

MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION



Annual Report
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

MLSC

Legislative Highlights in 2024

In 2024, the Maryland Legal Services Corporation continued its active advocacy to secure vital funding for the civil legal aid community and advance the establishment of a right to counsel in civil proceedings. During the legislative session, MLSC supported pivotal initiatives that promise to enhance access to justice and strengthen protections for vulnerable Marylanders.

The Renters Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024, a key component of Governor Moore's legislative package aimed at reducing the number of eviction filings in Maryland, represents a landmark step in addressing disparities within Maryland's landlord-tenant law framework. The legislation recognized the broader societal impacts of eviction, which disrupt communities, harm economic prospects, and increase reliance on homeless services by establishing the Office of Landlord and Tenants Affairs, creating a statewide tenant's right of first refusal, and establishes certain stays of evictions dependent on extreme weather conditions. While MLSC supported the legislation as a whole, we focused our advocacy on critical measures to bolster funding for civil legal aid which in turn would reduce the misuse of the civil court system as a collection tool in landlord-tenant disputes.

KEY PROVISIONS INCLUDE:

- **Surcharge Increases:** The surcharge for summary ejectment, tenant holdover, and certain breach of lease matters will increase from \$8 to \$43, with 45% of these funds directed to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation Fund.
- **Filing Fee Adjustments:** District Court and Circuit Court filing fees will increase by \$10 and \$30, respectively, with 40% of these additional funds directed to the MLSC Fund.

These increases will provide critical funding for the civil legal aid community, supporting MLSC and its grantees in serving those most in need. This law represents a comprehensive approach to mitigating the economic and social harms caused by eviction.

MLSC also supported **SB671**, which aimed to guarantee access to counsel for qualifying individuals in foreclosure proceedings by establishing the Access to **Counsel in Foreclosure Proceedings Program**. The bill would have named MLSC as the administrator of this program, building on our existing efforts to fund foreclosure prevention legal services through a special grant program supported by restricted, one-time funding since 2016.

Access to counsel in foreclosure proceedings has proven to be a vital tool in preventing disruptive displacement and keeping Marylanders in their homes. While SB671 did not advance in 2024, MLSC remains committed to pursuing this important initiative in the future to ensure stability for families and communities across the state.

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

As we reflect on the achievements of FY2024, we are filled with immense gratitude for the collaborative efforts of our funders, grantees, and supporters. Together, we've reached new milestones in expanding access to justice and empowering Marylanders facing critical legal challenges.

This year marked a significant breakthrough in our advocacy efforts with the passage of the Renters Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024. This legislation represents a landmark step in addressing disparities within Maryland's landlord-tenant law framework, recognizing the broader societal impacts of eviction and including provisions to strengthen the financial foundation of civil legal aid in Maryland. While addressing critical reforms to eviction proceedings, it also introduced provisions to strengthen MLSC's financial foundation. For the first time since the 1990s, filing fee surcharges—a key component of Maryland Legal Services Corporation's funding—were increased. These changes will offer crucial financial stability to MLSC and its grantees. Further details about the bill, along with additional legislative advocacy efforts, are available on the prior page.

This success would not have been possible without the unwavering support of the administration, including Governor Wes Moore, Secretary Jake Day of the Department of Housing and Community Development, and Secretary Rafael J. López of the Department of Human Services, whose partnership was instrumental throughout the process. We are incredibly grateful for their leadership and commitment to advancing this initiative. Additionally, we extend our sincere thanks to Chair Luke Clippinger for his pivotal role in amending the bill to include increases to all filing fee surcharges—not just those related to eviction proceedings.

In addition to this legislative achievement, FY2024 saw tremendous growth in our grantee community. We brought on four new grantees through our new pilot program, increasing the total number of grantees to 50 organizations across the state, and awarded a record amount of funding to support vital legal services in Maryland.

We remain inspired by the tireless efforts of our partners and the unwavering dedication of our supporters. The stories and outcomes captured in this report reflect the meaningful difference you help us make every day. As we forge ahead, we remain inspired by the strength of our partnerships and the incredible resilience of those we serve.

We invite you to explore the detailed stories and outcomes of this transformative year in the enclosed Annual Report. Together, let us continue to drive change, innovate, and create a more equitable future for all Marylanders.

