

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

GBLA
GREATER BAKERSFIELD
LEGAL ASSISTANCE



What's **INSIDE!**

A series of flowing, translucent blue lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling smoke or liquid waves, positioned horizontally across the middle of the page.

4	Background
5	History
6	Mission Statement
8	Core Values
11	Funded Projects
26	Client Demographics
28	Case Statistics
30	Financials
32	Staffing

A solid, dark blue horizontal bar that spans the entire width of the page at the bottom.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Partners in Justice,

Upon reflection on the close of a remarkable year, I am possessed with immense pride and gratitude. GBLA experienced a significant shift in 2024 while progressing toward a secure and promising future. What GBLA achieved may have seemed improbable, but it stands as a testament to the strength, dedication, and unwavering commitment of GBLA staff.

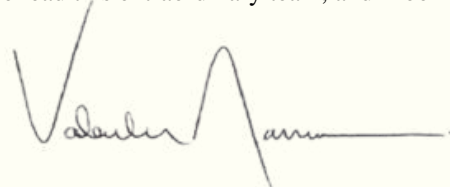
Leadership. I assumed the role of GBLA's executive director on February 5, 2024. Since then, GBLA has successfully navigated several challenges and complexities. GBLA faced the unfortunate passing of two board members and the resignation of our board chair. However, a fortunate alignment of timing provided an opportunity for progress. On April 29, 2024, LSC issued program letter 24-3, which relaxed certain restrictions and granted GBLA greater flexibility to adjust its board composition. These circumstances led to the responsibility of recruiting and appointing four new members to our board of directors. These new placements clearly show stability. GBLA's board has seven members, and I am committed to expanding our board further to strengthen GBLA even more.

Staff Expansion & Benefits Expansion. One of GBLA's greatest achievements in 2024 was the expansion of staff. This year, we welcomed nearly 18 new team members, who brought fresh perspectives, energy, and valuable experience to our organization's mission. GBLA has introduced several employee benefits in 2024, marking the first of their kind for our organization. Notably, we implemented (1) a 401(k) plan with expanded investment options, lower fees, and employer contributions (2) an attorney loan repayment assistance program (3) a wellness program to support the health and well-being of our team; and (4) the option to choose between multiple health insurance plans. These new benefits were designed to enhance the overall employee experience, demonstrate our commitment to staff well-being, and strengthen our ability to attract and retain talent.

Program Expansion. I am particularly proud to witness the launch of GBLA's Eviction Protection Program, a groundbreaking initiative and the first of its kind in partnership with the City of Bakersfield. This program offers vital support to Bakersfield residents facing housing instability and is a testament to what we can accomplish when collaborating and innovating. In addition, I want to highlight the exceptional growth and achievements of our Social Security Unit and Volunteer Attorney Project. Historically, GBLA's Social Security Unit was staffed by no more than two individuals. It has grown to include six dedicated individuals who have helped secure life-changing outcomes for clients. Similarly, the VAP unit, which once relied on just three volunteer attorneys at any given time, now boasts approximately twenty volunteers ready to assist our clients with invaluable legal support.

The Future. We will soon see several exciting developments regarding program expansion and technology. GBLA will also work with "The Group Forward" to craft a new, comprehensive strategic plan for its future. This plan will include a detailed succession plan for key job functions, ensuring continued leadership and stability. Most importantly, the strategic plan will develop a roadmap for GBLA's future over the next few years.

Conclusion. As we look ahead to 2025, I am excited to continue building on our successes, embracing new challenges, and remaining steadfast in carrying out GBLA's mission. It is an honor to lead this extraordinary team, and I look forward to all that GBLA will accomplish together in the year ahead. Cheers!



Background

Since 1968, GBLA has provided vital legal assistance in civil matters to thousands of Kern County's most vulnerable populations.

For example, GBLA assists victims of domestic violence and their children escape violence and take first steps towards economic stability; assists senior citizens with obtaining medical benefits and maintaining affordable housing; moves families experiencing homelessness from the streets to permanent housing; prevents families from becoming homeless by stopping unlawful evictions; ensures fair housing by protecting tenants from discrimination; secures guardianships for grandparents and other caregivers so children in their care can be enrolled in school and receive medical treatment; ensures children are no longer subjected to substantiated abuse and/or neglect while preventing them from entering an already over-burdened dependency system and foster care; assists families with obtaining public benefits so children are less likely to experience hunger; and much more.

GBLA has a long history of providing effective advocacy to ensure low-income individuals, families, and seniors do not suffer because of unmet basic needs – safety, food, decent housing, medical care, and access to many other services and resources throughout all four corners of the county.

Furthermore, GBLA has historically placed special emphasis on providing services to the most vulnerable populations, including seniors, and those residing in traditionally underserved and isolated geographic areas throughout the county.





History

Incorporated in 1968, GBLA was established as part of the Kern County Economic Opportunity Corporation (KCEOC) and received funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity.

In its early days, GBLA was located in a small office on Sumner Street in East Bakersfield, and in private law offices handling hundreds of dissolutions for indigent persons.

In 1977, GBLA began to receive its primary funding from the Legal Services Corporation and moved its offices to its present location on California Avenue.



According to the *Kern County 2024 Affordable Housing Needs Report* published by the California Housing Partnership, 27,665 low-income renter households in Kern County do not have access to an affordable home; 77% of extremely low-income (ELI) households in Kern County are paying more than half of their income on housing costs compared to 2% of moderate-income households.

Further, renters in Kern County need to earn \$24.17 per hour - 1.5 times the state minimum wage - to afford the average monthly asking rent of \$1,257.

Mission Statement

With a mission of ***“promoting social change and justice by providing high-quality legal services to the low-income community”*** it should come as no surprise that GBLA continues to receive between 500-700 phone calls a week from low-income individuals and families seeking justice.

While limited resources prohibit us from providing services to all people, each year our dedicated staff provides high-quality legal assistance to over 4,000 of Kern County’s most vulnerable populations including victims of domestic violence, people experiencing homelessness (or who are at risk of becoming homeless), and seniors.

To this end, GBLA continues to focus its resources on the most urgent civil legal matters involving homelessness and housing, health, domestic violence, guardianships, and services to families, children and seniors.



The poverty rate in Kern County has a significant impact on the quality of life for many people in the county. People living in poverty are more likely to experience food insecurity, homelessness, and health problems. This segment of the population is also less likely to have access to quality education and employment opportunities.

According to the *U.S. Census Bureau (2023)*, the poverty rate in Kern County is 20.4%. This is higher than the national poverty rate of 12.8%, and also higher than the average poverty rate in California, which is 15.3%.





GBLA is a non-profit corporation whose mission is *"to promote social change and justice by providing high-quality legal services to the low-income community."*

GBLA is not organized for the private gain of any person. It is organized under the Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation Law for charitable purposes. We provide civil legal services, free of charge, to Kern County's low-income and elderly residents. While there is never a fee for the services we provide, GBLA gladly accepts donations from clients upon conclusion of services.

GBLA's founding philosophies are deeply rooted with anti-poverty programs. We represent those who are unable to too afraid to speak for themselves, either because of racial, economic, social, or legal barriers and consequently have become mere statistics in social and economic research data.

In 2024 GBLA underwent an extensive search for a strategic planning consultant and ultimately selected The Group Forward to steward us through this process. In 2025 GBLA will be actively engaged in the process of creating a meaningful Strategic Plan to serve as our roadmap moving forward for the next few years.

The last comprehensive client needs assessment was conducted in the Summer of 2023 and the last strategic planning was conducted in September of 2018. We are looking forward using this tool to more effectively grow our organization and expand the services provided to our client community.

Core Values

PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE

We are committed to achieving excellence in every aspect of our work, setting high standards for ourselves and our team.

Each of us plays a key role in providing our clients with the highest quality work product, value, and exceptional service.

PRAGMATIC IDEALISM

We pursue our aspirations through strategies that are outcome-oriented.

