



Kansas Legal Services

We are legal aid in Kansas, providing equal access to justice for the most vulnerable Kansans.

kansaslegalservices.org

2025

Kansas Legal Needs Assessment



Completed by:



December 2025

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Assessment Highlights | 3 |
| Author | 4 |
| Methodology..... | 5 |
| Overview..... | 5 |
| Scope of Work | 6 |
| Assessment Phases | 6 |
| Data Collection and Analysis..... | 8 |
| Service Area Overview | 8 |
| Kansas SNAP Summary | 8 |
| Social Vulnerability Assessment..... | 11 |
| Subject Area Topics | 13 |
| Community Survey..... | 14 |
| Community Feedback | 14 |
| Subject Area Needs..... | 20 |
| Experiences with Abuse or Violence | 26 |
| Advocate and Stakeholder Survey..... | 29 |
| About Respondents..... | 29 |
| Stakeholder Feedback | 30 |
| Subject Area Needs..... | 33 |
| Recommendations from Advocates for Civil Legal Services | 37 |
| Listening Sessions..... | 41 |
| Substantive Legal Needs..... | 41 |
| Structural Needs | 41 |
| Systemic Needs..... | 42 |
| Analysis of Existing KLS Services 2022-2024..... | 43 |
| Overall Case Services Data..... | 43 |
| Consumer and Finance | 45 |
| Education | 45 |
| Employment..... | 45 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Family | 45 |
| Health..... | 45 |
| Housing | 45 |
| Income Maintenance | 46 |
| Individual Rights..... | 46 |
| Juvenile | 46 |
| Miscellaneous..... | 46 |
| Findings and Recommendations | 47 |
| Substantive Needs | 47 |
| Structural Needs..... | 49 |
| Systemic Needs | 50 |
| Vulnerable Population Needs | 50 |
| Conclusion | 50 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kansas Legal Services (KLS) is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to helping low-income Kansans meet their basic needs by providing crucial legal and mediation services. As the primary legal aid organization in Kansas, KLS ensures equal access to justice for the most vulnerable citizens.

The foundation for KLS was laid when the American Bar Association first recognized the need for special assistance to the poor. State and local bar associations worked tirelessly to promote legal aid societies, accepting that the pledge of "Equal Justice Under the Law" required access for people with limited resources. Legal aid societies were officially formed in Topeka, Wichita, and Kansas City in the mid-1960s and 70s. In 1977, the Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita societies merged to officially form Kansas Legal Services, Inc.

ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Community members, partners, advocates, and stakeholders offered detailed information about the needs of low-income people in Kansas. They also offered constructive feedback about the access to justice system and the need for changes to increase access to justice. More than 380 community members, advocates, and stakeholders completed legal needs surveys. More than 50 community partners, advocates, and stakeholders committed one to two hours each to take part in group interviews and listening sessions. Their contributions combined with the analysis of case and community data guided the creation of findings and recommendations to meet the legal needs of low-income people in Kansas.

Advocates and stakeholders praise KLS's work for lower income residents of Kansas. Recent highly successful pilots have been well received by partners and positively impacted KLS case statistics. Members of the community, advocates, and stakeholders identified the multiple areas as current civil legal needs for lower income Kansans. Needs are broken down into four subsections: substantive, structural, systemic, and vulnerable population needs. The recommendations in this assessment will help KLS meet community needs and collaborate with other advocates and stakeholders to address the emerging and changing issues impacting low-income people in Kansas.



Kōmēngé LLC is an organizational consulting partnership between Alex Gulotta, Anna Dorn-Gulotta, and Íde Gulotta with more than thirty-seven years of direct legal services experience in five different states (Arizona, California, Kentucky, Virginia, and Wisconsin). We also have more than twenty years of experience providing consulting services to access to justice organizations. We know the access to justice community.

At Kōmēngé, we believe an organization's ability to make an impact in the world — and in the lives of its community members — is inextricably linked to the health of the organization. Improving the way your organization thinks, acts, and dreams about the future increases the likelihood that your efforts will have long-term, positive societal impacts. Our approach focuses on the change you hope to make in the world and gives you the tools necessary to ensure that your strategies and activities are designed to realize that change.¹

¹ Cover photo by [Samuel Myles](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Overview

The assessment utilizes a modern approach to evaluation that emphasizes the development of practical processes for ongoing evaluation and decision-making – with an eye toward using data to improve existing systems and to drive substantive work. During our process, we consider opportunities to increase the use of data to identify unmet legal needs, address gaps in services or legal deserts to better measure the ultimate impact of the work.

Rationale

The role of traditional strategic planning and assessment has been under question for more than a quarter of a century.² As Mintzberg stated in 1994, “Three decades of experience with strategic planning have taught us about the need to loosen up the process of strategy making rather than trying to seal it off by arbitrary formalization.”³ More recently, the Stanford Social Innovation Review boldly professed “The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy.”⁴ This same message is embodied in many scholarly articles and books dedicated to organizational planning. This assessment follows that trend.

Critical Factors in the Needs Assessment Process

The assessment procedures used in this report are strongly informed by the work of Jeanne M. Liedtka, Professor of Business Administration at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia, who identified five elements to be incorporated into strategic thinking processes: systems-perspective, intent-focused, intelligent opportunism, thinking in time, hypothesis-driven.⁵ The work of David La Piana, author of The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution, suggests methods and factors to consider in a well-reasoned and rigorous strategic processes.⁶ Professor Liedtka’s factors and La Piana’s recommendations are highly aligned and critical to ensuring well-balanced and rigorous planning and assessment. We have incorporated these concepts into our methods of planning and assessment tailored specifically for legal aid programs.

² Mintzberg, H. (1994, February). The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning. Retrieved April 03, 2018, from <https://hbr.org/1994/01/the-fall-and-rise-of-strategic-planning>.

³ Id.

⁴ O'Donovan, D., & Rimland Flower, N. (2013, January 10). The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy. (SSIR). Retrieved April 03, 2018, from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_strategic_plan_is_dead_long_live_strategy.

⁵ Liedtka, J. M. (1998) Strategic Thinking: Can it be Taught? *Long Range Planning*, 31(1), 120-129.

⁶ La Piana, D. (2008) *The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution: Real-Time Strategic Planning in a Rapid Response World*. Saint Paul Minnesota: Fieldstone Alliance. See also the new edition La Piana, D. & Campos, M. M. (2018) *The Nonprofit Strategy Revolution: Real-Time Strategic Planning in a Rapid Response World*. (2nd Ed.). Saint Paul Minnesota: Fieldstone Alliance.

Scope of Work

Kōmǎngé provided assessment planning support by helping KLS scope, develop, and implement quantitative and qualitative measurement instruments, such as surveys and interview protocols; administering stakeholder and client surveys; conducting key informant interviews; hosting virtual listening sessions; evaluating qualitative data from listening sessions, key informant interviews, and surveys; analyzing historical case data; and developing recommendations for future program development.

Specific qualitative and quantitative datasets included:

- Surveys.
- Group Interviews.
- Community Listening Sessions.
- Demographic Analysis of the service areas' eligible client population mapped in relation to demographic factors and other relevant data.
- KLS case data from 2022 to 2024.

Assessment Phases

Phase One: Project Planning

The legal needs assessment and priority setting process began with a preliminary call to the Project Manager to review the overall process and make changes necessary based on KLS' specific needs. The Project Manager collaborated with Kōmǎngé to prepare for the needs assessment process with regular check-in emails and video conferences (as needed) to monitor progress. The Project Manager also helped identify and compile background data from KLS' internal case management systems, client satisfaction surveys, and from local resources such as courts and bar associations (as was relevant).

Phase Two: Survey Development, Implementation, & Analysis

Based on our preliminary fact-gathering, Kōmǎngé developed surveys to gain information about community needs. This included client surveys in English and Spanish and a separate stakeholder survey for staff, board, and key community partners. The client survey was posted on the KLS statewide website and emailed to past and current clients. The stakeholder survey was distributed via direct email. All surveys were promoted by KLS staff members. Surveys received two hundred ninety-six (296) community responses and eighty-seven (87) advocate and stakeholder responses. Kōmǎngé used the survey data to prepare for the key informant interviews and to begin identifying issues for further study and reflection.

Phase Three: Listening Sessions

Kōmǎngé conducted six (6) virtual listening sessions to gather input from approximately fifty (50) key staff, board members, and lead community partners.

Phase Four: GIS Mapping Analysis

In addition to the survey data, Kōmǎngé worked with the Project Manager to review CSR data by service type and by geographic location. This data was used to understand current service delivery patterns and to determine the impact and viability of future strategic initiatives. Kōmǎngé also reviewed other available data in the service area to identify significant demographic changes and potential opportunities for both impact advocacy and focused direct service work.

Phase Five: Completion of Final Report and Recommendations

The report integrates staff and stakeholder feedback and contains findings and recommendations both for case priority setting and service delivery adjustments. These findings can be used to build community awareness and support to address identified unmet legal needs.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

SERVICE AREA OVERVIEW

KLS's service area and this analysis covers all one-hundred-and-five (105) counties in the State of Kansas and four (4) Native nations that share geography with Kansas. Kansas' overall poverty rate in 2023 was 11.2% with significant disparities based on race or ethnicity.⁷ Poverty rates in 2023 reflect the following breakdowns:

- White Alone, Any Ethnicity 9.6%;
- Asian Alone, Any Ethnicity 13.8%;
- Some Other Race Alone, Any Ethnicity 14.6%;
- Two or More Races, Any Ethnicity 16.1%;
- American Indian and Alaska Native Alone, Any Ethnicity 16.2%;
- Hispanic or Latino, Any Race 16.7%; and
- Black or African American Alone, Any Ethnicity 18.9%.

Detailed maps for community and case demographics discussed throughout this report can be found in Appendix A Additional Maps.

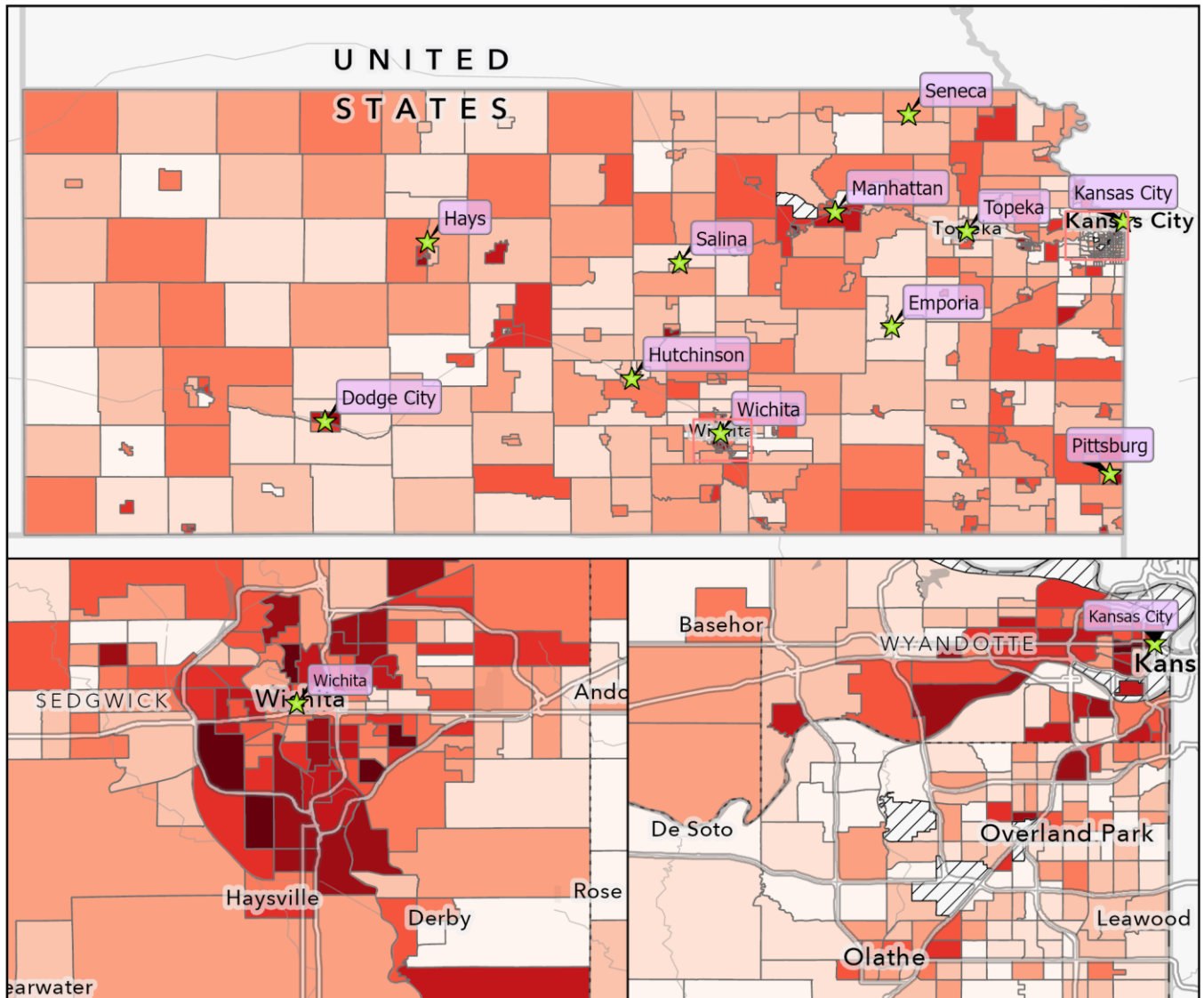
Kansas SNAP Summary

Additional insight into community vulnerability and public benefits needs can be gained from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation statistics. The SNAP Community Characteristics Dashboard Congressional District Explorer is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, to share information about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation, income, and household demographics.⁸ According to the Dashboard, in Kansas, 6.8% of all households participate in SNAP, or 80,801 households (out of all 1,188,340 households in Kansas). There are 139,425 households in poverty in Kansas, with a household poverty rate of 11.7%. This means that there are 58,624 households in poverty who do not receive SNAP benefits.

⁷ Kansas Health Institute, FuseKS Data Walk, Available at <https://www.khi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Poverty-Rate-by-Racial-and-Ethnic-Group-in-Kansas-Web.pdf>

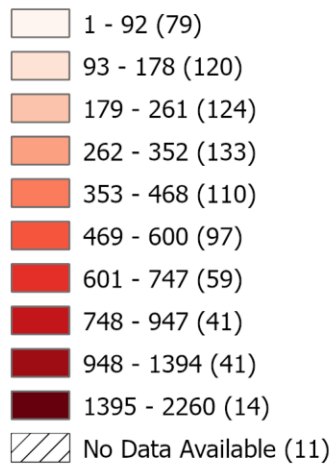
⁸ This data includes statistics for 2013 to 2023, with most recent data being based on 2023 SNAP participation statistics and the American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2013-2023, excluding 2020). The rest of this report uses the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, so individual numbers may vary. The Dashboard is available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/data-research/data-visualization/snap-community-characteristics-congressional-district-dashboard>.