With deepest gratitude,



Debra A. Thomas, Esq.
Board Chair



Michelle Daugherty Siri, Esq.
Executive Director

In Fiscal Year 2024

MLSC made \$47.5 million in operating, Judicare and special program grants to 44 nonprofits serving low-income Marylanders.

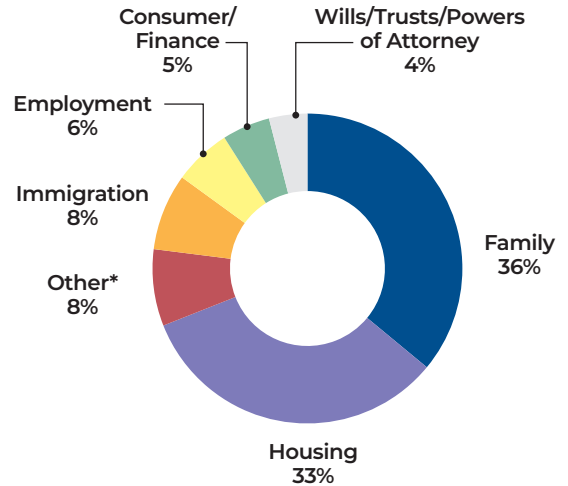
Our grantees closed over 81,000 cases, benefiting 170,000 people.

MLSC grantees closed cases in all 24 Maryland jurisdictions.

Over 2,300 attorneys donated more than 59,550 hours of service.

Legal aid providers helped clients obtain \$15 million in economic awards and avoid or save nearly \$18 million in costs through their cases, for issues such as child support, consumer judgments and discharged debts.

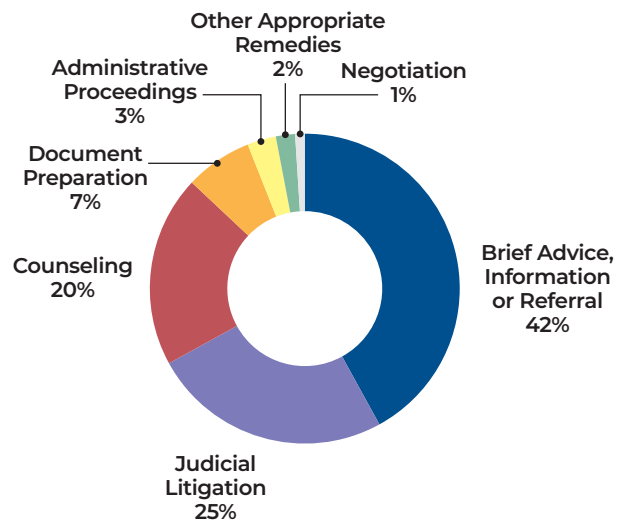
Types of Closed Cases



*Education, health, individual rights, income maintenance, juvenile/CINA, and miscellaneous

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Types of Service



Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

MLSC Grantees

In the spring of 2024, and including subsequent adjustments in the fall, MLSC approved for the coming fiscal year \$31,391,704 in operating, pilot and intern grant awards to 45 organizations. In addition, through a \$2,913,830 grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts and other funds, MLSC approved funding in the amount of \$3,263,830 from the continuation of the Judicare project, which pays reduced fees to private attorneys for contested family law representation. Also, MLSC awarded extension funding of \$720,812 restricted for foreclosure prevention and \$957,060 restricted for workforce legal services, and \$3,600,000 restricted for immigration legal services. With funding from the Access to Counsel in Evictions program and other money, MLSC awarded \$20,347,518 for eviction prevention projects. With new statutory funding MLSC awarded \$225,000 to start the Affordable Life, Wills, and Estate Planning for Seniors Grant Program. MLSC also awarded funding for one-time purchases totaling \$160,000. In November 2024, MLSC approved one-time technology grants totaling \$211,726. **More information about the grant process, application deadline, and current grants are available at www.mlsc.org.**