COLLABORATION

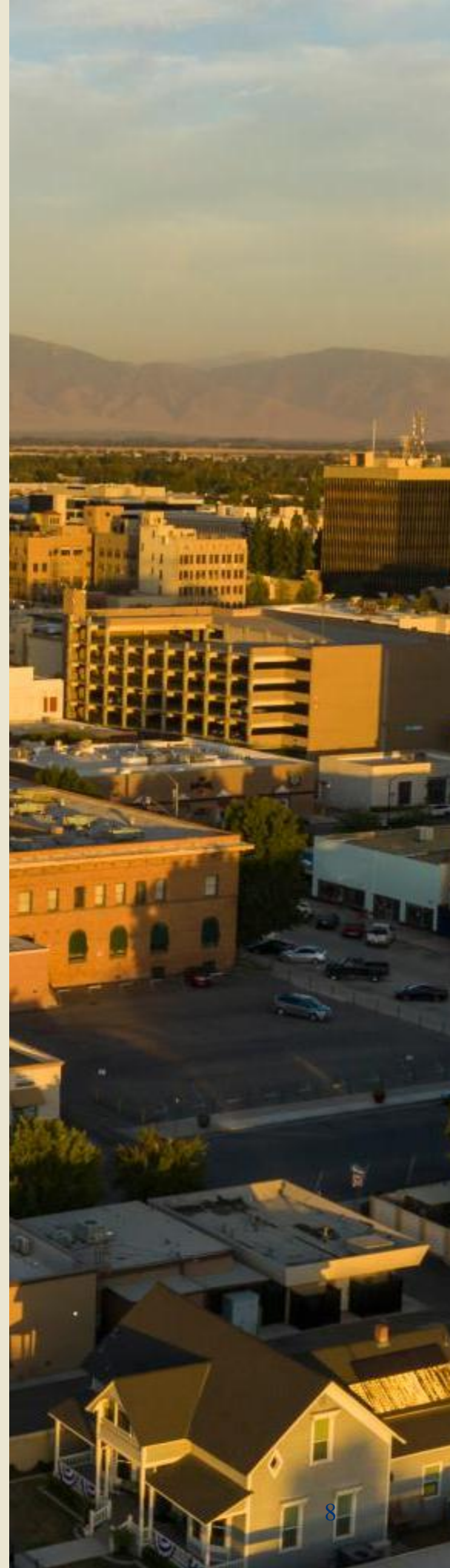
We work interdependently with an understanding that collaboration is fundamental to our success.

We listen with respect and communicate with transparency to find common ground and create lasting partnerships building on trust.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We are reliable and accountable and aspire to excellence in all we do.

We take ownership for our work and meet our commitments to our clients, our partners, and to our community.





EQUITY

We seek to be and to create a culture of inclusion, where everyone - including those who have been historically left out of the conversation - has a voice of influence.

We are intentional in our advocacy to achieve the greatest impact in the advancement of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion for our clients and in our community.

ADAPTABILITY

While we are firm in our vision, our forward actions are tuned by being outwardly alert while at the same time inwardly reflective.

COMPASSION

The principles of belonging, respect, inclusion, and empathy guide our work and everything we do.

We support the well-being, resilience, and growth of our clients, each other, and our community at large.

INTEGRITY

Honesty, transparency and ethical behavior are the cornerstones of our practice.

We always act in the best interest of our clients and maintain the highest level of professionalism.



Kern County Cities

*Arvin, Bakersfield, California City,
Delano, Maricopa, McFarland,
Ridgecrest, Shafter, Taft,
Tehachapi & Wasco.*



Funded Projects

AS OF MARCH 21, 2025 FUNDED PROJECTS INCLUDE

Basic Field Services & Volunteer Attorney Program
(Legal Services Corporation)

IOLTA & EAF Rural Legal Assistance
(California State Bar's Office of Access & Inclusion)

Seniors Law Center & Grandparent Guardianship Projects
(Kern County Aging & Adult Services Department)

Guardianship Caregiver & Domestic Violence Reduction Projects
(Kern County Children & Families Commission, First 5 Kern)

Social Security Disability Advocacy & Housing Disability Advocacy Projects
(Kern County Department of Human Services)

Fair Housing Law Project
(City of Bakersfield)

Landlord Tenant Assistance Center/Shriver
(Judicial Council of California)

Eviction Protection Program
(City of Bakersfield)

Housing Matters: Tenant Rights & Responsibilities Workshops
(Kaiser Permanente)

Kern Health Consumer Center
(Various Sources)

ELDER LAW UNIT



Grandparent Guardianship Project

Funded by the Kern County Aging & Adult Services Department since 2005, the objective of the Grandparent Guardianship Project is to assist grandparents (or other close relatives), age 55 or older, with obtaining guardianship of child(ren) up to 18 years old. The child(ren) must be currently living with the individual that is seeking guardianship.

Services include preparing and filing guardianship petitions, responding to objections, and representing in mediation and guardianship hearings, and preparing post-hearing letters and orders.

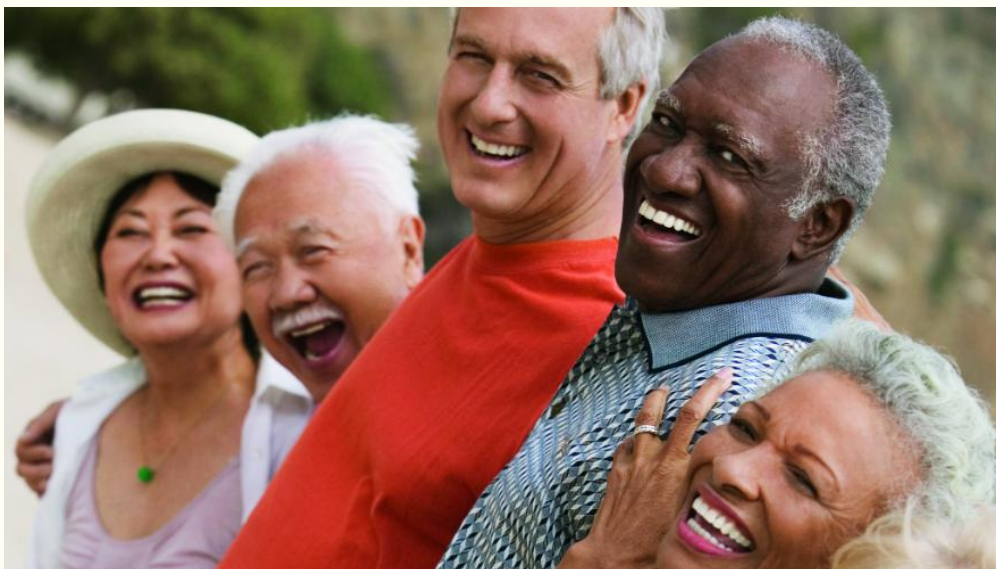
In March of 2024, 70-year old client came to our office seeking assistance with a habitability issue.

Client's apartment was infested with mice and rats, which she had reported two years ago when she moved into the house. After the landlord's continual refusal to address the rodent infestation, Client felt she had no other option but to contact Code Enforcement.

After Code Enforcement investigated the claim, they notified the landlord that they had 30 days to fix the issue. After several more interactions with

Code Enforcement, including an assessment of penalties, the landlord remained steadfast and failed to resolve the habitability matter. Client was a Housing Choice Voucher holder, and worried that if she continued to bother the landlord it would jeopardize her voucher if the landlord (as a result of what she felt was pestering) asked her to leave, or if code enforcement locked her out of her apartment.

The team had originally planned to assist client with a demand letter to the landlord that would simultaneously also enable client to commence locating a new residency with the assistance of the housing authority.



Seniors Law Center

Funded by the Kern County Aging & Adult Services Department since the 1980's, the objective of the Seniors Law Center is to provide an array of high-quality legal assistance to persons age sixty (60) years or older, with emphasis on those in the greatest economic and social need with particular attention to low-income minority older individuals, older individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and older individuals residing in rural areas.

Services include assistance with powers of attorney, advance health care directives, landlord-tenant matters, financial exploitation, elder abuse and neglect, and public benefits.

On April 8, 2024, client was served with a 90-Day Notice to Terminate Tenancy so she came into our office for help. Upon review of the 90-Day Notice, we believed that its issuance was retaliatory in nature against our client because she had exercised her tenant rights, which included the filing of a complaint with code enforcement.

On April 8, 2024, the next day, GBLA sent the landlord a demand letter via Fed-Ex demanding that the infestation be addressed. On April 12, 2024, we sent another demand letter regarding the 90-Day Notice to Terminate Tenancy and asserted our belief that they had retaliated against our client.

On April 17, 2024, we received a response from the landlord's attorney cancelling the tenancy termination notice.

While the scope of service provided was limited, the client was able to have her issue addressed and was no longer in danger of losing her housing or her housing voucher.

This case also provided laid the foundation for the housing authority's manager to step in and assist client with assistance in relocating.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES UNIT



Guardianship Caregiver Project

Funded by First 5 Kern since 2014, the Guardianship Caregiver Project assists caregivers with obtaining guardianship of children, prenatal to five, (and their older siblings) to prevent further exposure to domestic violence, child abuse, or neglect.

Client came to our office in November 2024 seeking a restraining order against her adult daughter for herself and her 7-month-old granddaughter. When she initially reached out to us in the summer of 2023, there was already a previous history of abuse. At that time a temporary restraining order was granted, but client ultimately withdrew her request.

In October 2024, clients daughter and granddaughter were staying in a shelter in Tulare County. Client received a call from a social worker with Child Protective Services requesting her to take temporary care of the minor child. After a Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit was signed, Client took her granddaughter home. Approximately one month later, client received a call from her daughter asking if she could come back home since she had been kicked out of the shelter and had no other place to go. Reluctantly, client agreed.