Poverty - Total Poverty Population



Population Below Poverty Level

Total Poverty Population



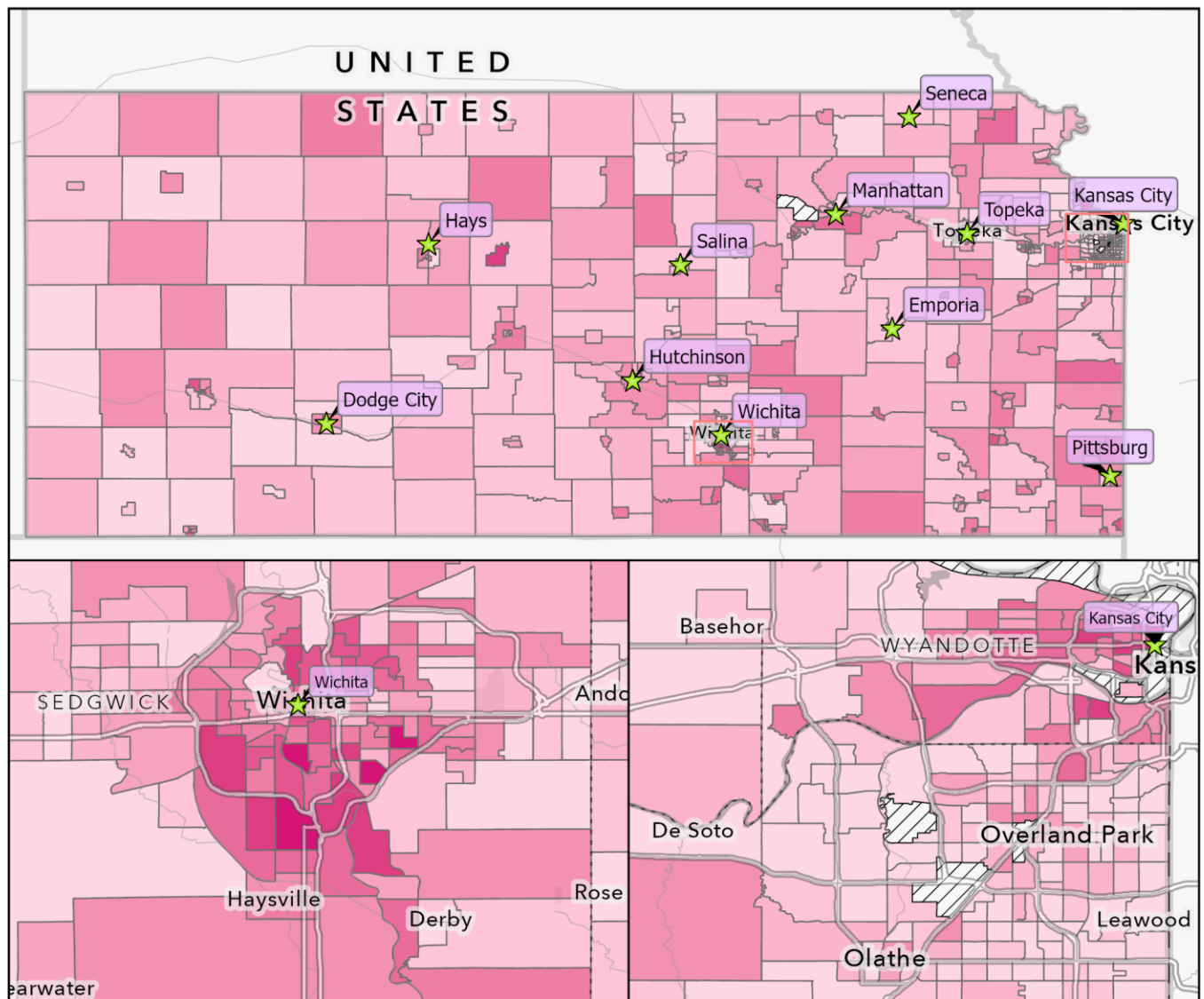
Office Locations

KLS Office

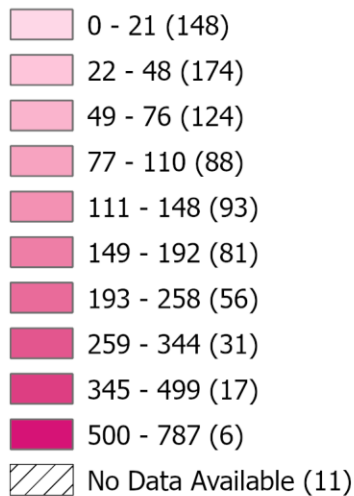
Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

American Community Survey
 2019-2023 5-year estimates
 S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months
 Geography/Subdivision: Census Tract
 Map shading shows the estimated number of people below the poverty level within a given census tract.

SNAP Benefits



Households Receiving SNAP



Office Locations

KLS Office

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

American Community Survey
 2019-2023 5-year estimates
 S2201: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 Geography/Subdivision: Census Tract
 Map shading shows the estimated number of households who report receiving SNAP benefits within a given census tract.

Social Vulnerability Assessment

To offer an intersectional picture of social vulnerability, the state of Kansas was mapped against the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry Social Vulnerability Index (CDC/ATSDR SVI or SVI)**, which CDC/ATSDR defines as “a place-based index, database, and mapping application designed to identify and quantify communities experiencing social vulnerability.”⁹

CDC/ATSDR defines social vulnerability in these terms: “Every community must prepare for and respond to hazardous events, whether a natural disaster like a tornado or a disease outbreak, or an anthropogenic event such as a harmful chemical spill. The degree to which a community exhibits certain social conditions, including high poverty, low percentage of vehicle access, or crowded households, among others, may affect that community’s ability to prevent human suffering and financial loss in the event of a disaster. These factors describe a community’s social vulnerability.”

SVI consists of four themes: **Socioeconomic Status, Household Characteristics, Racial & Ethnic Minority Status, Housing Type & Transportation**. Each theme encompasses several variables pulled from American Community Survey (ACS), 2018-2022 (5-year) data¹⁰. Individual variables are converted to a percentile ranking for each, summed, and then ranked again to produce the individual theme percentile ranks. The overall score is produced by summing all sixteen ranked variables and then converting those sums to percentile rankings.

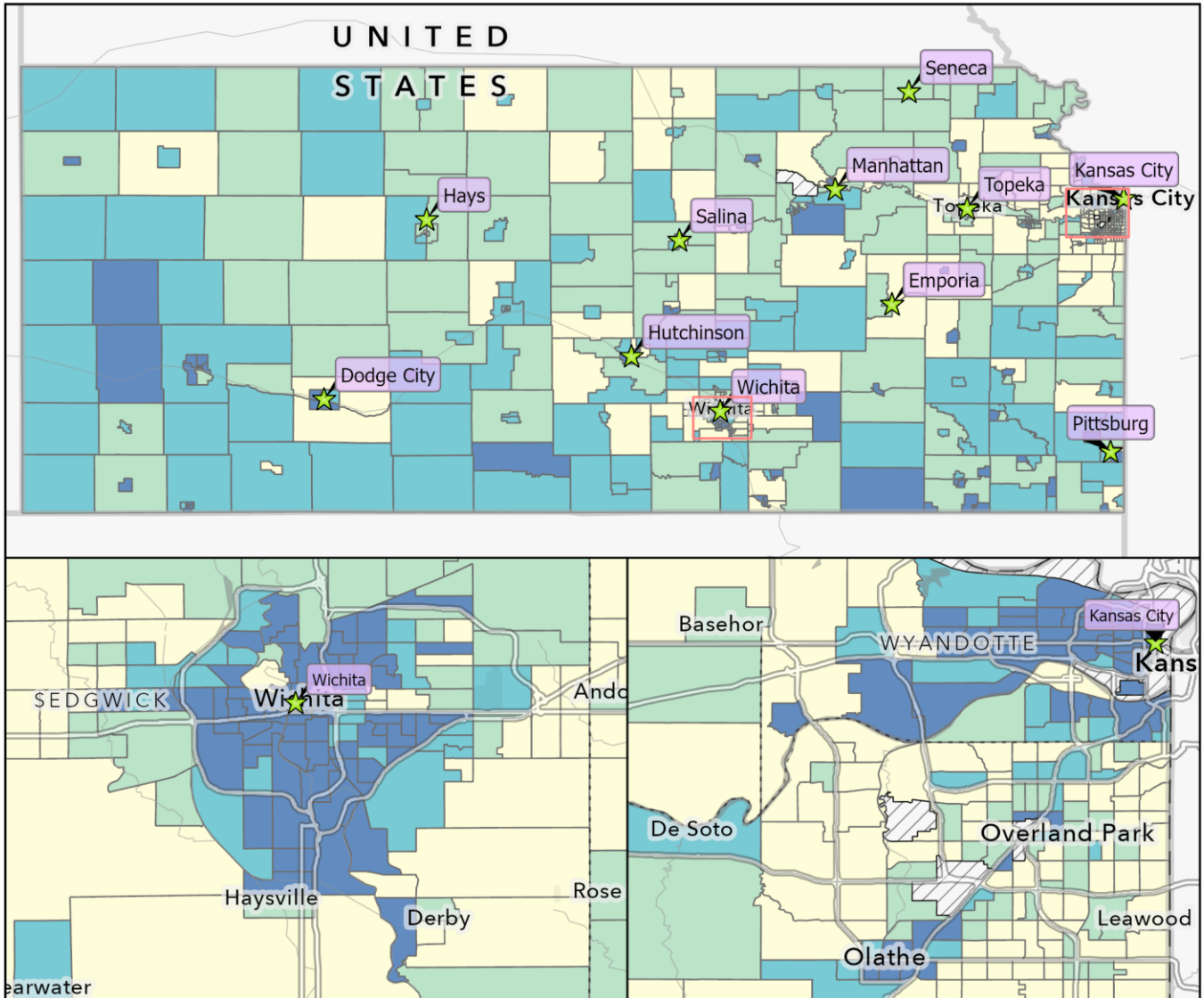
Because SVI is a ranked variable, the values are relative to the set of data in question. CDC/ATSDR offers SVI calculations for the entire US, individual states, Puerto Rico, and tribal census tracts. The calculations are also offered in two geography types/levels where applicable: county and census tract. SVI figures in this report reflect Kansas census tract SVI values and therefore represent an estimation of the relative social vulnerability of a census tract as compared to all other census tracts in the state of Kansas. Full documentation on the 2022 CDC/ATSDR SVI can be found on [the CDC/ATSDR website](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/place-health/php/svi/index.html).¹¹ KLS has offices in the areas of greatest concentrated vulnerability in the state. However, there are counties rated in the most vulnerable quartile who are far from a KLS office location.

⁹ See CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index 2022 is available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/place-health/php/svi/index.html>. Additional documentation and explanations of the four themes is available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/place-health/media/pdfs/2024/10/SVI2022Documentation.pdf>.

¹⁰ Census data can be accessed at <https://data.census.gov/>. The ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables can be accessed at <https://data.census.gov/table?q=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Detailed%20Tables>.






¹¹ See CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index 2022 is available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/place-health/php/svi/index.html>. Additional documentation and explanations of the four themes is available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/place-health/media/pdfs/2024/10/SVI2022Documentation.pdf>.

Social Vulnerability Index - Overall Vulnerability



SVI Theme

Overall Vulnerability

-  Least Vulnerable Quartile (205)
-  2nd Quartile (204)
-  3rd Quartile (204)
-  Most Vulnerable Quartile (204)
-  Data Not Available (12)

Office Locations

-  KLS Office

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index, Kansas
 KS_SVI_2022 - Overall Vulnerability
 Geography/Subdivision: Census Tracts
 Map shows what quartile of SVI or SVI sub-index scores a given census tract falls into, relative to all census tracts in the state of Kansas.

SUBJECT AREA TOPICS

In the surveys, community members, advocates, and stakeholders were asked about the types of legal issues experienced by people in the lower-income community, including the following areas:

Protecting income or avoiding debt (being unable to pay money you owe or unfair charges, including bill collectors, bankruptcy, credit, repossession, warranties, loans, medical debt, fraud or money scams)

Education (discipline, expulsion, suspension, special education, language access, job training, student financial aid)

Employment (firing, unpaid wages, poor working conditions, discrimination, harassment, taxes, employee rights, unfair disciplinary procedures, changes to contract terms)

Family (adoption, custody or visitation, child or spouse support, adult guardianship, name change, parental rights termination, paternity, domestic abuse or violence, support)

Juvenile (neglect or abuse, minor guardianship, emancipation)

Health and mental health (disability, injury or illness, healthcare services and coverage, mental health services, home healthcare and support, long-term care facility, other health or support services)

Housing (eviction or becoming homeless, poor maintenance, discrimination, housing vouchers or subsidized housing, mobile home, foreclosure, unfair mortgage practices, land ownership or title issues)

Income supports (problems with applying for, receiving, or the amount of Social Security retirement, SSI, SSDI, food stamps, Veterans' benefits, state or local childcare or kinship care supports)

Native American, Native, or Indigenous rights (any issue in Native nation court or related to Native nation membership)

Licenses (driver's license issues or reinstatement, occupational licenses)

Immigration (citizenship, legal status, asylum)

End-of-life planning (advance directives, powers of attorney, wills, trust, probate, inheritance)

Incarceration and reentry (criminal record expungement or sealing)

Individual rights (civil rights, disability rights, LGBTQIA+ rights)

Protection from violence (elder abuse, abuse, stalking, sexual assault and violence, human trafficking)

Unfairness by government officials (discriminatory or corrupt treatment by the police or other government official)

COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community survey was created to solicit feedback from client-eligible individuals in the community and was offered in both English and Spanish. The survey was posted on the statewide program website and available to individuals applying for services. Community members were asked about their most pressing needs in the last two years and the needs they see impacting other members of their community. The survey document is attached as Appendix C (Spanish Survey: Appendix E) and the survey response data (without text fields) is attached as Appendix D (Spanish Survey: Appendix F).

A total of 296 individuals responded to the two surveys (292 English survey, 4 Spanish survey). Not every individual answered every question. The total number of people responding to a question is included where relevant. In the survey, community members were asked about any problems or issues they experienced in the last two years impacting their life, such as problems keeping families together, keeping housing, getting or keeping work, paying bills, or anything affecting their health or wellbeing. The survey asked about their experiences with problems or issues in the subject area categories discussed above.¹²

Community Feedback

Community members experienced problems or issues spanning all the categories, but the most common was protecting income and avoiding debt.

The top problem areas by percentage of respondents who reported experiencing problems or issues in the last two years were:

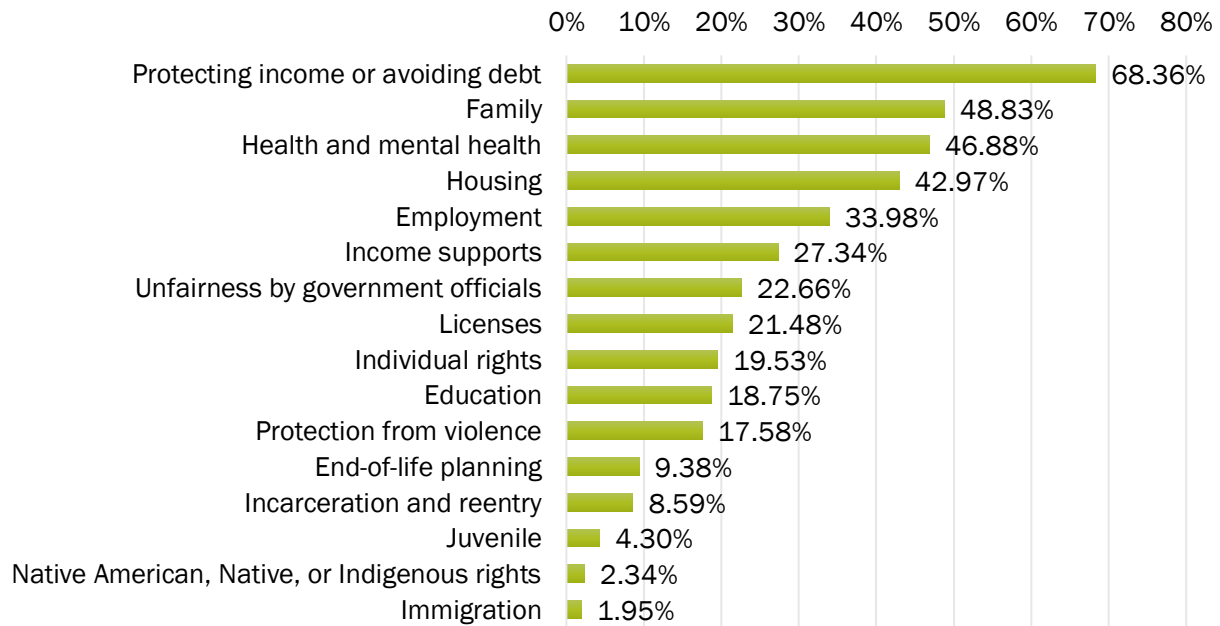
- Protecting Income and Avoiding Debt (68.36%)
- Family (48.83%)
- Health and Mental Health (46.88%)
- Housing (42.97%)
- Employment (33.98%)

Most people reported problems across multiple categories, with each person experiencing problems in 3.94 categories on average in the last two years. Of these problems, respondents rated protecting income and avoiding debt, family, and housing as the most severe or long-lasting problems that occurred in the last two years. For many individuals, concerns spanned multiple categories and affected many parts of their lives. People cited family law issues impacting income, housing, and health, while others

¹² Education, Employment, End-of-life planning, Family, Health and mental health, Housing, Immigration, Incarceration and reentry, Income supports, Juvenile, Licenses, Native American, Native, or Indigenous Rights, Protecting Income and Avoiding Debt, Protection from violence, and Unfairness by government officials.