- Allegany Law Foundation
- Amara Legal Center, Inc.
- Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
- Ayuda
- Baltimore Bar Foundation Senior Legal Services
- CASA, Inc.
- Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition
- Catholic Charities of Baltimore
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington
- Child Justice, Inc.
- Citizens Assisting and Sheltering the Abused (CASA)
- Civil Justice, Inc.
- Community Law Center
- Community Legal Services of Prince George's County
- DC Volunteer Lawyers Project
- Disability Rights Maryland
- Equal Justice Works
- FreeState Justice
- Harford County Bar Foundation
- Heartly House
- HIAS, Inc.
- Homeless Persons Representation Project
- HopeWorks of Howard County
- House of Ruth Maryland
- Life Crisis Center
- Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center
- Maryland Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts
- Maryland Legal Aid
- Maryland Public Interest Law Project
- Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service
- Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence
- Montgomery County Bar Foundation
- Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland
- Public Justice Center
- Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center of UMD Baltimore
- Rising for Justice, Inc.
- Sexual Assault Legal Institute
- Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center (SARC)
- Shore Legal Access
- Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy
- St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center
- Tahirih Justice Center
- United Way of Central Maryland
- University of Baltimore Foundation
- University of Maryland Carey School of Law Clinical Program
- Whitman-Walker Health
- Women's Law Center of Maryland
- World Relief

Types of Grants



Operating

Part of MLSC's unique mission is to provide operating funding, helping legal services nonprofits across the state to keep their lights on and the lights of justice burning.



Internships & Fellowships

MLSC also funds internships for law students and fellowships for eviction defense attorneys, investing in a pipeline of public interest attorneys for years to come.



Family Law

The Maryland Judicare program, administered by MLSC and substantially funded through a grant from the Maryland Judiciary's Access to Justice Department, pays private attorneys reduced fees to accept contested family law cases.



Foreclosure

MLSC's Foreclosure Prevention Grant funds nonprofits serving low-income Marylanders facing foreclosure.



Workforce

With the Workforce Legal Services Grant, MLSC funds grantees to embed legal service providers at job training and other workforce development sites.