Just 2 days after her daughter came back home, client left her house to pick her granddaughter up from school. A short while later she received a call from another child living in the home that the child's mother had left the house, with the child, and did not take any basic needs for her care. Client panicked and called law enforcement. She was advised that since there was no legal documentation of guardianship, she did not have the legal right to keep the child, and if the mother did take the child, she had every right to do so. Later that evening, around 7:00 pm, client received a call from law enforcement to come pick her granddaughter up from Lake Ming or she would go into child protective services custody. Client's daughter was arrested on charges of willful cruelty to a child after lighting her car on fire with the minor child inside. On the advice of Child Protective Services, client returned to our office in November 2024 seeking a restraining order.

In December 2024, our office was able to successfully obtain a restraining order against her daughter, which included the child as an additional protected party. This made a positive impact on both client and her granddaughter's lives by protecting them from further abuse by the child's mother. Client was also referred to our guardianship program for assistance with obtaining permanent guardianship over her granddaughter.

In May 2023, client came to our office seeking assistance with guardianship over her 3-year-old granddaughter on the referral of a social worker with Child Protective Services. Client has had her granddaughter since birth. The child's mother (client's daughter) had an extensive history of drug use, mental health issues, and violence, and the biological father was unknown.

Up until August 2023, the biological mother had been living with client. However, she was arrested in August 2023 and charged with battery, willful cruelty charges, assault on a cohabitant, and being under the influence. Client was granted an Emergency Protective Order by law enforcement. This information led to a referral to our domestic violence program to assist client with obtaining a restraining order against her adult daughter, who was now in jail.

Over the course of the period May 2023 (when client first sought guardianship) to May 2024, client had been repeatedly assaulted by her adult daughter, who was clearly upset that client had filed for guardianship of the minor. Client explained to us that there were multiple incidents where her daughter had threatened to kill her, wielded a knife at her, and punched her - and that many of these incidents had sadly occurred in the presence of her granddaughter because the child had been in her custody and control at the time. GBLA agreed to assist client in obtaining a restraining order against her daughter as well as pursuing a guardianship order.

After completing all the paperwork and going through all necessary legal procedures, in August 2024 we were successful in obtaining a restraining order against the child's mother, as well as an order granting client permanent guardianship over her granddaughter. This made a positive impact in client's life because it protected her from further abuse from her adult daughter, and made an even more positive impact on the grandchild's life as she no longer has to grow up observing domestic violence in the household. As a result of our intervention, client and her granddaughter are now living together happily, and most importantly, safely.

Domestic Violence Reduction Project

Funded by the State Bar of California's Equal Access Fund (EAF), the Domestic Violence Reduction Project provides legal assistance to protect individuals and children from further exposure to domestic violence, abuse, and/or neglect. GBLA assists clients by preparing and filing legal protective orders (commonly known as restraining orders), obtaining child custody and visitation orders where applicable, representing clients in court, and making referrals to other services when necessary.



Immigrant Victims

GBLA also assists VAWA eligible immigrants who are survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual assault. Services include assistance with VAWA and U-Visa petitions, petitions to adjust Lawful Permanent Resident status, and advocacy with law enforcement agencies. These remedies provide a way for victims to work independent of the batterer to obtain lawful-permanent residency, employment authorization, or even naturalization.

HEALTH & PUBLIC BENEFITS UNIT

Kern Health Consumer Center



The objective of this project is to provide assistance for Kern County residents with problems regarding Medi-Cal, Medi-Care, Covered California, and other private insurance plans. Services include filing appeals for eligibility denials of services from doctors or health plans, filing a complaint or grievance with health plans, deal with billing or affordability issues, and overcome issues accessing services due to language barriers, disability, geographic location, or appointment wait-times. In addition, KHCC also conducts community education presentations on how to get coverage and utilize health care services.

31 year old client and his sister caretaker contacted the KHCC for assistance with a billing issue. Due to client's diagnosis of multiple injuries, including paralysis, he needed The Freedom Bed (a medical bed whose cost ranges from \$20,000 to \$40,000 depending on the required accommodation). The mattress client had been using was not allowing his condition to approve and was in fact impacting his ability to complete basic activities of daily life such as bathing. He advised KHCC that his Medi-Cal managed care plan did not approve the purchase of this DME (durable medical equipment) and simultaneously refused to bill his secondary insurance (KFHC) because they were not contracted with the client's primary insurance (OM). The bed provider believed that the secondary insurance (KFHC) would deny the claim because the primary insurance was not billed. KHCC contacted KFHC on client's behalf and confirmed that they would process the claim if received but that it would not be denied solely in this situation because the primary insurance was not billed. This information was conveyed to the provider who agreed to send the bill and request that The Freedom Bed be approved by KFHC. After review by KFHC, they denied the claim citing that it was not medically necessary to receive this particular bed. KHCC then assisted with filing a request for an Independent Medical Review (IMR) with the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC). Upon review, DMHC overturned the plan's decision to deny the bed and ultimately ordered the plan to approve The Freedom Bed for our client. Currently, a request for Alexa is pending which would allow client to utilize voice activation for bed commands.

Client contacted KHCC when he completed his Cal-Fresh (CF) interview with the Department of Human Services and was verbally informed that his CF benefits were denied because he was not a United States Citizen or Legal Permanent Resident. KHCC informed client that he did have satisfactory immigration status to qualify for Cal-Fresh based on being a U-Visa applicant assuming he met all other eligibility criteria factors. KHCC contacted DHS on client's behalf and provided them with the rules and regulations regarding U-Visa applicants being eligible for Cal-Fresh benefits. As a result of KHCC's intervention, Cal-Fresh benefits were approved for client in the amount of \$232 monthly.

Public Benefits Program

The objective of the Public Benefits Program is to ensure low-income families have sufficient resources to meet basic necessities of life. Services include providing assistance regarding denials, reductions, terminations, and over-payments of public benefits including CalWORKs (welfare/cash aid), CalFresh (food stamps), General Assistance, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Services may include providing counsel and advice, completing appeal forms, obtaining health and benefits records, and representing at hearings.



Social Security Disability Advocacy Project

This project is funded by the Kern County Department of Human Services. The objective of this project is to support eligible General Assistance (GA) clients through the entire disability benefit application process. Services include the preparation of applications, appeals, reconsiderations, reinstatements and recertifications.

Advocates obtain documentation from hospitals, physicians and clinics to meet the necessary burden of proof of a recipient's disability. Contact is also maintained with the client throughout the process to support efficient application and appeals submissions and hearing representation.

53-year-old client came to us in August of 2022 seeking assistance with applying for Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). After spending his career in hard labor positions, he had developed back pain but continued to work through it. When his arm went numb he sought medical attention. It was determined that he had a pinched nerve due to the nature of the labor he had long provided. In an attempt to release the unbearable pressure, client underwent back surgery - but the numbness persisted and he still experienced great pain and limited mobility. As a result, client was unable to work and at risk of becoming homeless due to not being able to pay his bills.

In August of 2022, GBLA's SSI program assisted client with his application to the Social Security Administration. After his initial claim was denied on November 1, 2022, the team filed a Request for Reconsideration. When the reconsideration was denied, the team immediately filed a Request for an Administrative Law Judge hearing. While waiting for his hearing, client's condition did not improve and he continued to experience issues with paying his bills.

On January 4, 2024, the hearing was held and on April 30, 2024, client finally received his fully favorable decision, including SSDI and SSI benefits totaling \$951 per month and a back payment of over \$20,000. Client now has ongoing resources available to secure stable housing and is no longer at risk of becoming homeless.



In December 2021, GBLA received a referral from a partner social service provider through GBLA's Housing & Disability Program to assist a 61-year-old homeless client who had several physical disabilities, a heart condition, and mental disabilities. Client's mental disabilities were further exacerbated when he found his son deceased in his home.

Client began experiencing health problems in March of 2018 after spending his career in trucking and construction. In 2019, after client's disability benefits were exhausted, he attempted to apply for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). That is when client first became homeless and was subsequently unable to secure adequate attention for his medical issues. It was this struggle in seeking medical attention that led to the difficulties he encountered in the application process and which caused client's initial claim to be denied in March 2022.

GBLA's team immediately filed a Request for Reconsideration in October 2022 and encouraged client to seek appropriate medical care and begin building a medical record for his current conditions. When the reconsideration was denied in June 2023, an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearing was requested. Due to the nature of client's living situation and need for extended medical treatment, the ALJ hearing was rescheduled to July 2024. One of the team's advocates who represented client at the ALJ hearing strongly advocated for the disabled senior to receive benefits. On September 25, 2024, client finally received the ruling that his claim was approved - which included a back payment from the SSA of over \$33,000, as well as a regular monthly benefit of \$1,447. This favorable decision made a tremendous impact in client's life as he was finally able to secure permanent housing in addition to the much needed continued medical treatment for his health issues.



Housing & Disability Advocacy Project

Funded by the Kern County Department of Human Services since 2019, the objective of the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program is to assist HUD-eligible clients who are experiencing homelessness with obtaining disability benefits (such as SSI and SSDI benefits) using the SOAR method (SSDI/SSI Outreach, Access, and Recovery).