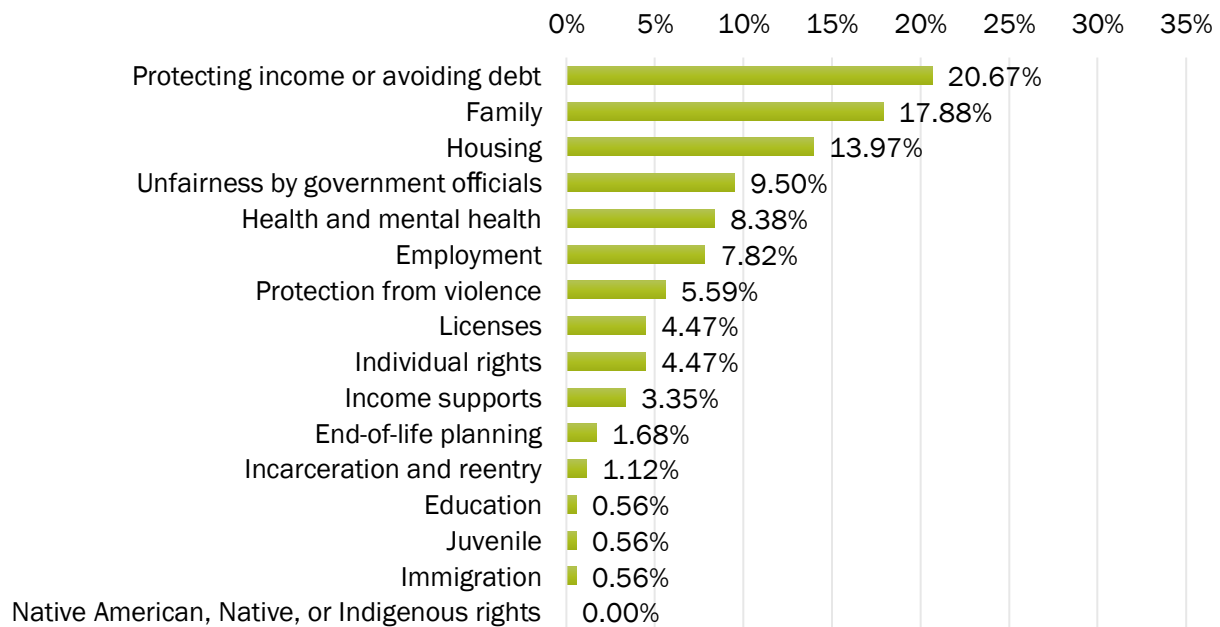
described individual rights or incarceration and reentry issues that impacted employment, housing, and income maintenance.

All Problems Experienced in the Last Two Years



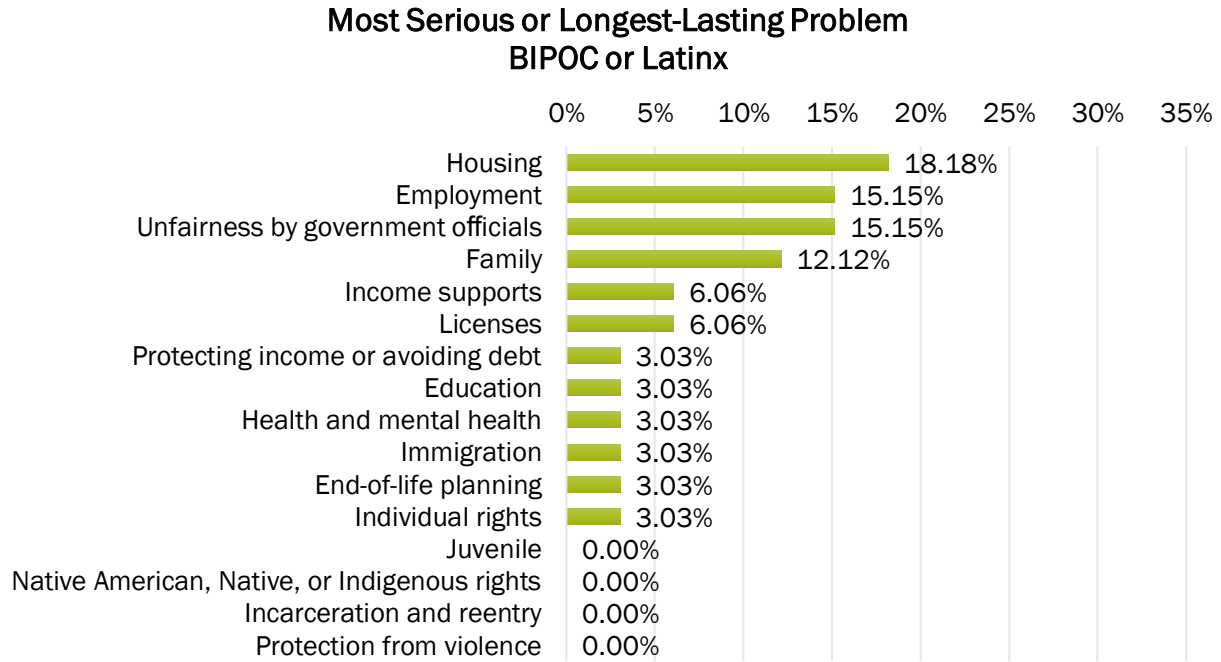
256 respondents out of 296 provided problem data.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem



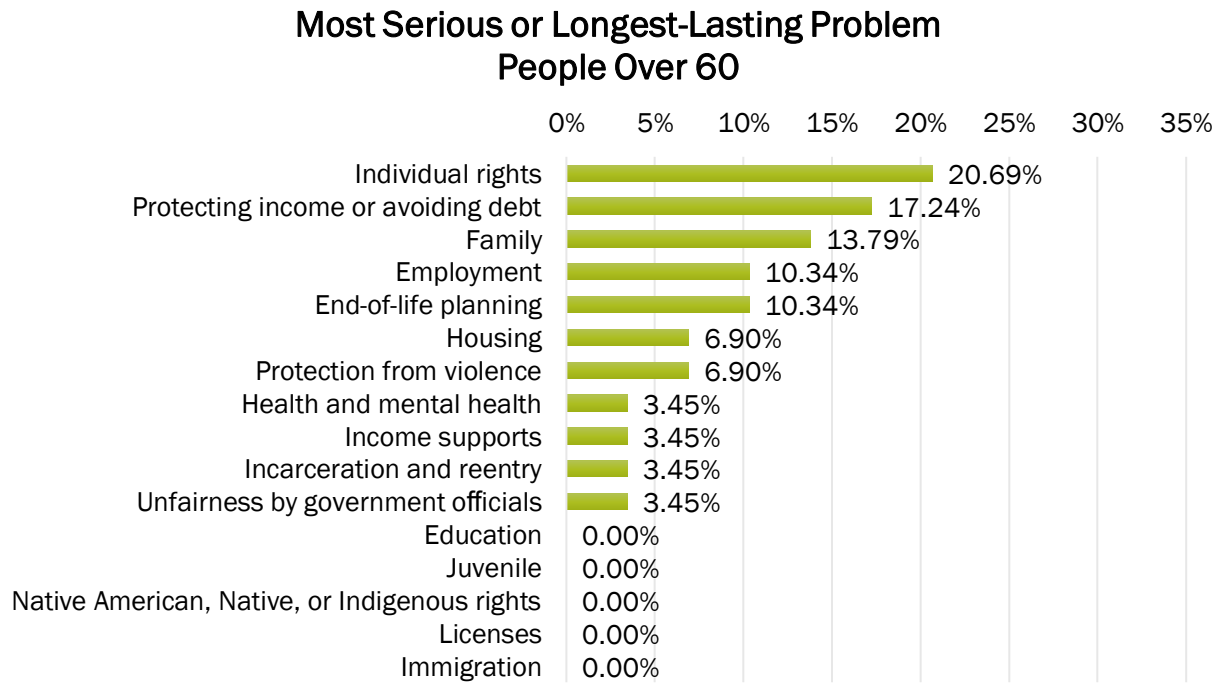
180 respondents out of 296 provided most serious or longest-lasting problem data.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – People who Identify as BIPOC or Latinx



33 respondents out of 180 who identified as Black, indigenous, people of color, or Latinx.

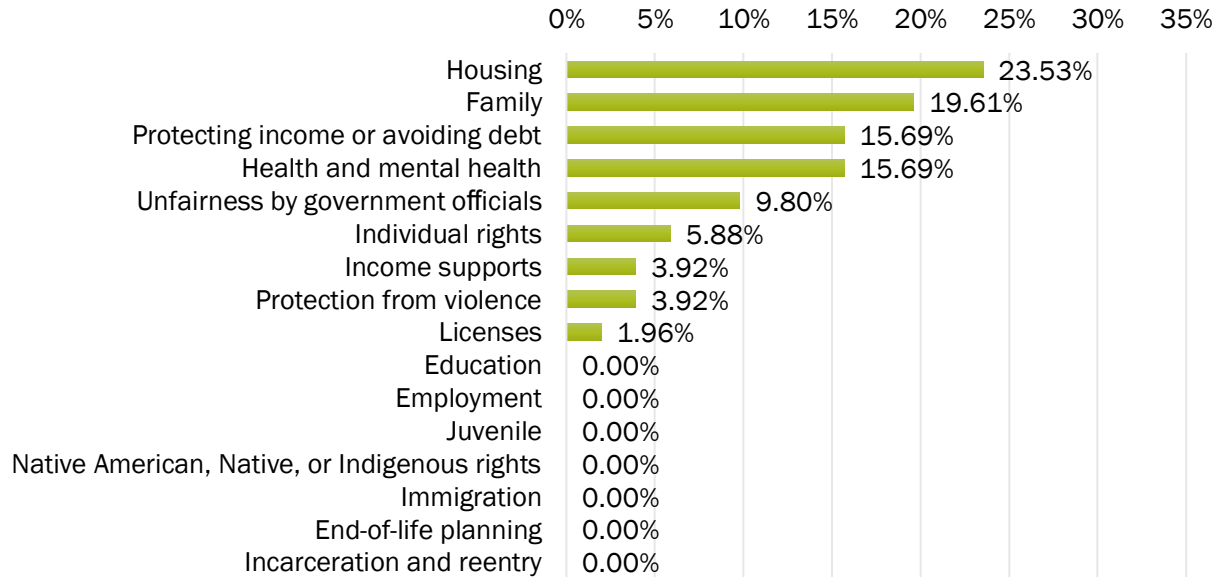
Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – People Over 60



29 respondents out of 180 who provided age data.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – Disabled and Unable to Work

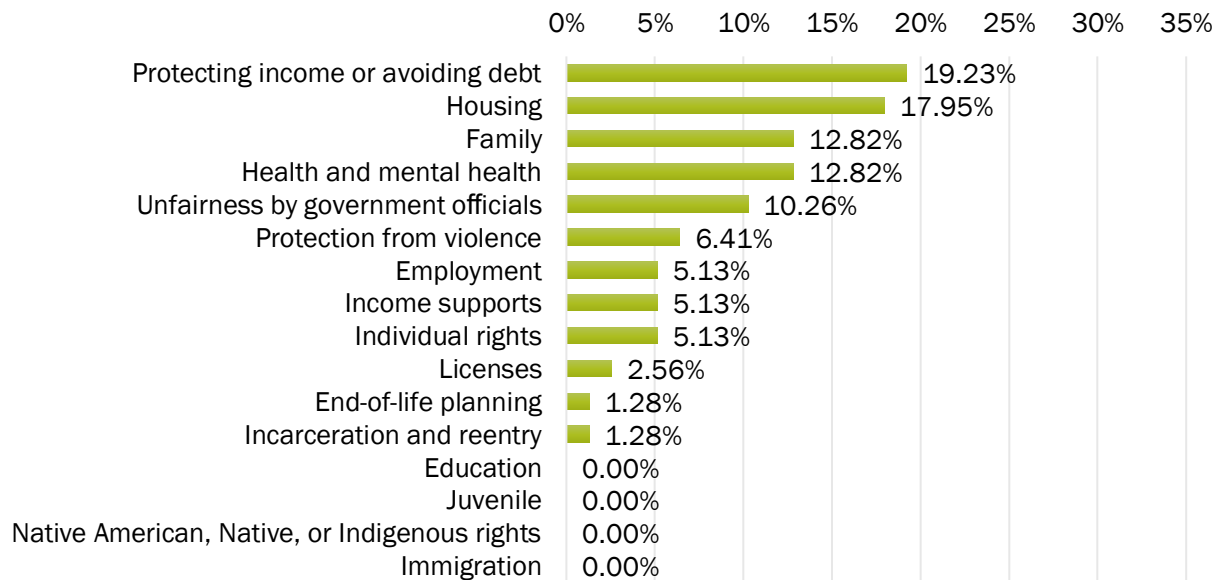
**Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem
People who are Disabled and Unable to Work**



51 respondents out of 180 who indicated they were disabled and unable to work.

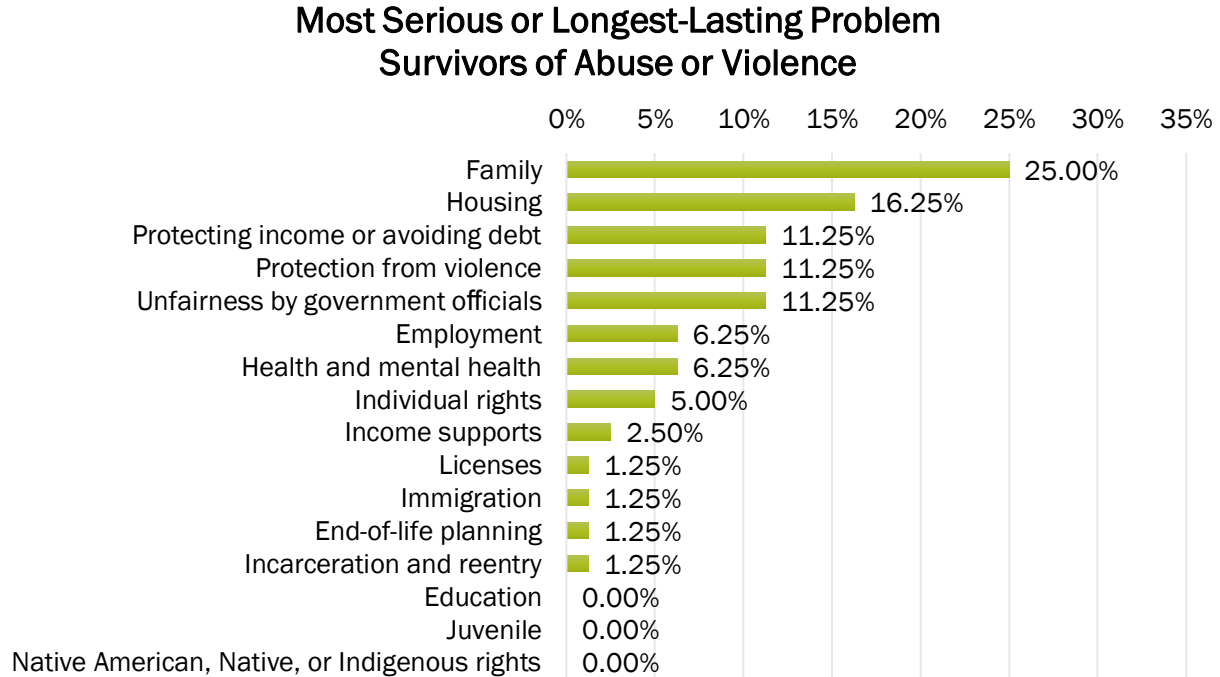
Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – Chronic Condition

**Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem
Chronic Condition**



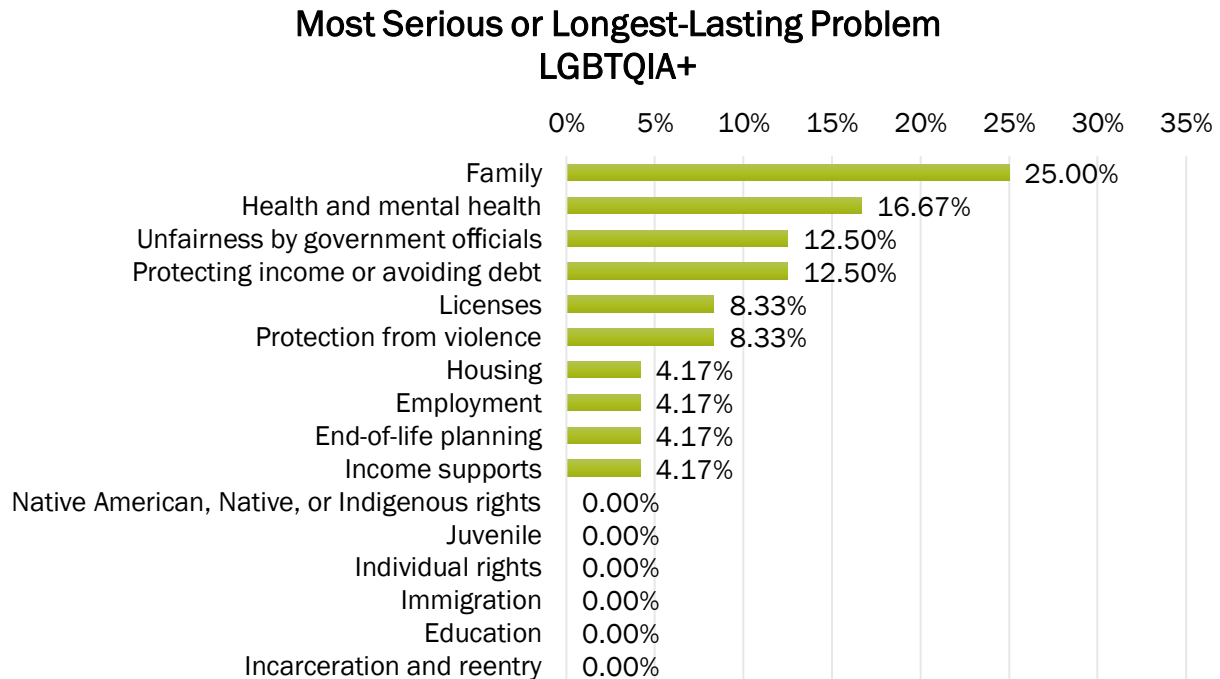
78 respondents out of 180 who consider themselves to have a chronic condition, difference, or disability.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – Survivors of Abuse or Violence



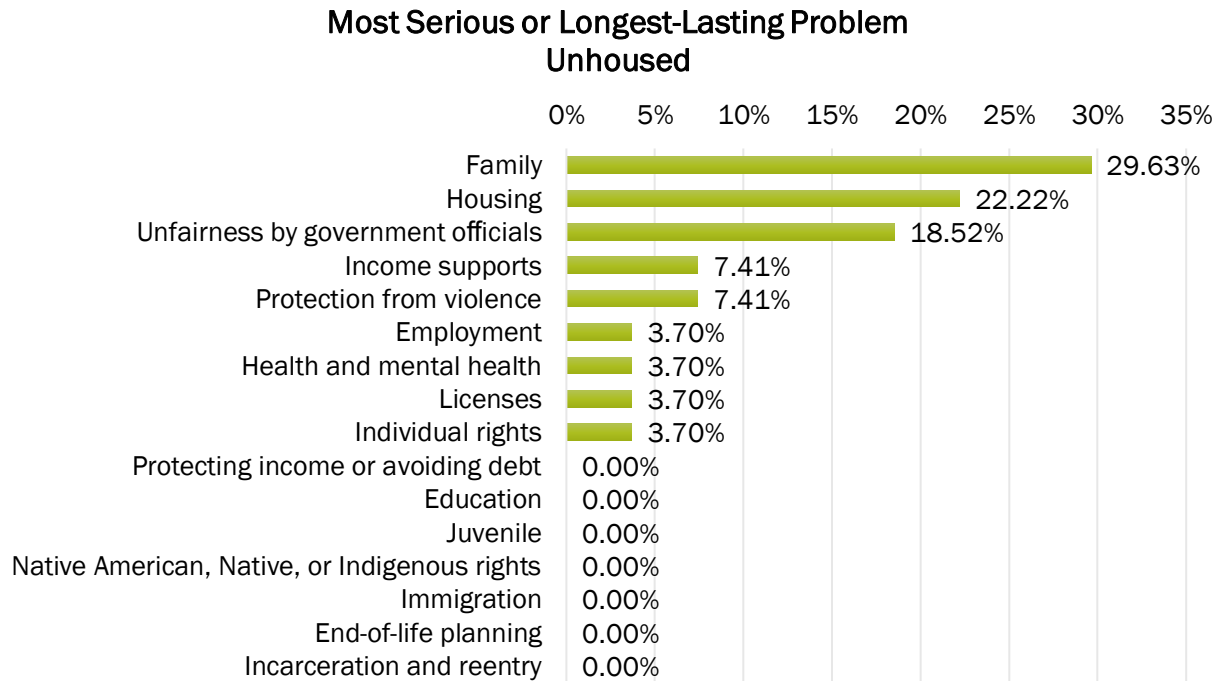
80 respondents out of 180 who indicated they had experienced any of the following: abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, stalking, human trafficking, or sexual violence.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – People who Identify as LGBTQIA+



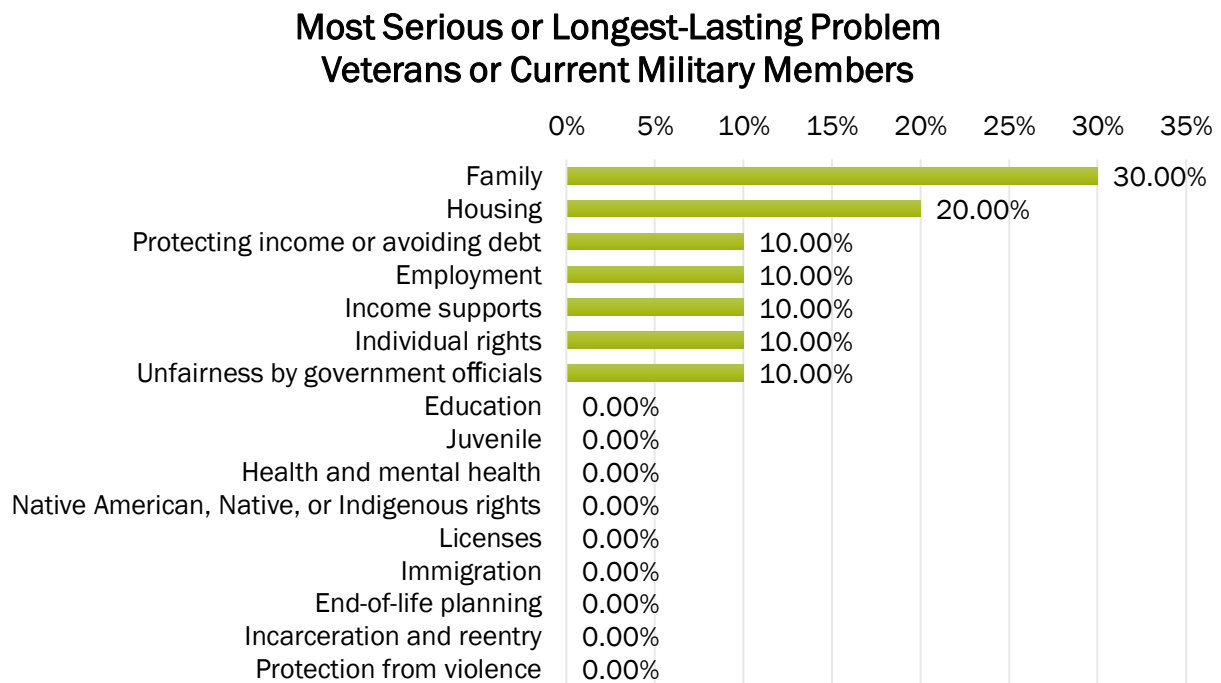
24 respondents out of 180 who indicated they were LGBTQIA+.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – Individuals who are Unhoused



22 respondents out of 180 who indicated they are currently unhoused.

Most Serious or Longest-Lasting Problem – Veterans or Current Military Members

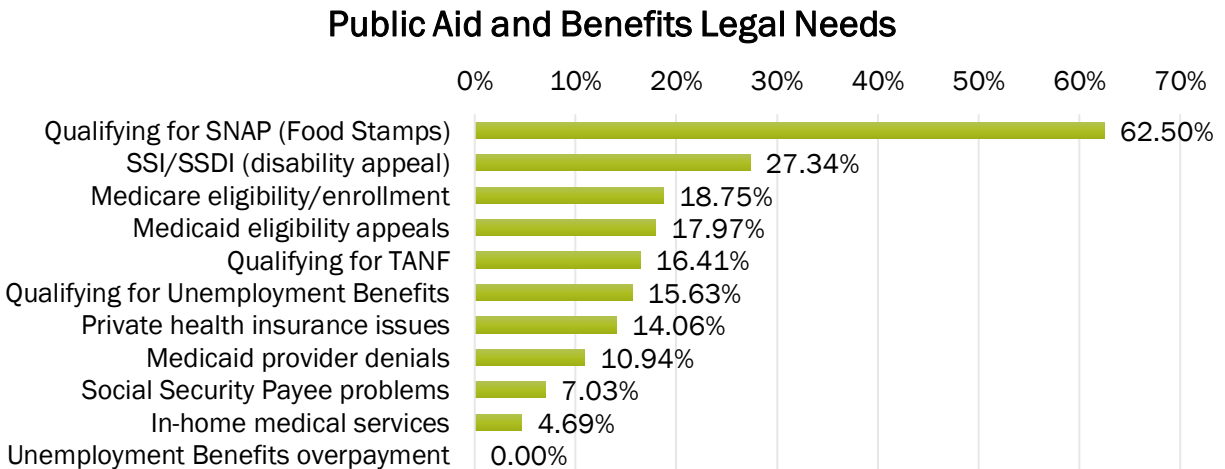


10 respondents out of 180 who indicated they are veterans or current military members.

Subject Area Needs

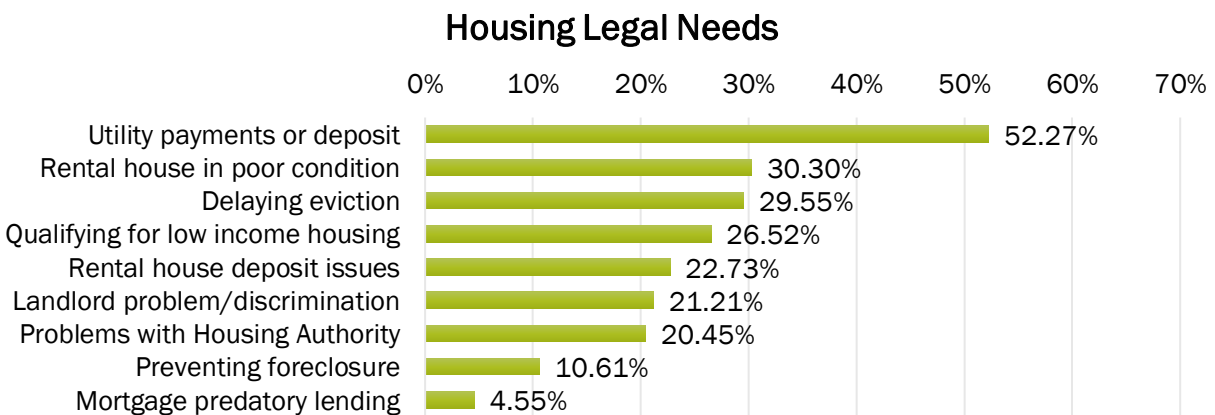
Survey respondents provided feedback about their needs in the last two years in multiple subject areas. In each area, respondents could select more than one issue they experienced in the last two years. Not every respondent provided feedback for each question. The number of respondents indicating they experienced issues in each category is provided.

Public Aid and Benefits Legal Needs



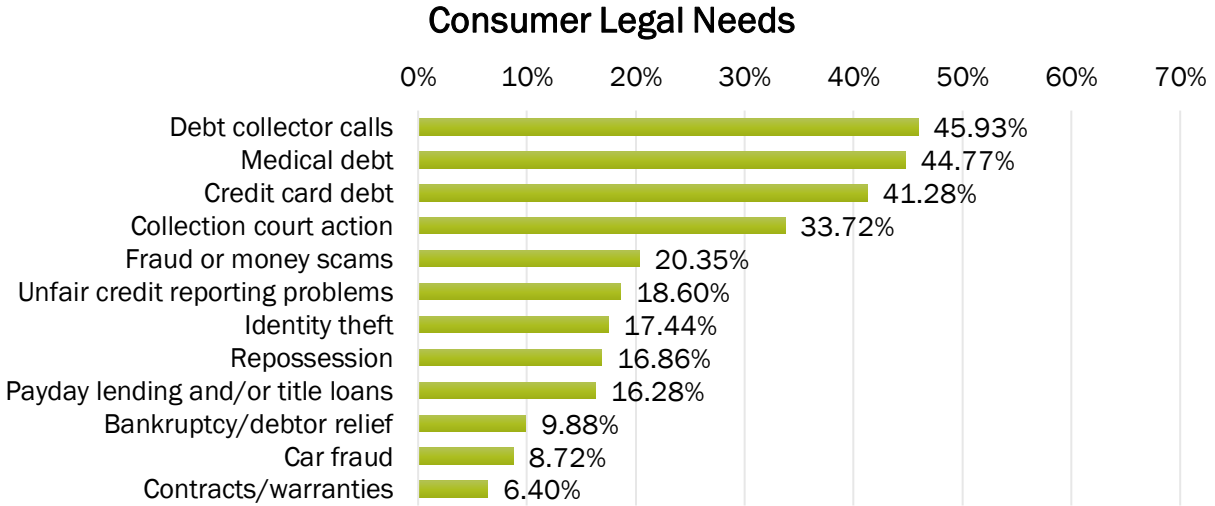
128 respondents out of 296.

Housing Legal Needs



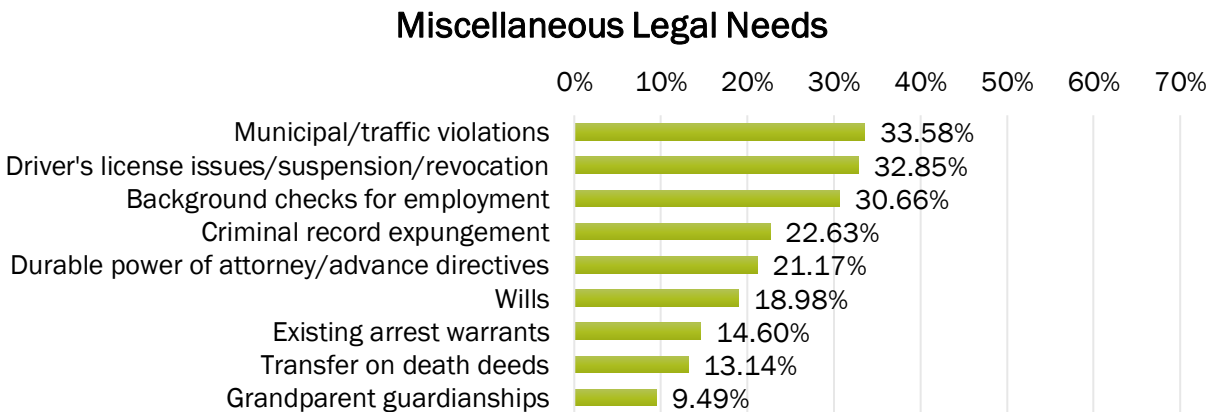
132 respondents out of 296.