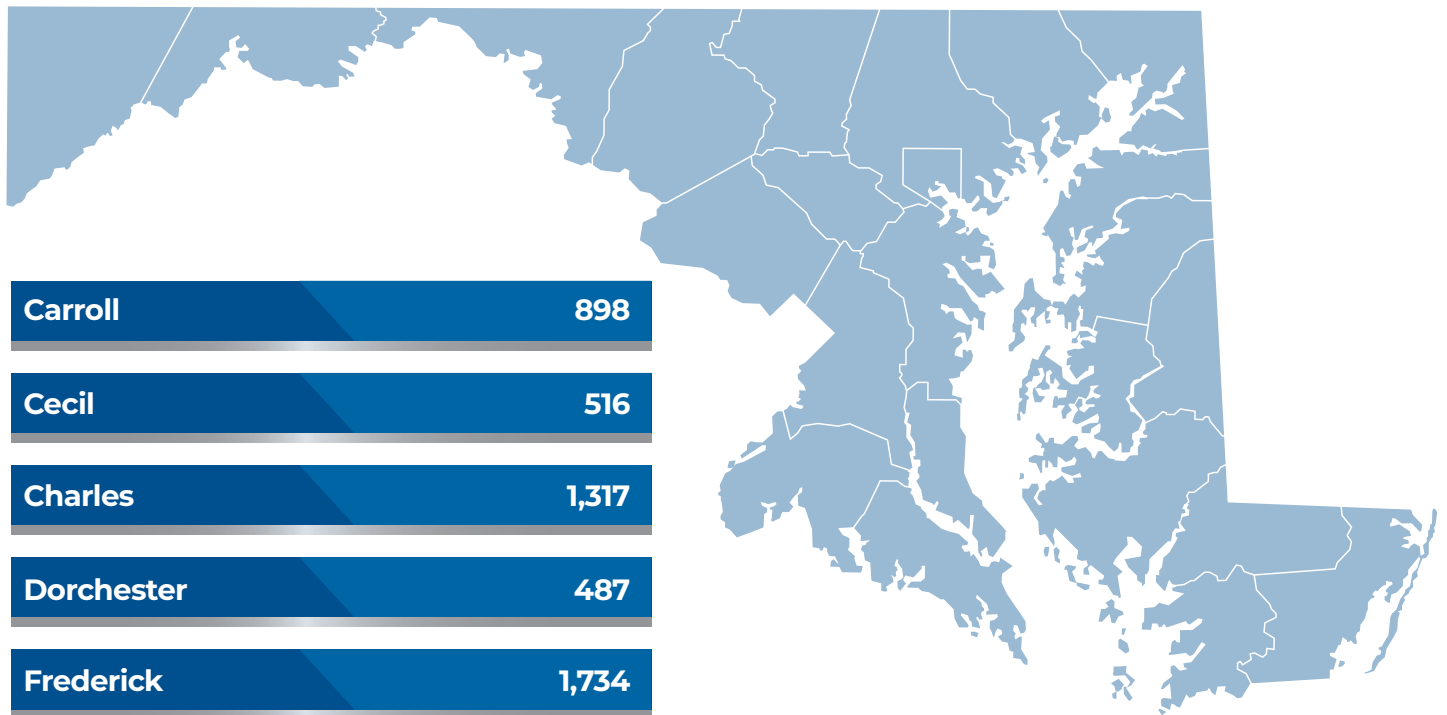


Eviction Prevention

This project funds full representation of residential tenants faced with eviction and includes the Access to Counsel in Evictions program created in 2021 by Maryland's General Assembly, which is under way with a goal of full implementation by October 2025.

2024 Closed Cases by County

Allegany	1,026		
Anne Arundel	5,290	Kent	208
Baltimore City	15,826	Montgomery	9,667
Baltimore County	8,677	Prince George's	21,047
Calvert	643	Queen Anne's	391
Caroline	555	St. Mary's	1,333



Carroll	898		
Cecil	516		
Charles	1,317		
Dorchester	487		
Frederick	1,734		
Garrett	120	Somerset	375
Harford	3,813	Talbot	548
Howard	1,477	Washington	1,278
		Wicomico	1,636
		Worcester	397

AMARA LEGAL CENTER Baltimore County



EMPLOYMENT

A client approached Amara for help with her criminal record, which was hindering her employment opportunities. A victim of trafficking, she had been arrested and charged with crimes that her trafficker had forced and coerced her to commit. The Amara attorney helped her file motions to clear her record. The client was profoundly relieved when this barrier was removed, allowing her to pursue new opportunities with renewed hope.

CASA, INC. Prince George's County



EMPLOYMENT

Amanda sought legal help from CASA after her employer refused to pay her for her last two weeks of work. The unpaid wages of \$2,280 were to go toward Amanda's rent, and so she was facing eviction for not paying rent. When she tried to demand her wages from her former employer, he accused her of harassment and threatened to call the police. CASA promptly sent a demand letter, and after difficult negotiations, secured the total amount of unpaid wages for Amanda. Amanda was able to pay her rent that month and was not evicted.

CIVIL JUSTICE Baltimore City



CONSUMER/FINANCE

Ms. L was sued by her former landlord who claimed damages to the rental property. The landlord originally filed a claim for \$5,000, then amended the alleged amount of damages to \$17,348.21 and then to \$28,000 plus pre-judgment interest. During the 4 ½ hour trial, Ms. L was represented by a Civil Justice panel attorney who repeatedly objected to the landlord's offered evidence. Ultimately, the judge dismissed the landlord's case, saving Ms. L. over \$30,000.

DISABILITY RIGHTS MARYLAND Queen Anne's County



EDUCATION

"Diego" has psychiatric disabilities. He was expelled from school for the entire year and only provided a few hours of virtual education per week. DRM filed an expedited due process hearing against the school district and after a 3-day trial, the judge found the district had denied the student a free appropriate public education and illegally educated him from home in an overly restrictive setting. Under the court's order, the school district then provided compensatory education to the student and placement in a non-public school for the remainder of the school year where he attended in-person with peers.

HOPEWORKS OF HOWARD COUNTY Howard County



FAMILY

HopeWorks assisted a client protecting herself and her children against her cousin. The cousin was suspected of abusing family members and had recently targeted the client's children. For years, the client's family refused to believe victims of domestic violence or hold perpetrators accountable. We took the case the day before trial and quickly got to work developing the client's testimony and integrating the 911 call she placed. The client came prepared, understanding the law and the purpose of her testimony. The Respondent did not appear, convinced the client was too afraid to come to court. The client obtained a protective order by default.

WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH Montgomery County



HEALTH

"Nancy" is 70 year-old Montgomery County resident; she and husband were denied renewal of Medicaid and other benefits. They were told they needed to spend down to qualify, though they reported no income. After they reapplied, DHS lost their application. Our legal team pushed DHS to reassess the application without success, but succeeded with Medicaid/QMB enrollment in May 2024, leaving a 4-month coverage gap and hundreds of unpaid bills. After weeks of failed outreach, the legal team filed for a hearing; days before the hearing, the clients were approved for retroactive coverage. The team is now advocating with providers to reprocess the couple's medical bills.