SOAR is a method of initial SSI/SSDI application whereby applicants work with a disability benefit advocate to prepare an application that is designed for expedited review. GBLA is the SOAR lead and technical assistance provider in Kern County. GBLA also coordinates at least one SOAR training for stakeholders each year.

Key collaborators include Kern County Department of Human Services and Flood Ministries.

CIVIL RIGHTS UNIT



Fair Housing Law Project

GBLA's Fair Housing Law Project has been funded by the City of Bakersfield since 2016 (and was previously funded by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's Private Enforcement Initiative from 2011 through 2025). The objective of the Fair Housing Law Project is to provide education and outreach activities in order to increase awareness of fair housing law to the community, provide an easy-to-access intake and complaint system, reduce the incidences of housing discrimination, and reduce or eliminate systemic barriers to fair housing.

Services include investigating claims of housing discrimination and providing enforcement services, providing presentations and print materials to the community, enforcing fair housing laws through advocacy with landlords, filing a complaint with HUD or DFEH, and/or filing a federal or state lawsuit. GBLA also hosts an Annual Fair Housing Law Conference each year in April as well to coincide with Fair Housing Month which commemorates the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968,

Client, a disabled individual, came to us with a discrimination claim. While seeking housing in Bakersfield she had disclosed to a housing provider that she had an emotional support animal (ESA). The housing provider asked her if the ESA was certified or registered. Client stated that she had a letter from her medical provider that described her disability-related need for the animal, and that the dog did not need to be registered. The housing provider asked for further proof the animal was certified, and when client asked what the housing provider meant when they asked whether or not the emotional support animal was "certified" the housing provider immediately shut down the conversation. GBLA moved swiftly to conduct matched pair testing and found that the testing results corroborated Complainant's allegations, in that there was evidence that the housing provider imposed improper barriers on disabled housing seekers who had emotional support animals.

The case was submitted to the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), who transferred the complaint to the California Civil Rights Department. GBLA assisted client with the mediation process. After a thorough investigation, the complaint was resolved at the mediation hearing. As part of the settlement, client received \$5,000.00 in compensation. Further, the housing provider had to complete fair housing training regarding emotional support animals under fair housing laws and is required to distribute to all current tenants a copy of a CRD fact sheet entitled "Emotional Support Animals and Fair Housing Law." As a result of this case, future tenants will be educated about their rights with regard to emotional support animals and will be made aware of the California Civil Rights Department as a resource.

HOUSING UNIT



Community Homeless Court

The Community Homeless Court (CHC) is a project that was spearheaded by GBLA and Kern County Superior Court in 2003. GBLA continues to serve as the CHC's Coordinator. Homeless courts assist participants resolve outstanding criminal matters, such as infractions, misdemeanors, and low-level felonies.

The CHC is a special misdemeanor and traffic session which is held at a local shelter or other community site and which removes legal barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing and employment for persons experiencing homelessness.

Key collaborators of this project include the Continuum of Care, Kern County Department of Human Services, Kern County Superior Court, Kern County District Attorney's Office, Kern County Public Defender's Office, and GBLA's Volunteer Attorney Program.



Shriver / Landlord Tenant Assistance Center

Funded by the Judicial Council of California since 2011, the objective of the Shriver Kern Housing Pilot Project is to assist low-income tenants with the unlawful detainer (eviction) process when an attorney represents the landlord.

Services include helping tenants understand the legal process, providing representation in court, and/or provide assistance in negotiating an agreement at a Mandatory Settlement Conference (mediation). The project also makes referrals to agencies that prevent homelessness, provide relocation assistance, or connect clients with services related to employment, education, and family necessities.

The Landlord Tenant Assistance Center (LTAC) assists low-income tenants with landlord disputes and pre-eviction notices. Unrepresented parties are assisted with understanding the legal eviction process and completing court paperwork. Services include limited brief service, full scope representation, self-help, educational workshops, and helping clients connect to available resources in the community to stay housed. LTAC is located on the Third Floor of the Kern County Superior Court, Metropolitan Division, 1415 Truxtun Ave, Bakersfield CA 93301.

A single mother with four minor children and a very limited income came to our office seeking assistance with an unlawful detainer. Client had recently failed to re-certify her housing application for subsidized housing with HACK (Housing Authority of Kern County) and simultaneously fell behind on rent. Client did not recall being notified of rental increase. As a monolingual Spanish speaker, client had previously been assisted by a former property manager with completing her application. The current property manager refused to provide assistance, and the applicant did not fully understand what was being requested of her. Combined with her unpredictable income as an agricultural worker, where during the rainy season there are days she cannot work and loses income, client found herself in dire need of assistance.

Client had previous interactions with the new property manager during a recent inspection of her home, where the property manager had made comments about the filth within client's home. During that inspection, client's minor children were cleaning and had left some clothing on the floor, which the property manager took a photo of when commenting about the filth. Since that encounter, client said her interactions with the property manager felt demeaning and she sensed the manager was trying to force her out of her home. The property manager had entered client's home on multiple occasions (without the required proper notice) - once removing client's children from the home to conduct a door repair, and another time to take images of the inside of her residence.

While one of our attorney and paralegal teams began working on the response to the unlawful detainer, client was referred to one of our housing navigators for additional support with obtaining a more sufficient income and assistance recertifying her housing application. Ultimately, both parties were able to reach a settlement agreement, client and her children were able to retain their housing, and she was able to complete the recertification process to maintain her subsidized housing. In addition, with the assistance of the housing navigator, client was also able to obtain additional Cal-WORKS and Cal-Fresh benefits that significantly improved her family's quality of life.



On average, there are 3.9 attorneys per 1,000 individuals nationwide, and 4.4 attorneys per 1,000 individuals in California. However, there are only 1.002 attorneys per 1,000 individuals in Kern County.

This creates significant barriers to accessing legal services, particularly for low-income and elderly populations.

To address this disparity, in 2024 GBLA began utilizing volunteer attorneys throughout California to provide legal services virtually and continues to recruit attorneys outside of Kern County to provide services to our clients remotely (and in-office as necessary).

By implementing this virtual service delivery model, GBLA has been able to continue providing high-quality legal services without a waiting list.

Eviction Protection Program



In partnership with the City of Bakersfield, this project provides eviction protection legal services, educational workshops, and resource referrals to City residents. The program provides a variety of services such as legal assistance, information, outreach and collaboration that supports and assists low-income individuals, families, and seniors to prevent loss of current housing; enforce rights to safe habitable housing; prevent low-income persons from becoming homeless, including but not limited to issues regarding assistance with: eviction defense, subsidized housing administrative law cases, housing discrimination or other affirmative litigation.

The educational workshops provide tenants with general information in easy-to-understand terms while focusing on topics to help prevent evictions such as money management, community resources, and tenant rights and responsibilities. In addition, housing navigators provide referrals to other collaborative partners and supportive social service agencies with the goal of keeping the client successfully housed.

Housing Matters: Tenant Rights & Responsibilities Workshops

Funded by Kaiser Permanente, this project conducts monthly workshops on tenant rights and responsibilities and fair housing laws, as well as other education and resources. It is our objective that participants, as of having attended these workshops, will make better decisions and thus avoid homelessness which leads to increased health issues and/or exacerbates existing health issues. Workshops also allow for additional screening to identify those needing extended legal services related to housing whether directly or indirectly.

VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY PROGRAM



Jim Modig, Esq., receiving the FY22-23 "Hero of Justice" award for his volunteer hours and length of service.



Diane Dodds, Esq., receiving the FY23-24 "Champion of Justice" award.

This project is funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Pursuant to **45 CFR Section 1614**, recipients of LSC funding must expend a minimum of 12.5% of their Basic Field award to engage private attorneys, law students, law graduates, or other professionals, in the delivery of legal information and legal assistance to eligible clients.

Legal professionals can serve in a variety of ways including: accepting pro bono case referrals, co-counseling with GBLA attorneys, assisting with legal research and writing, making court appearances, and offering community workshops in their area of expertise.