Consumer Legal Needs



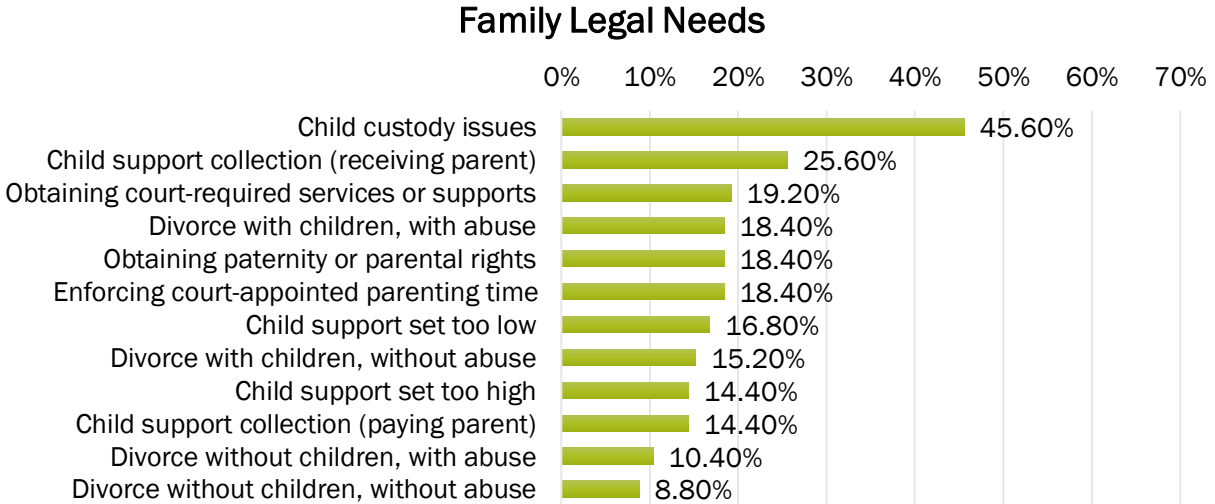
172 respondents out of 296.

Miscellaneous Legal Needs



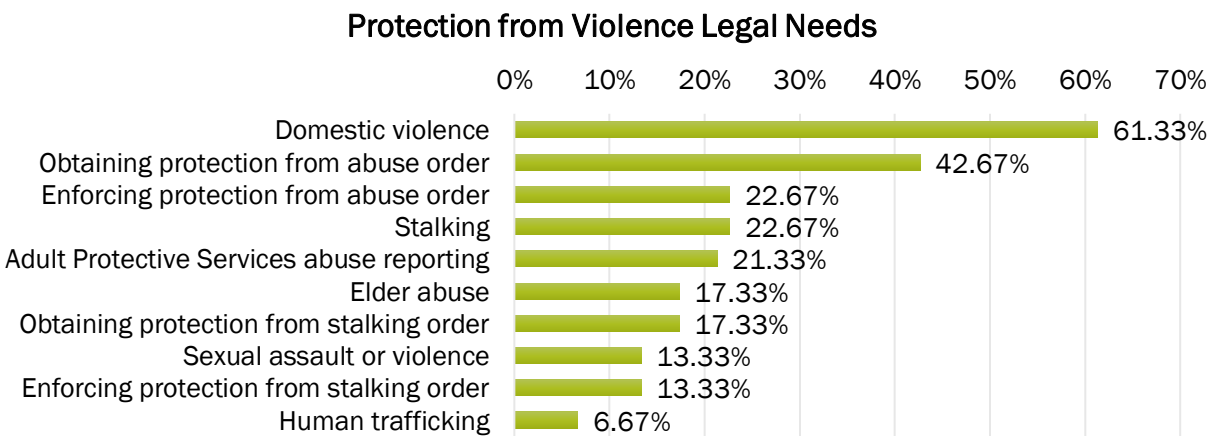
137 respondents out of 296.

Family Legal Needs



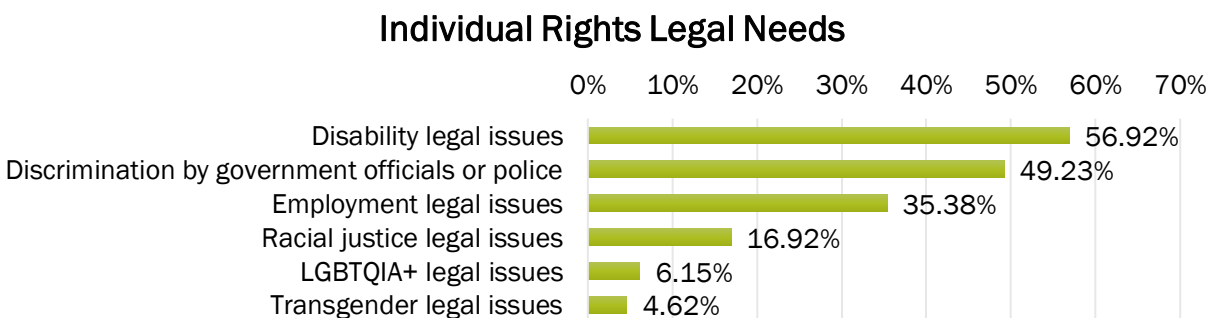
125 respondents out of 296.

Protection from Violence Legal Needs



75 respondents out of 296.

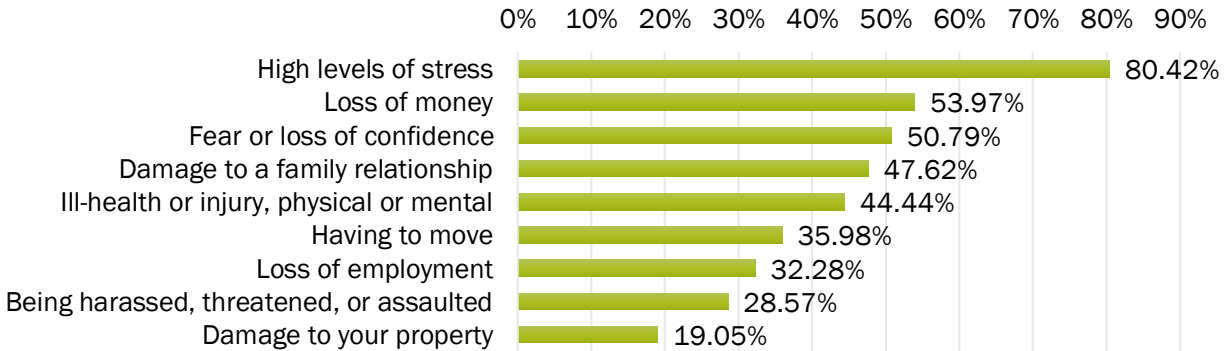
Individual Rights Legal Needs



65 respondents out of 296.

The legal issues caused respondents high levels of stress, loss of money, and fear or loss of confidence.

Impacts of the Problem



Over 54% of all respondents did not get any help or information about their problem.

Most respondents to the survey did not get information to help them understand or fix their problem (54.35%). About 30% of respondents received information from a website or “app,” while just under 20% sought information from an agency, organization, or support service provider. The top sources of help for people were family or friends (26.09%), a lawyer or attorney (18.48%), a non-profit or community organization (15.22%), and court, government body, or police (8.15%). Just over 18% filed or responded to a claim with a court, agency, or government body. For over 68% of respondents, the problem is still happening.

Most people did not get the help they needed and did not believe the process was fair. When asked whether they agreed with statements about their experience trying to resolve their legal issue, across all statements most respondents indicated negative experiences. The statements that respondents most agreed with was “I understood my legal rights and responsibilities,” where 48.66% positively rated the statement (19.33% strongly agreed, and 29.33% agreed), indicating more than 50% did not agree. All other statements were more negatively rated. The other most positively rated statements were:

- The outcome was much the same as for other people in similar situations. 42.86% positively rated (12.09% strongly agreed, and 30.77% agreed)
- I knew where to get good information and advice. 39.36% positively rated (10.97% strongly agreed, and 28.39% agreed)
- I was treated with respect. 39.55% positively rated (11.94% strongly agreed, and 27.61% agreed)
- Processes and decisions were clearly explained. 35.08% positively rated (12.69% strongly agreed, and 22.39% agreed)

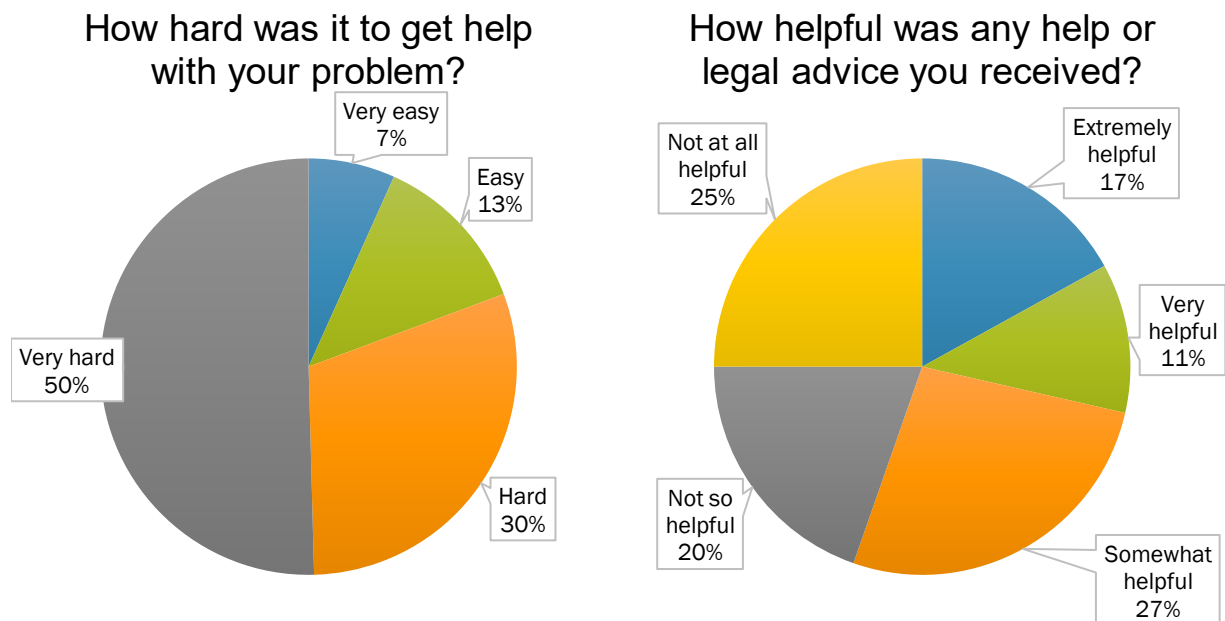
The most negatively rated statements included:

- The process was fair. 68.37% negatively rated (51.28% strongly disagreed, and 17.09% disagreed)
- I got all the help I needed. 71.32% negatively rated (52.94% strongly disagreed, and 18.38% disagreed)
- Any loss or harm, like to money or relationships, has been fixed or made good. 81.69% negatively rated (60.56% strongly disagreed, and 21.13% disagreed)
- The outcome was fair to everybody involved. 82.36% negatively rated (63.87% strongly disagreed, and 18.49% disagreed)
- I got the result I wanted. 83.06% negatively rated (62.90% strongly disagreed, and 20.16% disagreed)
- The problem was fixed quickly. 84.28% negatively rated (62.14% strongly disagreed, and 22.14% disagreed)

Many individuals had to pay for attorney or advisor fees, court fees, forms or document preparation, calls or correspondence, collecting information or evidence, travel to obtain help, and/or experienced lost wages (13-23% across all categories). Over 9% paid someone to complete forms or documents related to the problem.

Over a third of people did not get any help with their issue, and those that did receive help indicated it was very hard or hard to get help.

Over a third of people did not get any help with their problem. For those that did receive help, over 50% indicated it was very hard to get help and under 20% rated the help or legal advice as helpful. Over 50% asked for help from someone that could not help them.



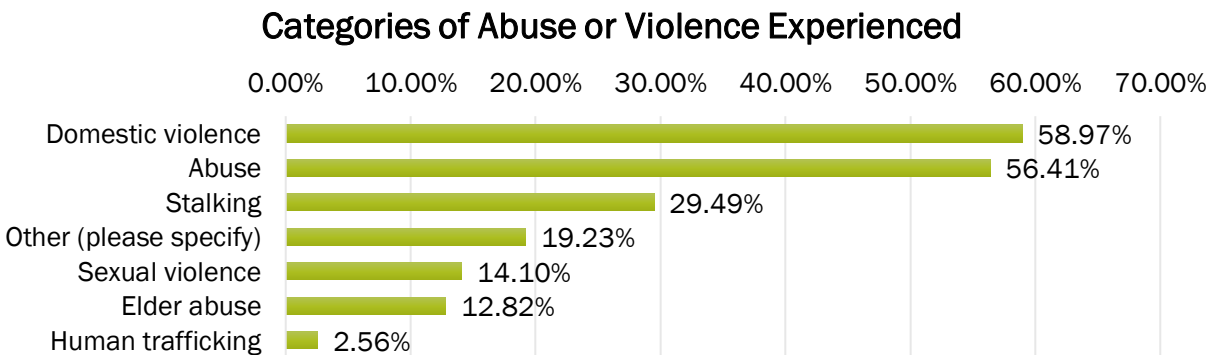
The top reasons people did not obtain help were not knowing where to get assistance, worries about the cost of obtaining help, and failed prior attempts to get help.

The top reasons respondents did not obtain help were: not knowing where or how to get advice (37.64%); they were worried about the cost (30.31%); they tried getting advice before and it wasn't useful (25.28%), it was too stressful (21.91%); they did not think it would make any difference to get help (18.54%), and/or they were scared to take action or get advice (17.42%). Respondents reported receiving unsolicited emails, calls, or letters offering some form of help (10.80%). In addition, 4.55% contacted or received contact from a form creator, and 1.14% contacted or received contact from a notario or notario publico. Though some of these contacts may have been genuinely helpful, these types of businesses carry a high risk of predatory practices or substandard assistance.

Experiences with Abuse or Violence

The survey contained a specific section on experiences with abuse or violence. Of the 189 respondents who answered the relevant question on the Survey, 43.39% (82 individuals) experienced one or more of the following: abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, stalking, human trafficking, or sexual violence and answered additional questions about their experiences.

For more than 70%, the domestic violence occurred in the last two years. Of those who experienced abuse or violence, about 53% went to a community organization for help. Those that sought help were most likely to seek help from several sources, including police (43.24%), friends or family (31.08%), mental health services organization (24.34%), legal aid organization (22.97%), domestic abuse organization (20.27%), hospital or medical staff (17.57%), or victim services organization (13.51%).

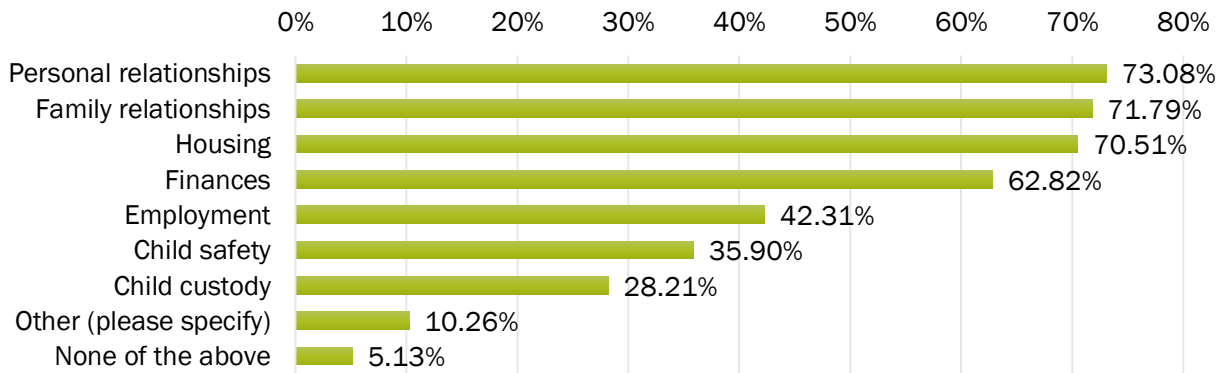


For those that didn't get help, when asked why they did not get help, people selected the following reasons:

- I contacted one or more organizations but they didn't help me. (35.53%)
- I was afraid to get help. (30.26%)
- I depended on the person who abused me for housing and other basic needs. (28.95%)
- I didn't know where to get help. (21.05%).