Access to Counsel in Evictions

Maryland became the second state in the nation to establish a statewide right to counsel for tenants facing eviction or subsidy termination during the 2021 legislative session. MLSC was designated as the administrator of the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) program. FY2024, the second year of a phased three-year implementation period, brought significant expansion to ACE – both in services and impact.

During FY2024, the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) program expanded from an initial eleven jurisdictions to statewide. Legal representation is now available to tenants in all twenty-three counties across Maryland, as well as Baltimore City. MLSC made grants to nine nonprofit legal services providers and both Maryland law schools in FY2024. These grantees handled a total of 10,168 ACE cases in every jurisdiction across the state during FY2024. Of the 7,194 cases where full representation was provided through ACE in FY2024, 86% of tenant households avoided disruptive displacement. ACE grantees also helped Maryland residents receive more than \$785,000 in housing judgments and avoid more than \$6.8 million in costs. These figures include cases closed under Baltimore City's Right to Counsel in Evictions program, which is separately funded by the City.

The Coordinated Intake system, which began as a pilot in Baltimore City the previous fiscal year, soft-launched its statewide expansion during FY2024. The United Way of Central Maryland and Civil Justice have partnered together to develop and manage the Coordinated Intake system for the ACE program in Maryland. Tenants living anywhere in Maryland can call 211 or visit legalthelpmd.org to apply for representation through ACE. Over 900 cases were placed with a legal services provider for representation through Coordinated Intake during FY2024. The Coordinated Intake team also referred more than 2,300 tenants for social services and other benefits to assist with housing stability during FY2024.

Tenant outreach and education is another critical component of the ACE program. During FY2024, MLSC contracted with nine nonprofit community groups to conduct outreach and provide education to tenants across the state regarding tenants' rights and how to access legal representation through ACE. These groups use a variety of outreach methods to reach tenants, including door-knocking, tabling at community events, partnering with schools and libraries, digital marketing, and more, to inform tenants of their rights and of the help available through the ACE program. Through their efforts, these groups provided information to more than 115,000 tenants in FY2024.

Independent program evaluator, Stout Risius Ross, recently issued its first report on the ACE program. The report highlighted the success of ACE during FY2024, finding that of the 87% of tenants who expressed a desire to remain in their homes, 88% were able to do so at the conclusion of their case with ACE representation. The program directly impacted more than 21,000 Maryland residents during FY2024, including 9,100 children. For every dollar invested in the ACE program, Maryland realized an estimated \$3.04 in fiscal and economic benefits, translating to a total impact of \$46.7 million in just one year.

Legal representation is now available to tenants in all twenty-three counties across Maryland, as well as Baltimore City.

Over 900 cases were placed with a legal services provider for representation through Coordinated Intake during FY2024.

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Annual Awards

Each year MLSC solicits nominations and presents awards to individuals and organizations that have contributed significantly to the provision of legal services to low-income Marylanders. MLSC held its annual reception on November 19, 2024 at Westminster Hall in Baltimore. MLSC Board Chair Debra Thomas and Maryland Supreme Court Chief Justice Matthew Fader presented the awards.



Seated: Makeisha Gibson; Cornelia Bright Gordon; Katherine Davis.
Standing: Michelle Daugherty Siri; Adam N. Crandell; Bobby J. Hill; Ivette Furneisen; Debra Thomas.

Award Recipients

Arthur W. Machen, Jr. Award

Adam Crandell

Benjamin L. Cardin Distinguished Service Award

Katherine Davis
Cornelia Bright Gordon

Rising Star Award

Ivette Furneisen

William L. Marbury Outstanding Advocate Award

Makeisha Gibson

Herbert S. Garten Public Citizen Award

CFG Bank

IOLTA Honor Roll

This joint initiative of the Maryland State Bar Association and MLSC consists of financial institutions that pay premium rates on IOLTA accounts, supporting critically needed legal aid for low-income Marylanders. We salute these institutions and encourage our supporters to patronize Honor Roll members.