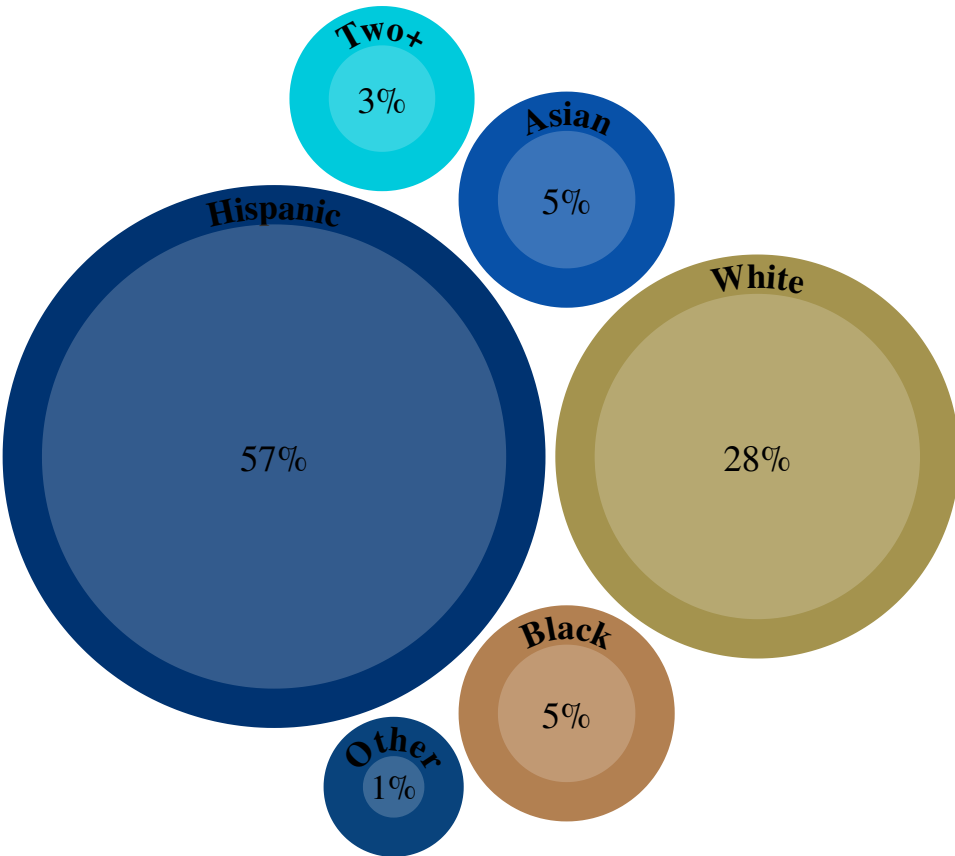
In addition to helping to address the legal needs of Kern County's most vulnerable residents, volunteers can develop contacts, gain experience in litigation, and recover fees from the opposing party when authorized by statute.

In April 2024, two clients sought assistance from GBLA in obtaining guardianship over two minors that had been living with them since August 2023. The two minors were siblings and friends the client's children. The minors had been staying at their friend's house after their father threatened to physically harm them. The minors' mother was homeless but had consented to the kids staying with our clients. One of the minors was legally blind and suffered from an autoimmune disease but clients had been unable to seek medical treatment for the minor - and the father refused to provide them with any written permissions to seek care.

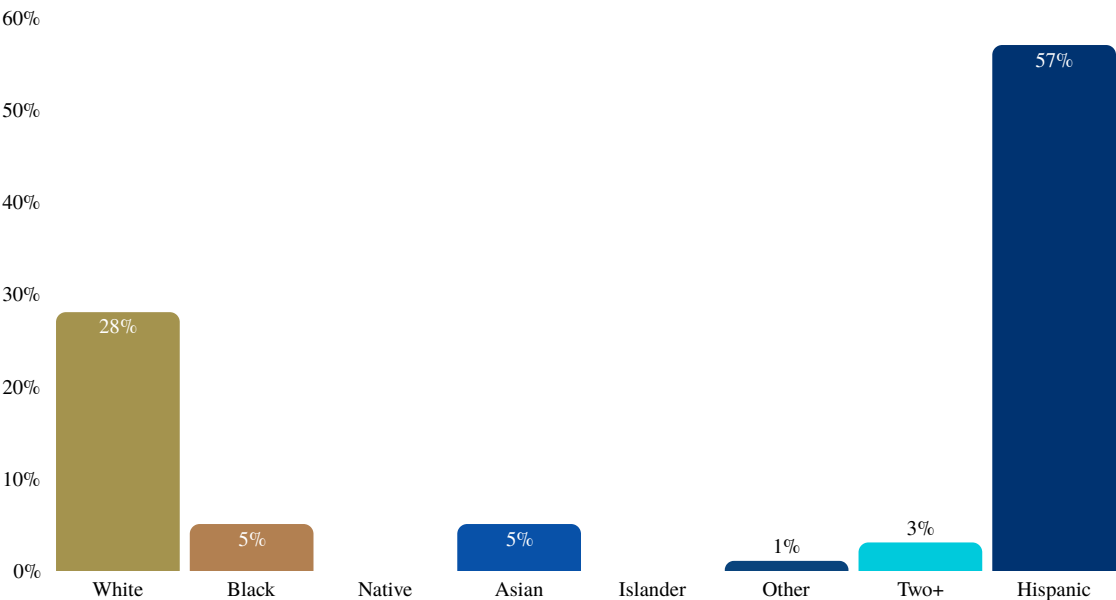
Before August 2023, the minors had spent most of their time with clients because they feared living with their father. Clients decided to seek guardianship over the minors after CPS became involved after a report from a school teacher containing troubling comments one of the minors had made about their living situation. Again, the minors' mother was cooperative and consented to the guardianship - but the father did not want to consent because he had been collecting Social Security payments on behalf of the children.

Since clients were income-eligible (but not program-eligible), the case was transferred to the Volunteer Attorney Program for placement with a private attorney. After several months of waiting, clients were finally paired with a volunteer attorney in October 2024. With the attorney's assistance, clients obtained temporary guardianship of the minors, received public assistance and medical coverage, and launched an investigation with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The minors were finally able to obtain proper medical treatment and are no longer in fear of their father. The volunteer attorney will continue to aid this family into 2025 to ensure a safe, healthy, and loving environment for the minors without barriers.

Ethnicity of Clients Served - 2024



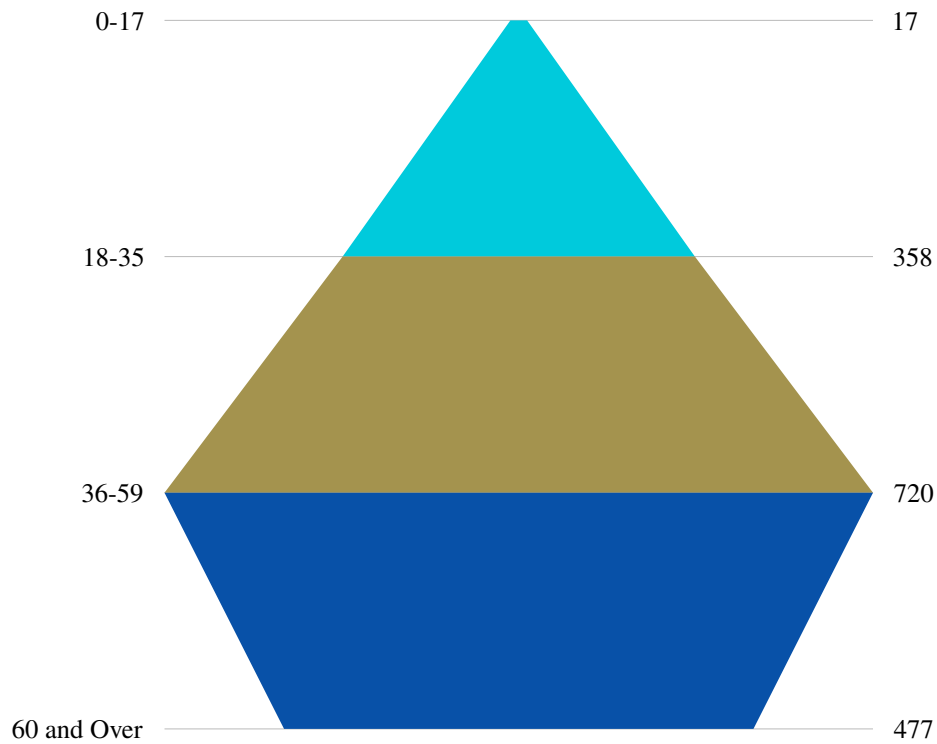
Compared to Race & Ethnicity in Kern County



*Hispanic includes respondents of any race. Other categories are non-Hispanic.