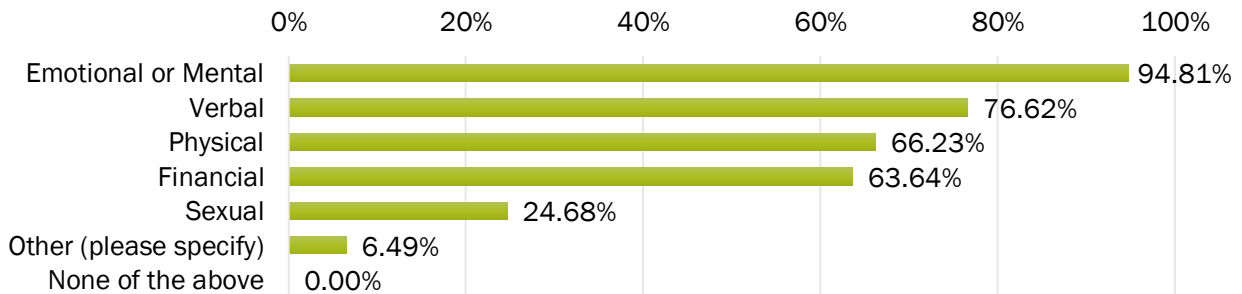
The greatest impacts from the abuse or violence were on personal and family relationships (73.08% and 71.79% respectively). This was closely followed by impacts on housing (70.51%) and finances (62.82%).

Impacts of Abuse or Violence



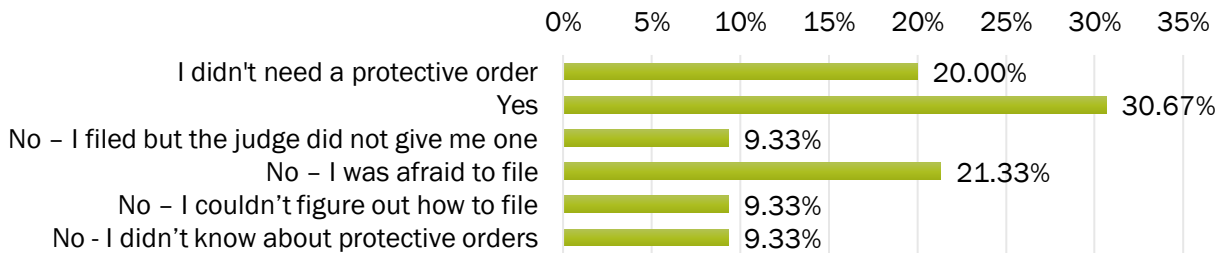
A significant number of people reported significant abuse that is not physical, including emotional or mental, verbal, and financial abuse.

Kinds of Abuse Experienced



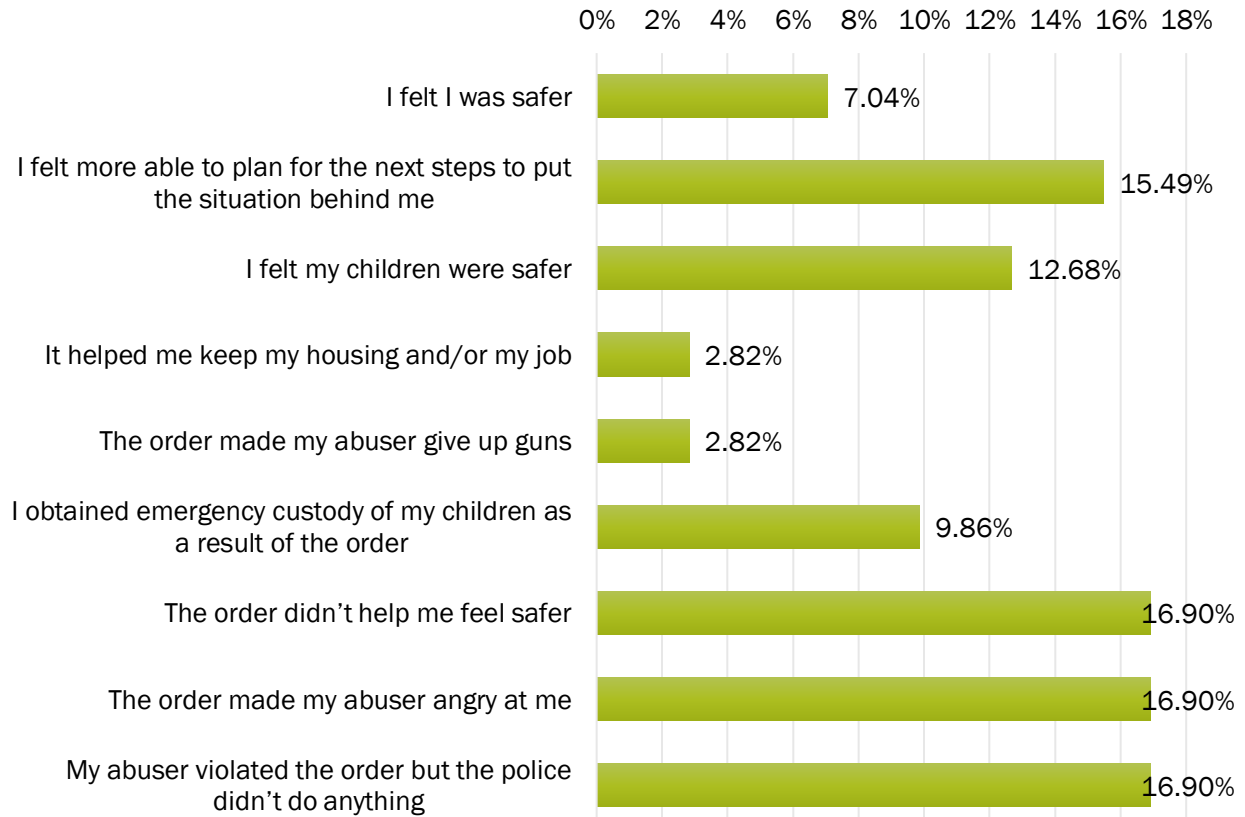
While 30% of people received a protection from abuse or protection from stalking order, 21.33% were too afraid to file, 9.33% could not determine how to file, and 9.33% did not know about protective orders.

Did you get a protective order, including a protection from abuse order or protection from stalking order?



Of the people who received a protective order, only 7.04% felt they were safer. Only 15.49% felt better able to plan for next steps, and only 12.68% felt their children were safer. The most selected impacts were that the order did not help the respondent feel safer, made the abuser angry at them, and the abuser violated the order but the police did not do anything (16.09% each).

**If you had a protective order, how did it impact your life?
Select any that apply.**



ADVOCATE AND STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

A key stakeholder survey targeting advocates, including legal aid staff, community stakeholders, social service providers, other members of the bar, judges, and court administrators was created. This survey obtained feedback from 87 individuals about KLS historical program activities, emerging community legal needs, and recommendations for future services. Written surveys were conducted via SurveyMonkey with participants able to share candid anonymous feedback. The survey document is attached as Appendix G and the survey response data (without text fields) is attached as Appendix H. In the survey, advocates and stakeholders were asked about the types of legal issues experienced by people in the lower-income community.¹³

About Respondents

A total of 87 individuals responded to the Advocate Survey, including:

- Current and former staff of legal aid organizations
- Other attorney advocates and members of the Bar Association, including members of the private bar, in-house counsel, and pro bono counsel
- Non-attorney advocates
- Active Judges
- Staff members of courts and court self-help centers
- State, municipal, local and Native nation government and agency employees covering an extensive spectrum of services that interact with lower-income and vulnerable Kansans, including education providers, state agencies, health departments, and law enforcement
- Social service providers, including directors, staff, and counselors with support organizations, including domestic violence and sexual assault, substance use, and mental health programs, as well hospital and community health nurses, staff, and volunteers

Over 50% of respondents work as advocates or staff in a variety of governments, agencies, and service providers, serving children, families, survivors of domestic violence, seniors, unhoused individuals, and other vulnerable individuals. Over 18% work at law firms or in private practice.

¹³ Education, Employment, End-of-life planning, Family, Health and mental health, Housing, Immigration, Incarceration and reentry, Income supports, Juvenile, Licenses, Native American, Native, or Indigenous Rights, Protecting Income and Avoiding Debt, Protection from violence, and Unfairness by government officials.

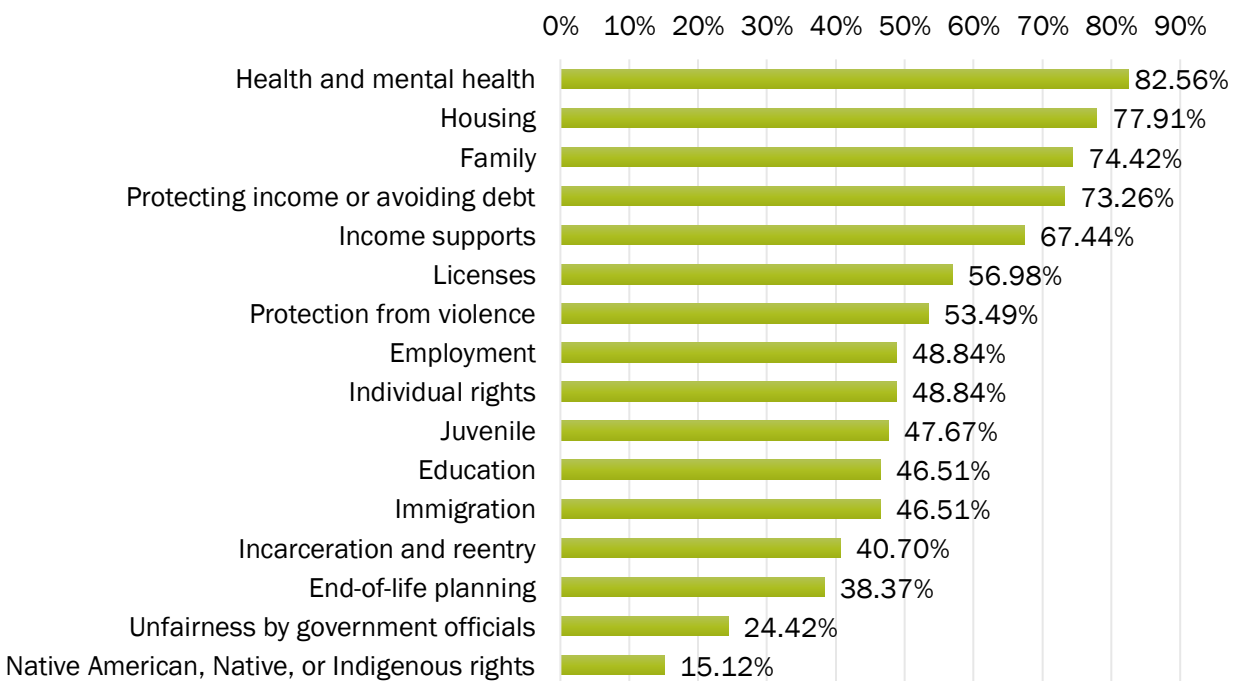
Stakeholder Feedback

Advocates reported seeing lower-income people with legal issues spanning all the surveyed categories.

Advocates were asked what issues they have seen impacting lower income people they serve at work or see in their communities. The top problem areas by percentage of respondents who reported the area being an issue for lower-income individuals were:

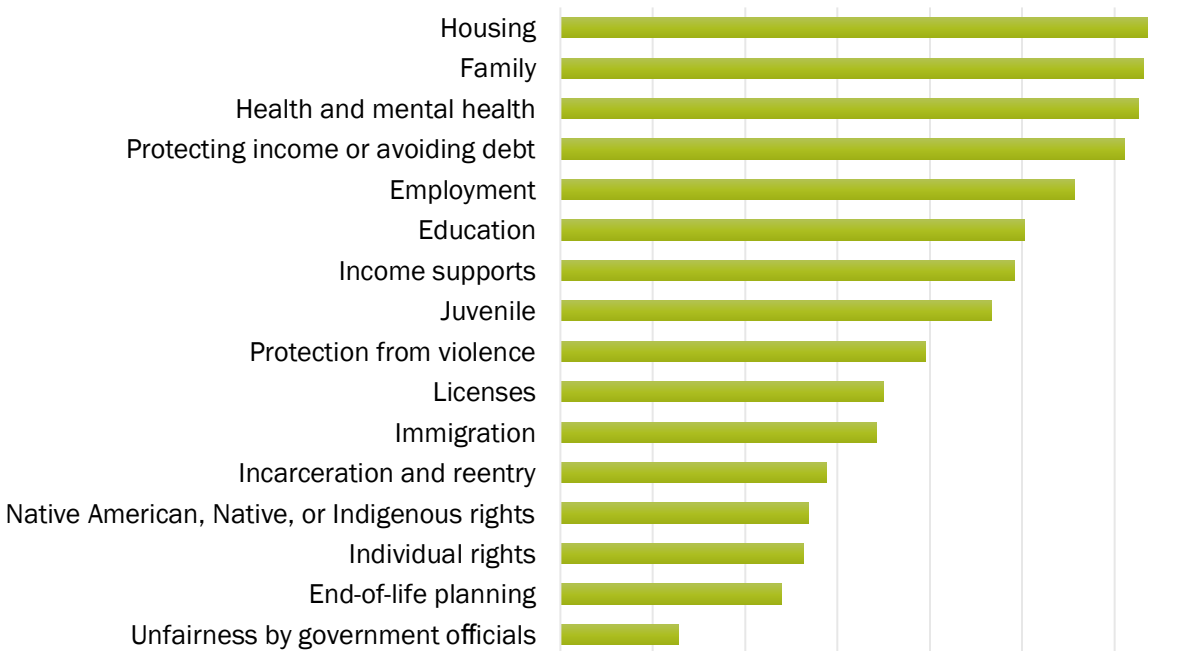
- Health and mental health (82.56%)
- Housing (77.91%)
- Family (74.43%)
- Protecting income or avoiding debt (73.36%)
- Income supports (67.44%)

Issue Areas Identified by Advocates



At least 78% of advocates see people with these issues at least weekly, with over 40% of advocates report they see people with these issues every day, over 30% at least a few times a week, and 7.32% about once a week. Some advocate organizations engage in regular assessments of individual or family needs, and see these issues come up frequently. When asked to rank the most urgent needs for civil legal help, they identified housing, family, health and mental health, protecting income or avoiding debt, employment, and education issues.

Most to Least Urgent Issues Identified by Advocates



Issue categories listed most urgent (top) to least urgent (bottom) by weighted average of rankings.

Advocates and stakeholders do not believe there are adequate resources or services to meet community civil legal needs.

Over 60% of advocates and stakeholders do not believe there is a reliable source of information or assistance in their communities to help lower income people resolve civil legal problems. Over 78% do not believe there are adequate services to meet community civil legal needs. Many cite the lack of local resources in rural areas or smaller communities, or the overall lack of civil legal attorneys and other advocates to provide representation and assistance. Others indicate a need for more support or financial resources to help keep people in their homes or provide necessary mental health services. Multiple stakeholders indicated that KLS is the only provider of civil legal services in the areas covered by their organizations and that there is an overall lack of funding for staffing to serve everyone who needs assistance. Across the state there are transportation barriers, lack of internet access, and lack of knowledge or availability of legal information or self-help resources.

“Legal resources for lower income individuals are strained and wholly insufficient. Both legal aid organizations and the public defender system are grossly underfunded and overwhelmed.”

“While we have KLS and it's a giant help, they can't help everyone, especially when there is a conflict of interest.”

“KLS does a great job, but one organization can't meet the needs of the community and not enough attorneys take pro bono cases.”

“While I am aware that there are many legal organizations in my community and many ways for people to potentially get help this is not enough. People who are in lower income situations and struggling often cannot seek specific organizations, we need more communication and teamwork as a community to solve many issues.”

Across the issue areas presented to advocates and stakeholders, most do not believe there are extremely or very effective self-help materials to assist people. The highest ranked area for self-help materials was protection from violence, which advocates only rated as 8.54% extremely effective, 19.51% very effective, and 32.93% somewhat effective. The next most highly rated areas for self-help materials were end-of-life planning (8.54% extremely effective, 9.76% very effective) and family law (7.32% extremely effective, 10.98% very effective). All other areas quickly dropped below 10-15% between extremely effective and very effective ratings, indicating there is room for improvement in self-help materials across all subject areas.