MLSC is pleased to acknowledge the 2024 awards reception sponsors

Advocate

Iloff, Meredith, Wildberger & Brennan, P.C.
Kramon & Graham, P.A.
Marjorie Wax and Brian Hochheimer

Partner

Ballard Spahr LLP
DLA Piper
Gordon Feinblatt LLC
Law Offices of Sally B. Gold, LLC
Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC
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Supporter

Gorges & Company
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Minnesota Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company
Hon. Mark Scurti
Summit Business Technologies
Hon. Pamela J. White

Media Sponsor



MLSC Revenue

MLSC revenue for grants is primarily generated from the MLSC Fund, which is composed of three special funding sources:

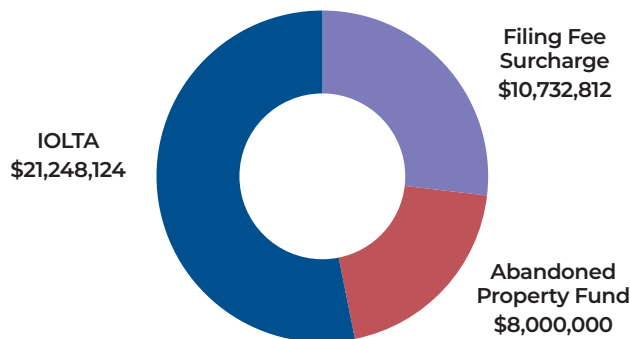
Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) held by Maryland-licensed lawyers

A surcharge on certain Circuit and District Court filing fees

\$8,000,000 from the Abandoned Property Fund

MLSC Fund Revenue

During FY24, the MLSC Fund received total revenue of over \$39.9 million.



Summarized Financial Information

Statement of Net Position June 30, 2024

Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 4,862,283
Investments	24,706,788
Receivable, IOLTA Receipts	1,968,122
Due from State of Maryland	21,416,810
Grants Receivable	4,112,803
Grant Advances	631,200
Other Receivables	36,343
Prepaid Expenses	86,174
Capital Assets - Net of Accumulated Depreciation & Amortization	75,913
Deferred Compensation Investments	107,132
Other Assets	1,600
Total Assets	58,005,168

Liabilities

Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	442,253
Deferred Revenue	12,101,568
Due to State of Maryland	2,270,827
Deferred Compensation Obligation	107,132
Right-of-Use Leases	65,070
Total Liabilities	14,986,850

Net Position

Net Investment in Capital Assets	75,913
Unrestricted	41,373,582
Temporarily Restricted	1,568,823
Total Net Position	\$43,018,318

Statement of Activities

For the Year Ended June 30, 2024

Program Expenses - Legal Assistance	\$50,310,697
General Revenues	
State of Maryland Appropriations - Legal Assistance	47,947,879
Eviction Prevention - ACE funds	11,086,718
Increased Access to Counsel Programs - AOC Funds	3,670,805
Judicare Program - AOC Funds	2,487,686
Government Grants	2,091,547
State of Maryland Housing Security Grant	1,378,768
Cannabis Program - AOC Funds	1,033,559
Outreach and Education Reimbursement - ACE	280,500
Contributions	22,702
Annual Awards Reception	24,750
Investment Income, Net	1,590,373
Total General Revenues	\$71,615,287
Increase in Net Position	21,304,590
Net Position at Beginning of Year	21,713,728
Net Position at End of Year	\$43,018,318

The report is a summary of the financial statements incorporated in the annual audit report issued by Gross, Mendelsohn, & Associates, P.A. for the year ended June 30, 2024. The complete financial statements and notes are available upon request from MLSC.

*See page 5 for grant commitments made at the close of FY2024.

MLSC Board

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Maryland Legal Services Corporation

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Karen Wabeke, Esq.
Director of Special Programs

Cindy Wallace
Chief Financial Officer / Chief Operating
Officer



About MLSC

The Maryland Legal Services Corporation, established in 1982 by the Maryland General Assembly, is a nonprofit organization governed by a nine-member Board of Directors appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. MLSC distributes funds from the Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program and other sources to nonprofit organizations for the provision of civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. MLSC currently provides funding to 50 nonprofit grantees throughout Maryland to ensure that eligible clients in all areas of the state have access to legal assistance. MLSC also administers Maryland's Access to Counsel in Evictions program.

FUNDING LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVING THE ENDS OF JUSTICE

About IOLTA

Attorneys routinely receive client funds to be held in trust for future use. In the case of amounts that are small or to be held for a short time, attorneys must place these funds into Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA). The generated interest is used by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation for grants to programs that provide civil legal services to low-income Marylanders.



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