HUMAN SERVICES GRANTS PROGRAM (HSGP)

FY 2023-24 PROGRAM STATUS REPORT

Agency: Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

Program: Comprehensive Community Legal Services

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###### FY 2023-24 SUBMISSION CALENDAR

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| **REPORTS** | **REPORT PERIOD** | **REPORT DEADLINE** |
| Mid-Year Program and | 7/1/2023 - 12/31/2023 | Monday, February 5, 2024 |
| Fiscal Status Reports |
| Year-End Program and | 7/1/2023 - 6/30/2024 | Monday, August 5, 2024 |
| Fiscal Status Reports |

**Instructions:**

* All reports submitted to the City are considered public record. Please note that staff will use the information provided in the mid-year and year-end reports to provide Council and the public with summary reports of agency performance highlighting key outcomes, successes, findings, and concerns.
* Please be concise. For example, do NOT copy and paste repetitive content from your Mid-Year to your Year-End. In most cases, a complete program status report will be no more than 8-10 pages in length.
* When preparing your report, please be sure to refer to your current Program Plan (Exhibit A) Program Budget (Exhibit B) and Special Funding Conditions (Exhibit C), of your executed Grant Agreement with the City.
* To submit your completed report to the City, upload the file to your agency’s SharePoint folder **as a Word document** and notify your grant analyst once you have done so.
* Please contact your grants analyst or [humanservices@santamonica.gov](mailto:humanservices@santamonica.gov) for any issue with accessing your agency’s SharePoint folder.

**SECTION I: PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND CHANGES**

**Provide a brief summary of your program accomplishments, challenges, and changes that occurred during the reporting period. Please also provide information or observations related to population or service trends.**

At year end, LAFLA is pleased to report that, despite experiencing a significant staffing deficit during the reporting year, we substantially met or exceeded many of our annual targets. Of the total number of unduplicated residents we helped, nearly 20% presented multiple legal issues resulting in more than one case for each of those residents. This includes residents who faced more than one unlawful detainer case during the reporting period, an important metric not evidenced by looking solely at the number of unduplicated residents served. This is an increase from 14% of residents with multiple cases at this time last year.

The number of eviction cases continues to rise in Santa Monica. LAFLA has developed a successful pretrial motion practice to successfully defeat many unlawful detainers at either the demurrer or summary judgment stage, avoiding trial where possible, and resolving cases to the benefit of our clients to keep them housed. While unlawful detainer litigation cases continue to comprise the bulk of our housing work, during the reporting period, we also helped low-income residents with public benefits issues such as social security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), general relief, Medicare and Medi-Cal, and access to food stamps. We also helped residents with employment discrimination and wage claims.

LAFLA also continues to provide vital assistance to survivors of domestic violence, as well as support in divorce, custody, and child support cases through the domestic violence clinic. We offer services in a manner most convenient for the client, whether that be through Zoom or in-person assistance. This blended model allows us to serve traditionally hard-to-reach clients and provides the greatest access to survivors seeking protection from domestic violence and those in need of family law support.

Specifically, at year-end:

* LAFLA exceeded its year-end target for total active and closed cases for housing, benefits, and other general non-DV/family issues.
* LAFLA substantially met its year-end target (95% of annual goal) for the number of unduplicated Santa Monica residents receiving help with domestic violence restraining orders, as well as family law matters, through the domestic violence clinic.
* LAFLA substantially met its year-end target (89% of annual goal) for the number of unduplicated Santa Monica residents receiving services for housing, benefits, and other general non-DV/family issues.

* LAFLA reached 86% of its year-end goal for total unduplicated residents served for any type of case, which is significant given the severe staffing shortages faced during the reporting period.

Other accomplishments during the grant year include:

* LAFLA reached a settlement in its income discrimination lawsuit brought on behalf of a low-income disabled tenant against her landlord. This is in addition to the permanent injunction put in place against this local landlord to stop source of income discrimination for our client and all other tenants of this landlord in the State of California. In mid-2023, LAFLA, along with our partner and co-counsel Western Center on Law and Poverty, and its low-income tenant client successfully won on three of its six causes of action through a Motion for Summary Adjudication, resulting in the permanent injunction. The parties were able to resolve the remaining issues in the litigation in early 2024. This case was filed in March 2020 for source of income discrimination on behalf of a Santa Monica resident against their landlord regarding, among other things, their refusal to accept Section 8 funds paid on behalf of a tenant.
* LAFLA continues to offer our twice weekly housing clinic, during the school year, to address housing issues faced by residents. The clinic is a blended online/in-person model conducted with the help of law students from UCLA’s El Centro Legal. We also have continued to hold our monthly clinic at Virginia Avenue Park on the third Wednesday of the month. The Virginia Ave clinic assists local residents on a walk-in basis with no appointment necessary.