Advocates rated the efficacy of legal help more highly across all categories. The categories rated the most as extremely or very effective were:

- Protection from violence – 45% highly effective (15% extremely effective, 30% very effective)
- Family – 40% highly effective (17.5% extremely effective, 22.5% very effective)
- End-of-life planning – 37.04% highly effective (18.52% extremely effective, 18.52% very effective)
- Licenses – 33.75% highly effective (17.5% extremely effective, 16.25% very effective)
- Juvenile – 30.77% highly effective (12.82% extremely effective, 17.95% very effective)
- Protecting income or avoiding debt – 30.48% highly effective (13.41% extremely effective, 17.07% very effective)
- Housing – 29.26% highly effective (14.63% extremely effective, 14.63% very effective)

Advocates appreciate the court forms provided online by KLS and the courts but indicate that issues around access to technology and low literacy pose barriers for many litigants. In some legal areas, such as simple divorces, name changes, and protection from abuse or stalking, there are accessible self-help resources that are effective. In other instances, the area of the law or the legal issue is too complicated for the existing self-help materials to be effective. In others the complexity of the system combined with individual barriers to access, or comprehension prevents effective self-representation. Advocates specifically cited issues related to immigration, disabilities (social security cases) or mental

health (including housing stability), and general eviction defense as areas where existing self-help materials may not be sufficient.

“In my experience, the general population does not know that these are available or where to find them. The ones I have found, they are helpful, but if they aren't accessible by the population who needs them, then they aren't as effective as they could be.”

“The self-help resources are a great start especially for folks who have the acuity and time to spend on it, but for most, it's too difficult and/or time consuming to understand on their own.”

“We try to make referrals and find resources; however, they are VERY sparse.”

Subject Area Needs

Public Aid and Benefits Legal Needs

Advocates identified SSI or SSDI disability appeal cases as the most frequently seen public aid and benefits legal need (identified by 79.27% of advocates). Advocates also identified qualifying for SNAP (Food Stamps) (57.32%), Medicaid eligibility appeals (50%), and Medicare eligibility/enrollment (47.56%) as the top public aid and benefits issues. Advocates also raised the following issues or needs:

- SSI/SSDI overpayments
- Juvenile benefits in CINC cases
- Medicaid waiver programs for Home and Community-Based Services, including support in applying for or representing in denials of Home and Community-Based Services to keep people in their homes
- Veterans' disability and discharge issues
- Access to medications and coverage for routine medical treatment
- Expanded access to mental healthcare
- Need for adequate substance use supports and programs, including alternatives to incarceration, income supports, and supportive housing

“Access to necessary resources like income support and housing. Without them, the people I work with often end up homeless and their symptoms severely exacerbate. Often times, this results in criminal issues and endangers their lives. It's quite literally a life or death situation. They cannot stabilize their health because of the lack of resources and the intense stress that comes with that.”

“Cuts to Medicaid will increase institutionalization of the elderly and disabled, therefore, more resources targeting access to less restrictive

care settings and individuals rights of Kansans facing premature institutionalization – class action, in particular – seems like the right pairing for LSC.”

Housing Legal Needs

The most frequently identified housing legal needs were preventing or delaying eviction (identified by 70.24% of advocates), poor housing conditions (70.24%), and qualifying for low-income housing (69.05%). Over 50% also identified: problems with Housing Authority (58.33%), landlord problem/discrimination including ADA/race/gender (54.74%), and utility payments or deposit (53.57%). Advocates cited concerns with habitability issues, failures to make repairs to essential appliances, and other poor maintenance by landlords, including Section 8 landlords. Others indicated concerns about code enforcement condemning rental units without helping displaced tenants. Others raised concerns about unfair or frequent rent increases, including for lots in mobile home communities and for Section 8 landlords. Advocates also raised the following issues:

- Lack of affordable housing especially for the lower income, seniors, or people with disabilities
- The need for housing supports for the unhoused, with the rapidly growing unhoused population
- Eviction defense in mobile home communities
- Advocacy needed to address the extremely pro landlord environment, including adjustments to the codes and methods of enforcement
- Education and advocacy around tenants’ rights

“Protection against eviction and enforcement against slum lords. Kansans can't work and raise their families without adequate shelter.”

“As a homeless service provider, anything related to housing. Eviction prevention, code enforcement for landlords, etc. Housing is a major social determinant of health and people often recover faster if housing is available and safe.”

Consumer Legal Needs

Advocates raised concerns about medical debt (79.53% of advocates), credit card debt (57.83%), and payday lending and/or title loans (54.22%). Just under 50% of advocates also identified legal needs in collection court action (49.40%), fraud or money scams (48.19%), and debt collector calls (45.78%). Advocates also mentioned: child support issues or failure to pay, representative payee issues for seniors, and bank-offered debt relief or consolidation loans that require high credit scores to qualify. Others raised a need for financial education or debt avoidance, as well as guidance about resolving issues before they end up in the legal system. Advocates also sought:

- Education and training about identifying and avoiding scams and fraud
- Action to prosecute people targeting vulnerable populations, especially immigrants, Spanish-speakers, seniors, and people with disabilities with various scams

Miscellaneous Legal Needs

Almost 75% of advocates see driver's license issues, including suspension or revocation (74.70%). Over 50% also identified criminal record expungement (63.86%), municipal or traffic violations (57.83%), and durable power of attorney or advance directives (55.42%) as legal needs. Advocates also raised issues connected to some incarceration and reentry issues, including background checks for employment or housing. Advocates also raised the need for:

- Information about and access to social support services
- Better court forms and resources for probate and guardianship
- Alternatives to incarceration for juveniles
- Getting rid of "check the box" in rental and employment contexts
- Providing education and advocacy to courts and systems that interact with litigants with criminal record or mental health concerns to help people receive "consistent and empathetic help"
- Criminal law representation or support for people convicted of a crime that occurred during a mental health episode or crisis

Family Legal Needs

The most identified family legal needs were child custody issues (69.74%), divorce with children with abuse (65.79%), child support collection – receiving parent (59.21%), divorce with children without abuse (57.89%), obtaining paternity or parental rights (53.95%), and obtaining court ordered services or supports (53.95%). All other legal issues in the family law category were also identified by at least 30% of advocates. Advocates also raised the following concerns:

- Family law cases where only one side is represented, leading to unfair outcomes
- District Court trustees and judges not enforcing child support payment
- Lack of support for foster children or child in need of care representation
- Lack of shelters and supportive housing needs for families in crisis
- Lack of support and education for young, single mothers

Protection From Violence Legal Needs

The greatest need identified in this category was for domestic violence (78.21%). Over 50% of advocates also identified sexual assault and violence (60.26%), obtaining protection from abuse order (56.41%), enforcing protection from abuse order (51.28%), and elder abuse (50%) as issues in the community. All other categories in this section were also seen frequently by advocates, including Adult Protective Services abuse reporting, stalking, obtaining protection from stalking order, enforcing protection from stalking order, and human trafficking. Some needs overlap with the Family Legal Needs identified above, but also include concerns around:

- Increases in domestic violence and violence issues
- Supports to children who are survivors of violence

Individual Rights Legal Needs

The most identified issue in the category of individual rights are disability legal issues (64.20%). All other categories also were identified by over 30% of advocates and include: racial justice legal issues (48.15%), employment legal issues (45.68%), transgender legal issues (38.27%), LGBTQIA+ legal issues (37.04%), and discrimination by government officials or the police (33.33%). There was some cross-over here with the issues raised by advocates with protection from violence issues. Additional issues include:

- Overall civil rights issues, including those that cross other legal issues or categories
- Police not enforcing protective orders, including potential bias in enforcement or protection
- Incarceration and reentry issues, including housing or employment discrimination based on a criminal record.
- Stigma and bias against immigrants and communities of color, impacting their treatment by agencies, courts, and the police
- Accommodation in employment, housing, or other services

Cross-Issue Needs

Advocates identified several needs that span several or all issue categories. These include:

- Better self-help materials needed across all legal areas, including estate planning, wills, and probate
- Education about engaging with courts and the legal system
- Education and know your rights presentations to young people, including increasing outreach and education in schools
- Advocacy with the courts about demystifying court processes or being more transparent and accessible
- Overall lack of adequate representation and lack of advocates

Recommendations from Advocates for Civil Legal Services

Many recommend support and funding for more civil legal attorneys and advocates.

In the survey advocates were asked to recommend expansions or changes to civil legal services to better meet community needs. Many identified the need for more advocates providing more services across broader geographic areas and subject areas, while acknowledging that this need requires additional funding and support to achieve. Advocates indicate there is a need for support and funding for more civil legal services.

“I wish there was more help and resources.”

“We just need more of them - and it would be great if there were additional staff to help families with ancillary needs outside of legal services (e.g., referral coordination).”

“Access to services in more communities.”

“The legal services providers are great. But there aren't enough of them and they are underfunded.”

“Legal services providers are critical to helping Kansans access justice under the law. They are desperately underfunded, however, relative to the need.”

“Terrific element of the solution, but not adequate to meet the needs of low-income Kansans in rural areas, especially.”

“I do refer to Kansas Legal Services for assistance with some things, but the capacity does not match the need. Some parts of the state provide lawyers in evictions cases, but not all.”

“KLS does a lot but there's only so much they can do. There need to be additional non-profit agencies and requirements that attorneys take pro bono cases.”

“Legal services provides a valuable service at a high level of competency, but the organization is understaffed and underpaid.”

“More access, more lawyers, more pay for those lawyers, more training for those lawyers, and the same for court personnel.”

“I have seen the people at KLS do amazing things for my clients. We need 1000 more people like them. There is only so much a small staff can do and so many hours they can devote to it. The need is overwhelming.”

Advocates recommend increasing access to services for vulnerable populations.

Advocates recommended increasing services to some vulnerable populations or for specific legal issue areas. Some advocates recommend expanding access to particular services for populations in high need, even if those services are outside the normal course of work. This includes providing application assistance for benefits and services for vulnerable populations, including those fearful to seek help, especially for LGBTQIA+ individuals and immigrants.

“Allow more seniors to access their services for free.”

“Search out and provide additional legal representation to the LGBTQIA+ community.”

“Legal Services are an excellent resource for seniors with limited resources.”

Advocates identified multiple communities or groups of people who need extra assistance accessing services:

- Non-English Speakers, Spanish-speaking parties, especially in the context of court and agency services and forms
- Individuals with low or no literacy in English
- Seniors, especially those in any of the other raised categories, in particular non-English speakers, immigrants, people of color, and individuals with disabilities.
- People of color, including Native Americans, Black Americans, and Latinx individuals.
- Immigrants, including immigrants with legal status less than citizenship, individuals here on work visas, and people who are undocumented.
- Adults and children with disabilities, especially those with mobility issues, brain-based diagnoses, or those being discharged from nursing facilities or for mental health treatment
- People with extreme mental health concerns, people with substance use disorders, and the unhoused face barriers and discrimination.
- LGBTQ+ members of the community, especially people who are trans and/or nonbinary, including applying for services or seeking basic assistance, who are fearful of discrimination or reprisal
- Children, Youth and Juveniles, especially those without parental support, those under- or unhoused, or engaged in the criminal justice system
- Individuals with lived experience in the criminal justice system, especially when trying to navigate the pardon or expungement system, including those who are unhoused, especially those in any of the other raised categories
- People without access to reliable transportation

Increased collaboration and triage across providers and agencies would better serve the community.

Many advocates believe that providers should better collaborate to create more unified systems for triage and support. Often people do not know what services or resources are available and support does not get to those with the highest needs. Current systems put much of the burden on obtaining help on the individual, which does not always provide trauma-informed care.

“I don't think accessing services is a problem. Publicizing the services is. We need better clearinghouses for information.”

“Providers need to do a better job of accessing retired lawyers or those with additional time to help for projects. We are squandering resources by not having a central clearinghouse that is used to distribute cases to lawyers willing to serve.”

“I think attorneys and civil legal service providers can always improve on trauma-informed services.”

Others also expressed a desire for better engagement with courts and clerks to provide education and training. This may include addressing misconceptions about legal information compared to legal advice or may require the expansion and improvement of pro se resources developed by courts or advocates.

“Additional outreach/training directly to court clerks regarding available programs and resources, and the appropriate application processes for lower income Kansans. Expanding available pro se forms would also be helpful.”

“Many pro se litigants complain that court staff refuse to answer even simple questions (such as how to request a hearing date), and in some cases staff will provide information or make up requirements or rules that are completely contradictory to what the KJC's [Kansas Judicial Council's] own instructions tell the litigants to do. Litigants then feel that they are being led in circles and that they will never be able to solve their legal issues, regardless of how many free forms or other resources are available.”

Many advocates recommended expanding alternative service delivery options to better meet community needs.

Advocates identified several opportunities for civil legal aid or other providers to increase alternative service delivery methods to increase access to civil legal help. These include:

- Increasing the use of all alternative service delivery models, including clinics and improvements to self-help resources
- Continuing to develop relationships with private bar attorneys, including in-house or practice, to leverage more help for the community
- Increasing pro bono legal services or developing systems of flexible rates or reduced cost services, especially for individuals who do not qualify for civil legal services or are conflicted out of representation
- Providing workshops for specific legal needs regularly offered with connecting materials or forms
- Increasing training and support to non-attorney advocates who can assist in their communities

“Access to an attorney is important. Even 15 minute free consultation can be helpful.”

“Legal services is often the last line of defense for low-income people.”

LISTENING SESSIONS

Six (6) virtual listening sessions captured the reflections of fifty (50) stakeholders including key community partners from a broad cross section of different organizations. Feedback from an additional three (3) listening sessions with core pro bono volunteers or volunteer leaders are also included below, where relevant. Needs are broken down into three subsections: substantive, structural, and systemic needs.

Substantive Legal Needs

Substantive legal needs relate to a need for services in a particular subject or legal services area. Stakeholders identified the following substantive legal needs:

- Address more farm related issues.
- Address the needs of meat packing workers, feed lot workers, and their families.
- Protecting against elder financial exploitation.
- A broader range of services for victims of domestic violence.
- Expand immigration services to include U-visas and T- visas and other avenues for relief consistent with LSC guidelines.
- Increased debt collection extended representation.
- Increased public benefit appeals including Medicaid denials and UI.
- Explore needs in tribal communities.

Structural Needs

Structural needs relate to how people access the legal system or support services. This may include barriers to accessing help or the need for alternative means of meeting community needs. Stakeholders identified the following structural needs:

- The need for increased access to legal aid in rural areas, particularly in western Kansas.
- Issues with transportation in rural areas.
- The need to improve intake.
 - Can the online intake be reformatted to allow a prescreening routine before a full application?
 - Can the online intake or pre-screen routine be made available 24/7?

- Is there a reasonable and simplified path for agency-to-agency warm referrals?
- Can we set and then meet clearer expectations for client call backs?
- Consider use of standing or sequential clinics to provide the opportunity for limited services on a repeat basis in high volume case areas where assisted pro se assistance may be valuable.
- Diversify funding to increase flexibility to practice law consistent with needs of the client community (less driven by specific funding source deliverables).
- Enlist the help of organizations, community advocates, and social workers in rural communities as CJWs or legal navigators.

Systemic Needs

Systemic needs relate to overarching issues that if addressed could help large groups of similarly situated individuals. Some of the issues below could be addressed through expanded individual casework (as recommended in substantive legal needs) but would benefit from coordinated or larger actions to impact a larger percentage of the people in need. Stakeholders identified the following systemic needs:

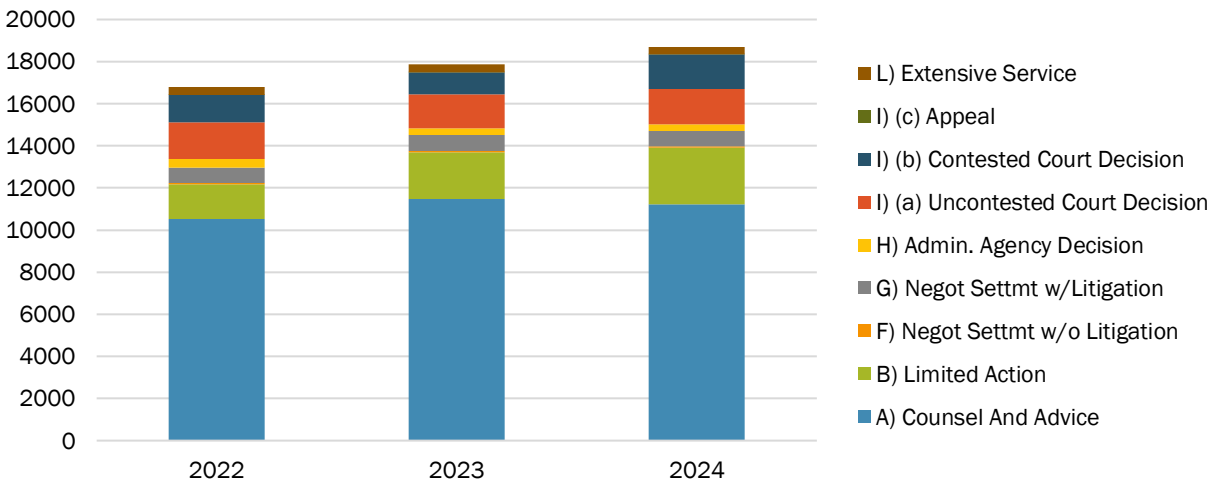
- Issues with access to the courts and the need for expanded access to virtual appearances and easy electronic submission of evidence (at least for some proceedings). Benefits both pro se litigants and KLS clients and their attorneys.
- Increased virtual court access might also increase the ability of urban attorneys to assist with pro bono matters in rural areas.
- Legal aid and bar collaboration on judicial training.
- Approach Court re mandatory pro bono.
- Create a system for limited required disclosures and document exchange in landlord-tenant cases (FRCP 26 model).
- Systemic efforts to enforce the warranty of habitability (how) or other efforts to create and enforce statewide housing quality standards.
- PFA advocacy to include coercive control, emotional, financial, and mental abuse as bases for relief (long-term project).