Source: [Censusreporter.org](https://censusreporter.org)

Age of Clients Served - 2024

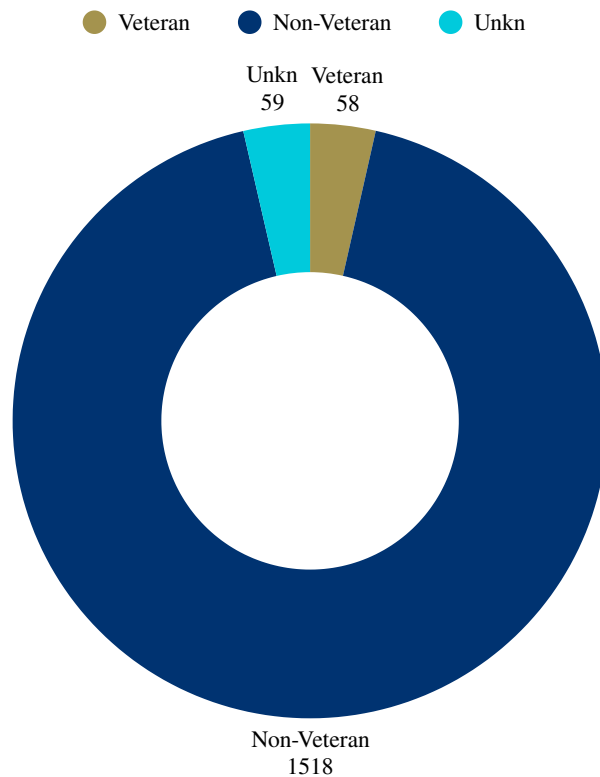


Primary Languages Spoken

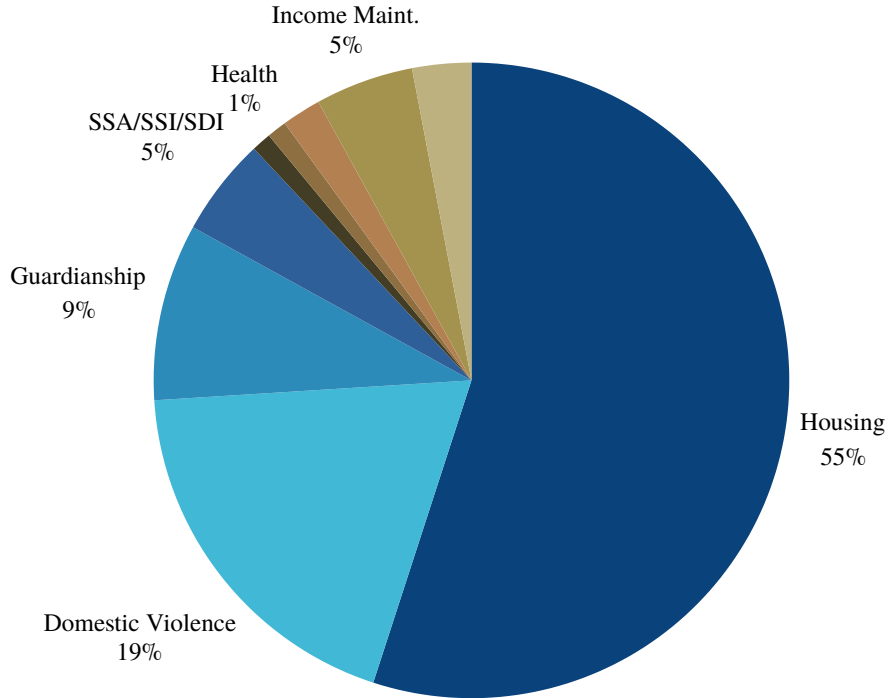
During 2024, approximately 86% of clients served by GBLA spoke English, 12% spoke Spanish, and the remaining 2% spoke Punjabi, followed by Arabic, Sollovak and Tagalog.