###### SECTION II: COLLABORATION EFFORTS

**Please highlight any new efforts to collaborate with other service providers and/or leverage services, if applicable. Please include the agency name(s) and service(s) provided.**

LAFLA’s Santa Monica office continues to work and collaborate with other service providers to the benefit of program participants including, but not limited to: UCLA Law School’s El Centro Legal, Santa Monica Cradle to Career, Santa Monica Senior & Disability Task Force, Disability Community Resource Center, Sojourn, St. Joseph Center, and WISE & Healthy Aging.

LAFLA also continues to meet regularly with the Santa Monica Housing Authority to address issues facing tenants. When appropriate, LAFLA refers tenants to the City Attorney’s Office for further support and advocacy for issues such as discrimination and tenant harassment.

###### SECTION III: STAFFING PATTERN

**If applicable, please describe how staffing changes during the report period have impacted service delivery, caseload, and redistribution of work among other staff to ensure service levels are maintained. please also describe recruitment efforts and an anticipated hire date.**

There were significant staffing changes during the reporting period. LAFLA lost the only senior housing attorney in the program and the next most experienced housing staff attorney, both leaving within two weeks of each other. Their two positions remain vacant, meaning LAFLA only had one of three full time housing attorneys for much of the reporting year. We continue to make efforts to fill those roles as soon as possible. These two vacancies had an impact on intake and caseload capacity and will continue to do so going forward until they are filled. Ongoing cases left by departing attorneys were distributed and handled by remaining staff with no interruption in service.

Although not funded by HSGP, the office also lost its only Right to Counsel staff attorney who relocated out of state in August 2023. In total, the LAFLA Santa Monica office lost three of its four housing attorneys in four weeks. The Right to Counsel position, funded through a separate grant, was not filled until March 2024. There is still one other Right to Counsel attorney position vacant as well.

Further, the office replaced its benefits attorney serving residents through the program. The new benefits attorney has an office on-site in Santa Monica to meet with residents in person at their convenience.

**Please indicate how volunteers or interns were used during the reporting period. Provide the total number of volunteers or interns. If interns were used, please indicate their program level (e.g., undergraduate, masters).**

* Housing: 6 law clerks and 47 law students donated a total of approximately 1,030 volunteer hours to assist residents with legal problems through our housing clinics and summer case work.
* Domestic Violence Clinic: 5 law clerks, 10 law students, and 46 pro bono attorneys donated a total of approximately 1,356 hours to assisting survivors through both our Zoom-based virtual clinic and our in-person courthouse domestic violence clinic.
* Law clerks, law students, and volunteer attorneys are utilized primarily to expand intake capacity for factual investigation and assessment, reporting to a LAFLA attorney for an assessment of the client’s legal needs, and receiving pertinent legal advice to deliver to clients. In the domestic violence clinic, volunteers also engage in active drafting and preparation of the restraining order packet on behalf of clients.

**SECTION IV: GRIEVANCES & GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT (GNA)**

**Please provide the total number of grievances recorded by your program during the reporting period. Discuss trends in the number and types of grievances and any action taken to address common or recurring issues.**

**Please detail any additional changes or issues regarding your agency’s GNA (if applicable).**

LAFLA did not receive any grievances or complaints related to the Good Neighbor Agreement during the reporting period.

**SECTION V: SPECIAL FUNDING CONDITIONS**

**Provide a status report on how the agency is meeting its funding conditions listed in Exhibit C of your Grant Agreement for the current fiscal year, clearly addressing each individual funding condition in bullet point format.**

Agency will assist eligible participants in submitting applications to applicable relief and housing sustainability programs, including local, state, and federal rental assistance programs, including but not limited to: Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Below Market Housing (BMH) Waitlists, Preserving Our Diversity (POD), Continuum of Care (CoC), and HOME voucher programs.

* Through our Case Manager, LAFLA offers residents in-house legal adjacent support and tenant navigation to assist with voucher applications including, but not limited to: (i) Housing Choice Voucher (HCV); (ii) Below Market Housing (BMH) Waitlists; (iii) Preserving Our Diversity (POD); (iv) Continuum of Care (CoC); and, (v) HOME voucher programs. The Case Manager is a direct liaison to the City of Santa Monica’s Housing and Human Services Division for residents, attending regular meetings with both the Santa Monica Housing Authority as well as the Senior Task Force. This is part and parcel with LAFLA’s holistic treatment of our clients, recognizing that tenant issues are multi-faceted and often require more than just legal support to find resolutions.
* During the reporting period, the case manager received 51 new service requests for residents that are either completed or still currently active. Those are in addition to any other requests carried over from the prior fiscal year that are still active. This means the case manager handled over 70 requests in total during the reporting period.

###### SECTION VI: BOARD INVOLVEMENT (COMPLETE AT YEAR-END ONLY)

**Please indicate:**

* **Number of Board meetings conducted during the reporting period**

There were six Board Member meetings conducted during the reporting period of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

* **Board vacancies and plans to fill those vacancies, if applicable**

There are three vacancies on the Governance Committee of the Board. LAFLA plans to fill these vacancies by requesting recommendations or nominations from internal staff to identify suitable community-based organizations with which to partner with.

* **Significant policy actions or development activities taken by the Board during the program year**

The Board reached out to new, potential members and added three new board members at the June 2024 meeting. The Board is also working with the East LA Capital Campaign committee to raise funds for the new East Office.

**SECTION VII: PROGRAM PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT (COMPLETE AT YEAR-END ONLY)**

**Share examples of how feedback from program participants was incorporated into program design during the program year.**

Part of our delivery service model had to be adjusted during the reporting period as the only elevator in our office building (not owned by LAFLA) became inoperable in September 2023. This effected LAFLA’s offices and the other tenants in the office building. Specifically, it created a barrier to access for any resident seeking assistance who had a physical disability or mobility limitation. LAFLA staff were immediately concerned, and we also received feedback from several clients who now could not access our office.

In response, LAFLA staff offered several options aimed at improving our legal services' accessibility. We met clients outside the building to talk and sign documents. We also incorporated more home visits, when needed, as part of our “meet you where you are” approach to service delivery. Finally, we added a virtual option to our housing clinics during the week, to allow residents to stay at home and meet us, when comfortable, on the phone or videoconference.

Additionally, LAFLA's staff seek from each client, throughout the life of their case, informal feedback and, at the close of our service of representation, responses to an optional written survey.

**SECTION VIII: SUCCESS STORIES (COMPLETE AT YEAR-END ONLY)**

**Please include no more than three success stories that illustrate the impact of your program on individual participants or households. When doing so, please take care to avoid any personally identifiable information that could compromise the privacy of any program participants. Please also note that staff will use the information provided to update Council and the public on agency performance.**

* \*Jane (not their real name) first spoke to LAFLA through a free legal clinic after having received an eviction notice from her landlord for non-payment of rent. \*Jane had been living in her apartment for 25 years without issue, but the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on her income and mental health, and she quickly ran out of savings. LAFLA staff moved quickly to address the problems through full scope representation in her unlawful detainer case. While the legal case proceeded, LAFLA’s case manager connected \*Jane with WISE & Healthy Aging as well as Santa Monica’s Housing and Human Services division. These organization assisted \*Jane in applying for the benefits and resources necessary to stabilize her life. As a result these referrals, Jane began receiving government benefits from CalFresh and MediCal. She also started receiving income through Santa Monica’s POD program (Preserving Our Diversity) and Social Security Retirement.

Through significant advocacy and negotiation from her LAFLA attorney, Jane was able to demonstrate that she had a stable income which convinced her landlord to agree to accept a Project-Based Voucher. This meant \*Jane could stay in her current apartment if the back-rent could be paid. St. Joseph’s Center and the countywide CES system provided the financial assistance to clear Jane’s back-rent, while LAFLA, SMHA, \*Jane, and \*Jane’s landlord worked to complete the paperwork for the Project-Based Voucher. Under the voucher, \*Jane’s portion of rent owed each month was significantly reduced. Once the back-rent was paid and the voucher approved, the eviction case against Ms. Doe was dismissed. Today she happily remains in her long-term, rent-controlled tenancy.

* \*Anne (not their real name) initially completed an intake with LAFLA regarding alleged tenant harassment that \*Anne believed was done in retaliation due to owed back-rent from the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon thereafter, an eviction case was filed. In response, LAFLA attorneys entered their appearance to represent \*Anne in court. At the same time, LAFLA connected \*Anne to WISE & Healthy Aging, who helped her apply for early Social Security benefits. LAFLA then searched for a creative solution to Anne’s unlawful detainer case, such as an available subsidy program to make her tenancy sustainable and avoid homelessness.

Unfortunately, once COVID-era rental protections elapsed, all \*Anne’s outstanding back-rent came due at once. With no available existing subsidy programs, and little funds to bargain with, LAFLA staff looked for another solution. In May 2024, The Laurel, a new Affordable Housing complex opened in Santa Monica and offered \*Anne a new opportunity at a positive outcome. LAFLA attorneys negotiated an exit plan for \*Anne, and a soft landing at The Laurel. By agreeing to accept the new affordable housing at The Laurel, \*Anne avoided possible homelessness and an eviction judgment on her record, giving her a fresh start in a new apartment.

**By submitting this report to the Human Services Division, I certify that this report is true, complete, and accurate to the best of my knowledge and that all disbursements have been made in compliance with the conditions of the Grantee Agreement and for the purposes indicated**