A majority of program staff are multi-lingual

Veterans Served - 2024

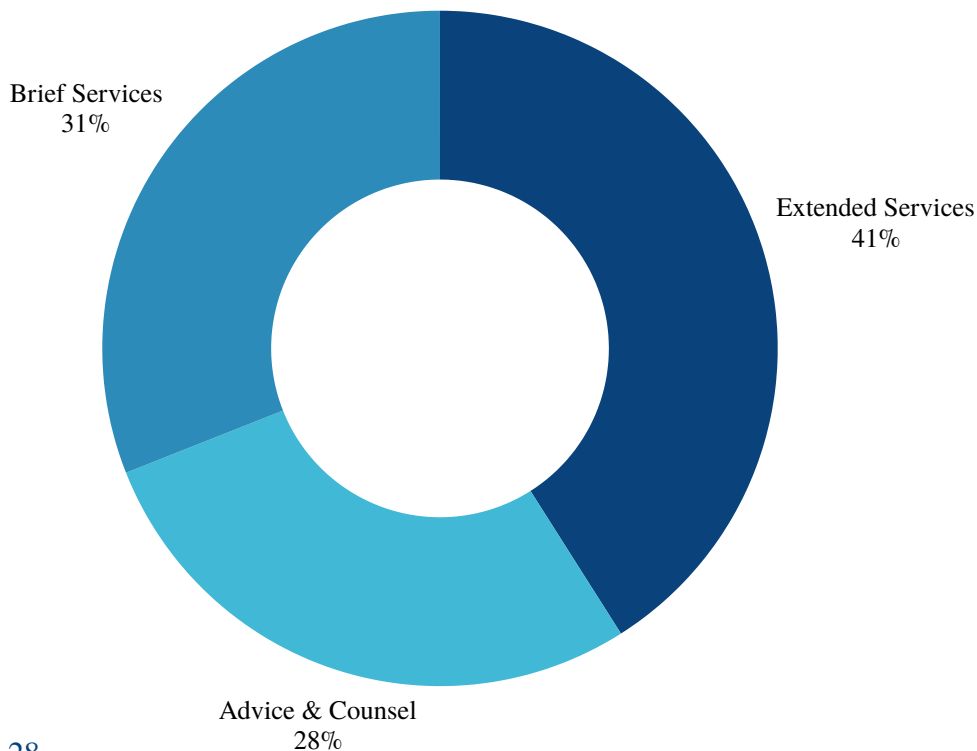


Closed Cases by Subject Area - 2024



*Persons
Impacted*

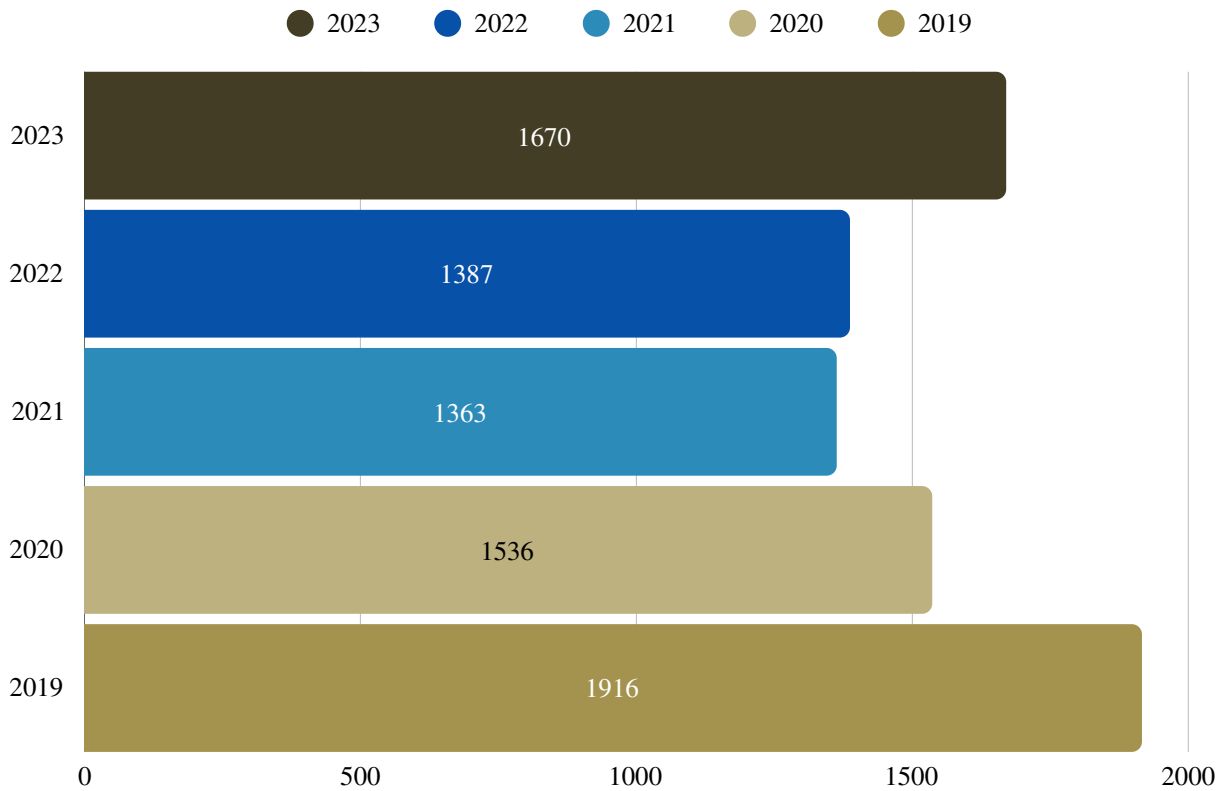
Level of Service Provided - 2024



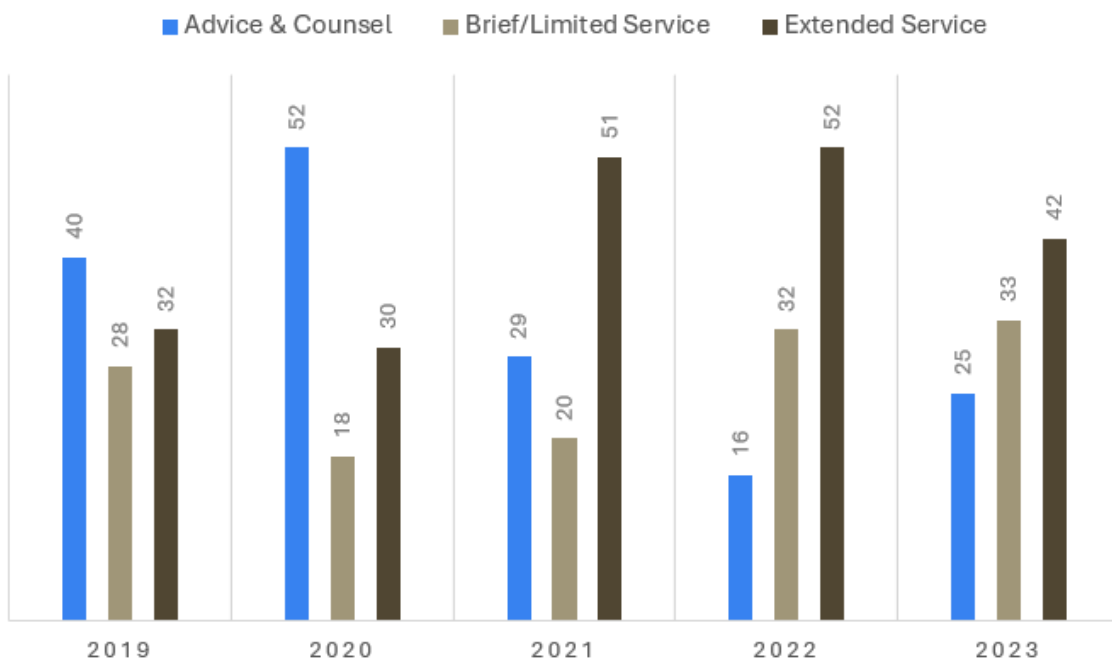
In 2024 a total of 1,888 cases were closed with another 390 remaining open as of Dec 31, 2024 - for a total of **2,278**.

Of the 2,278 cases a total of **4,437** individuals were impacted (comprised of 2,365 adults and 2,072 children).

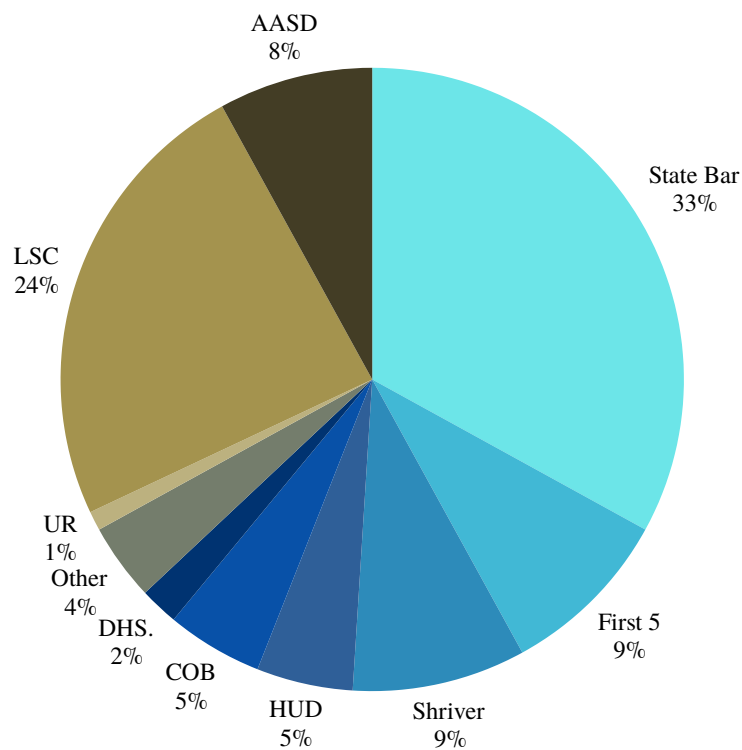
Number of Cases Closed - Past 5 Years



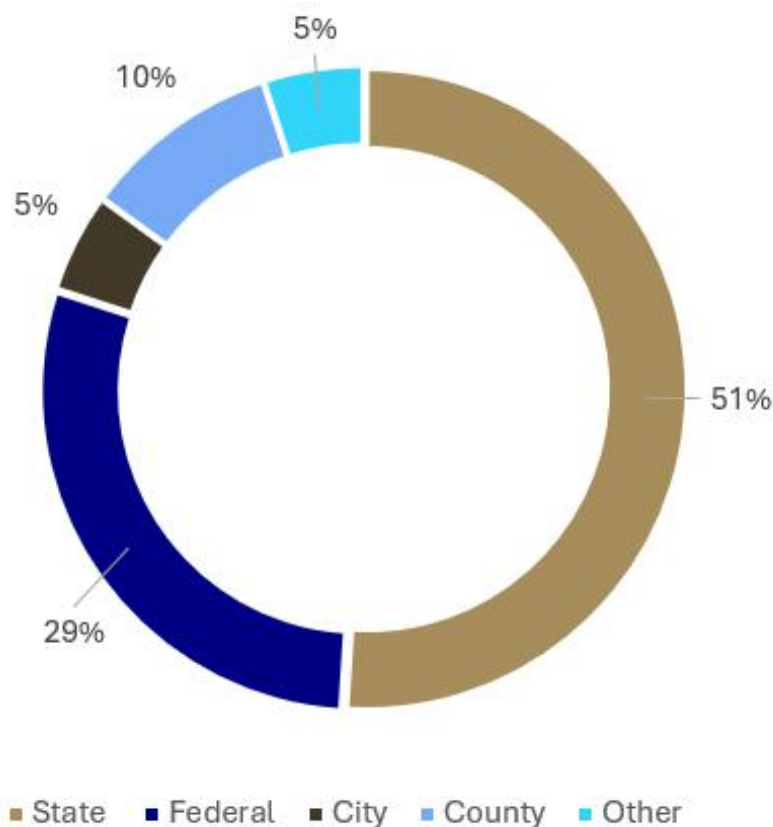
Level of Service Provided - Past 5 Years



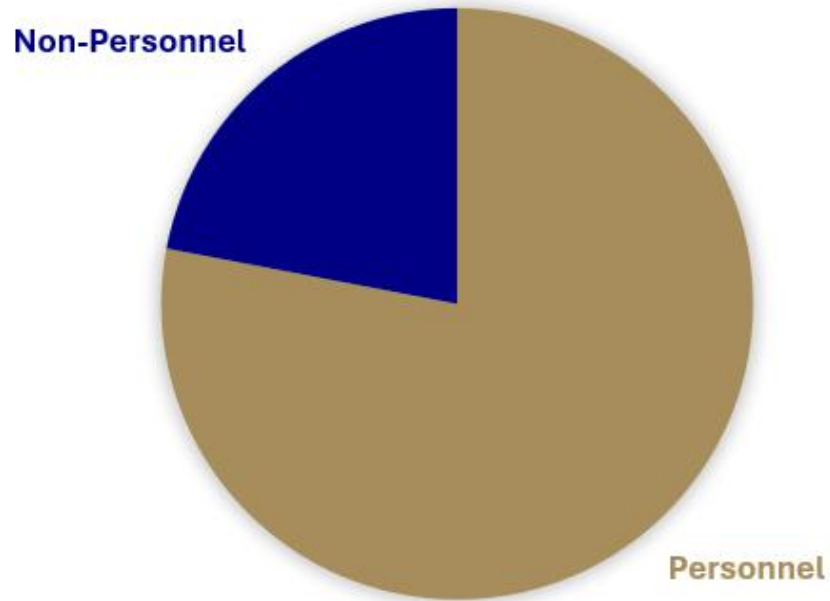
Revenue by Funding Source - 2024



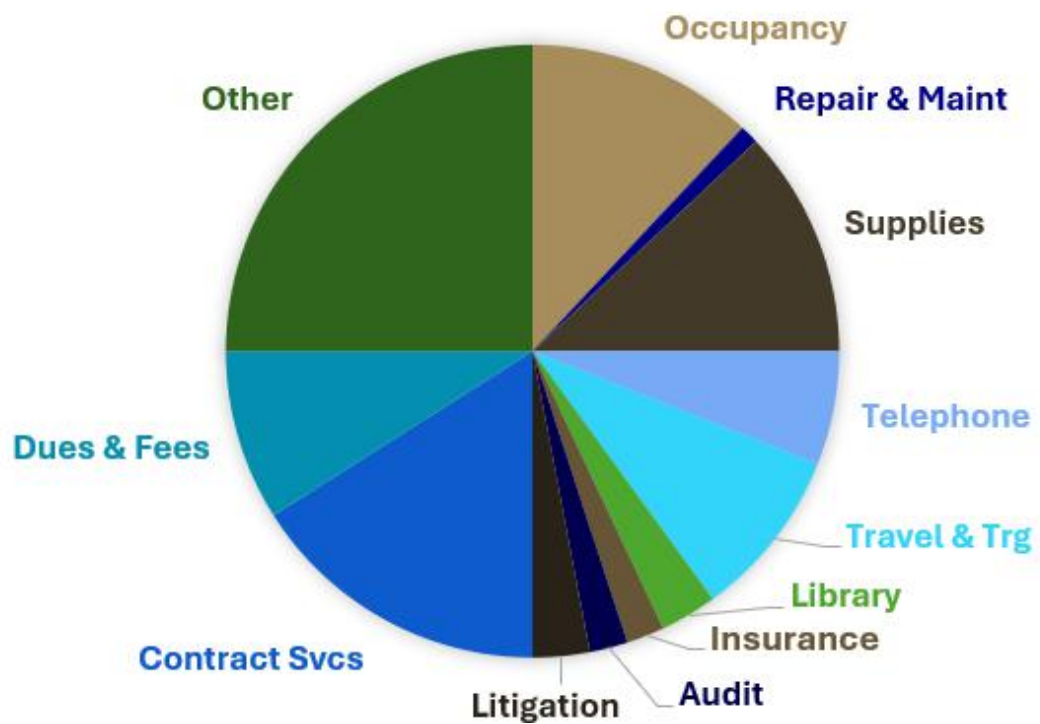
Revenue by Type - 2024



Expenditures - 2024



Non-Personnel Expenditures - 2024



PROGRAM STAFFING

Directors of Litigation

Housing Unit

Peter Chang, Esq. - Supervising Attorney

Elham Khazaian, Esq. - Supervising Attorney

James Humphrey, Esq. - Staff Attorney

Ali Jan, Esq. - Staff Attorney

Kayleen Clements - J.D.

Sandra Mitchell - J.D.

Elise Riel - J.D.

Dailyah Rudek - J.D.

Kristi Gibson - Legal Secretary

Elena Almazan - Community Engagement Advocate

Gabriela Gomez - Community Engagement Advocate

Pamela Foots - Eligibility Coordinator

Alicia Garcia - Eligibility Coordinator

Max Gradowitz, Esq.
Director of Litigation - Div A

Jeanette Irigaray-Welch, Esq.
Director of Litigation - Div B

Bashar Algabyali, Esq.
Director of Litigation - Div. C

Fair Housing

Jina Kim, Esq. - Supervising Attorney

Alexandra Gullett - Registered Legal Aid Attorney

Oakley Trinh - Investigation Coordinator & Housing Navigator

Eileen Diaz - Eligibility Coordinator

Social Security

Lori Varaich, Esq. - Attorney

April Graham - Team Lead

Alma Jathan - Non-Attorney Representative

Raquel Lopez Ortiz - Non-Attorney Representative

Carol Mumm - Non-Attorney Representative

Sandra Bradford - Legal Secretary

Seniors Law Center

Anthony Estrada, Esq. - Supervising Attorney

Yarnell Sherrell, J.D.

Klyde Torres, J.D.

Public Benefits & Health

Nancy Duran-Torres - Team Lead

Irma Gonzalez - Non-Attorney Representative

Rosa Magana - Non-Attorney Representative

Janet Robles - Non-Attorney Representative

Alonso Rodriguez - Non-Attorney Representative

Domestic Violence

Spencer Shain, Esq. - Supervising Attorney

Shelby Radecki, Esq. - Staff Attorney

Alicia Gonzalez - Team Lead

Marisol Alcantar - Senior Paralegal

Graciela Gonzales - Senior Paralegal

Veronica Barrera - Legal Secretary

Rosalia Rosales - Eligibility Coordinator

Guardianship

Carol R. Bracy, Esq. - Staff Attorney

Daisy Solorio, Esq. - Staff Attorney

Justin Gapper - J.D.

Melissa Medina - Senior Paralegal

Kendra Salinas - Senior Paralegal

NON-ATTORNEY ADVOCATES

Eligibility

Katia Laguna-Cruz - Team Lead

Leticia Franco - Eligibility Coordinator

Maria Hurtado - Eligibility Coordinator

Anna Vega - Eligibility Coordinator

Volunteer Attorney Program

George San Miguel - Program Coordinator

David Arredondo - Program Coordinator

Data, Information & Compliance

Edward Dorneles - Director of Legal Information, Operations & Data Management

Luis Ramirez - Legal Information, Operations & Data Management Officer

Thomas Mitchell - Director of Marketing

Carmen Burgos - Compliance Officer

Ana Ortiz - Team Lead

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFFING

Executive Director

Valentin Narvaez, Esq. - Executive Director

Finance

Tim Denari, CPA - Director of Finance

Sarah Mioni - Accounting Supervisor

Sophea Somm - Accounting Clerk

Jessica Alegria - Accounting Clerk

Crystal Lewis - Grant Accountant

Development

Danita Melton - Director of Grant Acquisitions & Management

Kassie Mullican - Director of Donor Development

Human Resources

Rhonda Higgins - Director of Human Resources

Kim Condon - Human Resource Assistant

Carlos Ramirez - Human Resource Assistant

Jonathan Chavolla - Special Ops

Board of Directors

Vanessa Chavez, Esq. - Board Chair
KLEIN DENATALE GOLDNER

David J. Rivera, Esq.
LAW OFFICES OF DAVID J. RIVERA

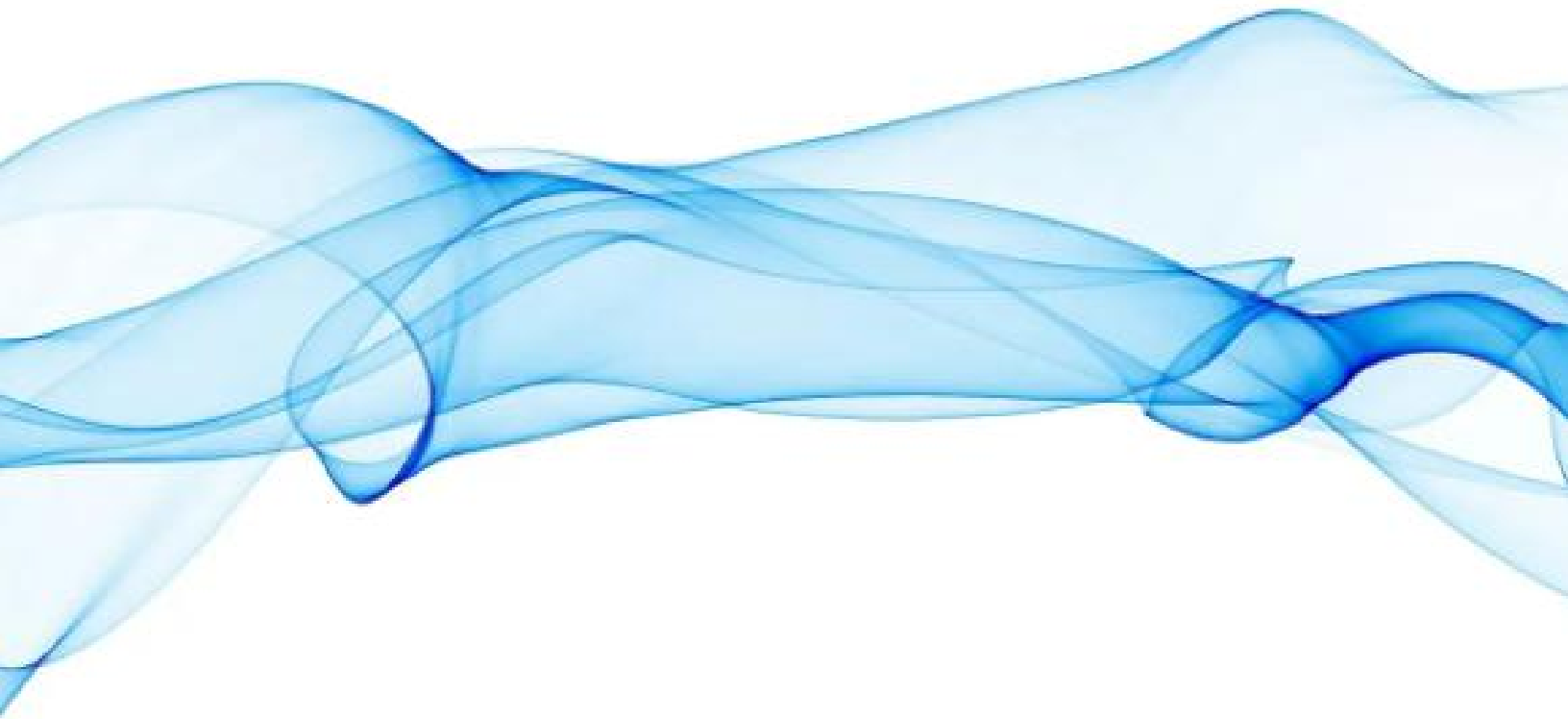
Juan Garza, Esq. - Sect/Treasurer
CHAIN COHN CLARK

Mayra G. Estrada, Esq.
KLEIN DENATALE GOLDNER

Lydia E. Ortiz
Client Representative

Jack Chavolla
Client Representative

Yvette Huizar
Client Representative



GBLA
GREATER BAKERSFIELD
LEGAL ASSISTANCE