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING KLS SERVICES 2022-2024

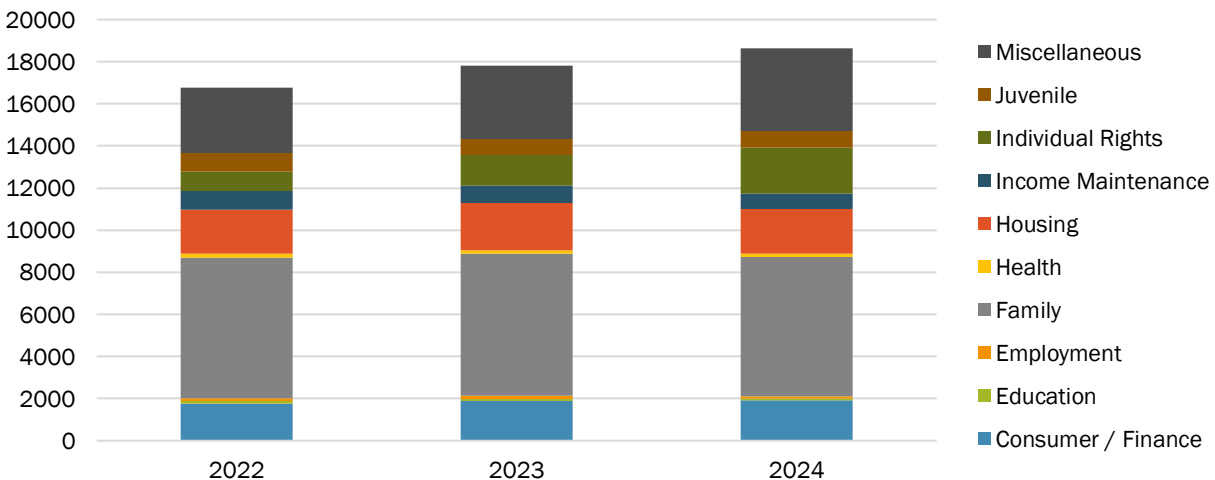
Overall Case Services Data

Over 60% of all KLS cases are Counsel and Advice. There has been an upward trend in total case numbers since 2022. The percentage of Limited Action cases has increased in recent years, with a decrease in some higher levels of service. Over 35% of all KLS services are provided in the category of Family Law, followed by Miscellaneous (over 19%), Housing (over 12%), and Individual Rights (over 9%). Case trends show increases in the percentage of cases that are Family Law, Housing, Consumer and Finance, Individual Rights, and Miscellaneous. Additional data is available in Appendix B – In-Depth Data Overview.

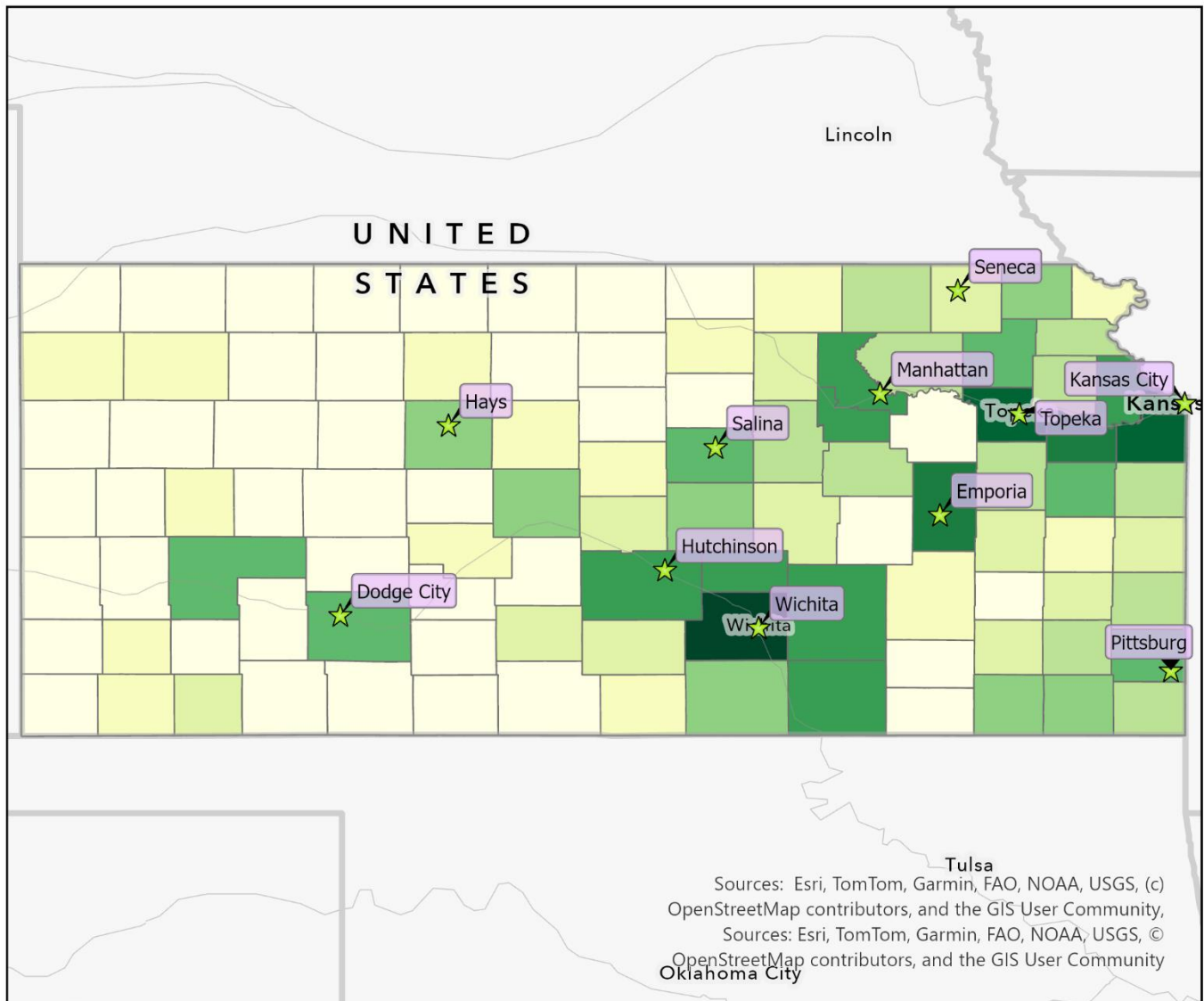
Total KLS Cases by Level of Service



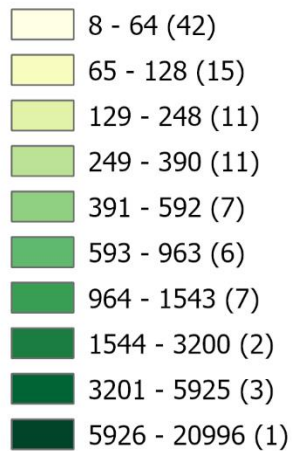
Total KLS Cases by Problem Code Category



KLS Cases - Total Cases



Total Cases



Office Locations

★ KLS Office

Map shading shows the estimated number of cases from a given problem code category that were matched to that county.

Cases were assigned to counties based on the county of court listed if available, or the county of residence if no county of court was listed.

Consumer and Finance

The number of consumer cases is increasing, especially for Counsel and Advice, with decreases in Court Decisions overall. Consumer cases are 94% Counsel and Advice, with very few cases at higher levels of service. Most KLS Consumer cases are for collection.

Education

Almost 75% of KLS Education cases are at the highest levels of service, including uncontested and contested court decisions. Recent education cases trend toward contested court decisions (72% of cases in 2024), with a decrease in uncontested court decisions (8% in 2024, down from 44% in 2023). Recent trends indicate more cases being served at the highest levels of service. Over 75% of education representation occurs in discipline, including expulsion and suspension.

Employment

Total employment cases numbers have dropped, with a large drop in extensive service cases. Almost all employment cases in 2024 were counsel and advice (over 98%), with only 1 client receiving a higher level of service. Most categories of KLS's employment representation have remained steady, but with a significant decrease in income tax cases contributing to the overall drop in employment law cases.

Family

The total number of family law cases has remained relatively consistent in the last three years. Almost 70% of all family law representation is counsel and advice, followed by uncontested and contested court decisions. Less than 3% of family law cases are limited action. About 25% of all family law work is in Protection from Abuse for survivors of violence, over 10% divorce separation or annulment with abuse and kids, and over 9% custody or visitation in cases with abuse.

Health

Health law representation has decreased in the last three years. Over 95% of health law cases were counsel and advice, almost 2% limited action and less than 3% at higher levels of service. Of the 496 health law cases, only 21 received a level of service higher than counsel and advice. Representation is primarily in Medicaid and other health.

Housing

Housing representation has remained relatively stable over the last three years, mostly with variations in the number of people receiving counsel and advice. Over 80% of housing cases are counsel and advice, while over 10% are limited action. Over 60% of

housing cases are private landlord tenant, and over 17% home ownership or real property (not foreclosure) cases. Federally subsidized housing cases are about 7% of all cases.

Income Maintenance

Income maintenance representation has decreased in the last three years, primarily in administrative agency decisions and extensive service. Overall, about 50% of income maintenance cases are counsel and advice, with the remainder at higher levels of service. About 40% of income maintenance cases are administrative agency decisions, with the remainder almost all at higher levels of service. About 60% of income maintenance cases are SSI advice and representation, followed by almost 20% SSDI cases. Less than 3% overall are food stamps representation. Most of the drop in total income maintenance representation is in SSI and SSDI cases.

Individual Rights

KLS has more than doubled representation in individual rights cases since 2022. Individual rights representation has increased for higher levels of service, including limited action (over 22% in 2024, up from 8% in 2022) and uncontested court decisions (over 28% in 2024, up from 18% in 2022). Individual rights representation is almost exclusively driven by increases in criminal record expungement cases served by pro bono attorneys through limited scope assisted pro se clinics and KLS staff providing extended representation to clinic participants who need higher levels of service.

Juvenile

There is a slight decrease in juvenile representation from 2022 to 2024, however most of this drop is in advice and counsel, with an overall increase in higher levels of service. Over 60% juvenile representation is at higher levels of service, with increases in contested court decisions and extensive service. Over 65% of juvenile representation is in minor guardianship or conservatorship, followed by about 20% neglected, abused, or dependent representation. The greatest decreases have occurred in Juvenile Review Hearings and emancipation cases.

Miscellaneous

KLS has significantly increased representation in cases in the miscellaneous category, especially at higher levels of service. Over 60% of cases in the miscellaneous category are at higher levels of service, with almost 40% of cases as limited action. There are significant increases in representation for advance directives/powers of attorney, licenses (drivers', occupational, and others), traffic defense or municipal violations, and stalking remedies. Much of this growth is driven by the expansion of special projects and clinics at KLS.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community and stakeholder feedback combined with the analysis of case data and community characteristics guided the creation of these findings and recommendations. Other advocates and stakeholders praise KLS's work for lower income residents of Kansas. Recent highly successful pilots have been well received by partners and positively impacted KLS case statistics. Members of the community, advocates, and stakeholders identified the following areas as current civil legal needs for lower income Kansans. Needs are broken down into four subsections: substantive, structural, systemic, and vulnerable population needs.

SUBSTANTIVE NEEDS

- Consumer
 - Debt collection assistance (medical debt, credit cards, other collections) with greater emphasis on extended representation
 - Predatory lending practices, unfair and deceptive practices (payday lending and title loans, fraud or money scams, etc.), including larger actions against bad actors targeting vulnerable populations
 - Protection against elder financial exploitation for people over 60
 - Also identified: unfair credit reporting problems, identity theft, and repossession
- Education
 - School discipline
 - Special education
- Employment
 - Discrimination on basis of race, LGBTQIA+, mental health, disability, substance use, and criminal convictions (“check the box”)
 - Wage claims
 - Working conditions
- Family
 - Family Law
 - Child custody issues
 - Child support (receiving parent)
 - Obtaining court-required services or supports
 - Divorce with children, with abuse
 - Obtaining paternity or parental rights
 - Enforcing court-appointed parenting time
 - Protection from Violence
 - Obtaining and enforcing protection from abuse orders
 - Elder abuse and Adult Protective Services abuse reporting
 - Stalking assistance, including obtaining and enforcing protection from stalking orders
 - Sexual assault or violence assistance

- Potential bias or unfairness in the enforcement of protective orders
 - High need to prioritize vulnerable populations: disabled and unable to work; survivors of violence under broader definitions of what constitutes violence; individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+; and individuals who are unhoused
- Juvenile
 - Juvenile benefits
 - Foster children
 - Child in need of care (CINC) representation
 - Minor guardian/conservatorship
 - Neglected/abused/dependent
 - Delinquent
- Health and Mental Health
 - Medicaid eligibility and provider denials
 - Access to mental healthcare
 - Access to medications and coverage for routine medical treatment
 - Medicare eligibility and/or enrollment
 - High need for application assistance for benefits and services for vulnerable populations, including those fearful to seek help, especially LGBTQIA+ individuals and immigrants
 - Assistance with Medicaid waiver programs for Home and Community-Based Services, including support in applying for or representing in denials of Home and Community-Based Services to keep people in their homes
 - Need for adequate substance use supports and programs, including income support, supportive housing, and alternatives to incarceration
 - Health and mental health was the most highly rated category by advocates, with cross-over impacts on many other categories of needs
- Housing
 - Utility payments or deposit issues
 - Poor housing conditions and poor maintenance, including public housing
 - Preventing or delaying eviction
 - Security deposit issues
 - Education and advocacy around tenants' rights
 - Increased focus on federally subsidized housing and public housing
 - Problems with Housing Authority (Public Housing/Section 8)
 - Qualifying for low-income housing
 - Increased focus on mobile home communities
 - Unfair or frequent rent increases, including mobile home communities
 - Eviction defense in mobile home communities
 - Increased focus on housing discrimination, including:
 - Landlord problem/discrimination including ADA/race/gender
 - Criminal background questions for housing (“check the box”)
 - Reasonable accommodation
- Income Maintenance
 - Qualifying for SNAP (Food Stamps)

- SSI/SSDI (disability appeals)
- Qualifying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Veterans' benefits
- High need to prioritize vulnerable populations: people over 60; people with chronic conditions, differences, or disabilities; individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+; and immigrants
- Individual Rights
 - Disability rights
 - Racial justice legal issues
 - LGBTQIA+ issues
 - Immigration services, expand to include U-visas, T-visas, and other avenues for relief consistent with LSC guidelines
 - Civil rights, including mental health discrimination, age discrimination, discrimination by government officials or police, and discrimination against immigrants and communities of color, impacting their treatment by agencies, courts, and the police
 - Criminal record expungement
- Miscellaneous
 - Municipal/traffic violations
 - Driver's License issues/suspension/revocation
 - Durable power of attorney/advance directives
 - Wills and transfer on death deeds
 - Planning Documents (Miller trusts and similar tools)
 - Incarceration and reentry issues
 - Veterans' discharge issues

STRUCTURAL NEEDS

- Need for increased information or self-help resources accessible to the community
- Expanded access to KLS services needed in rural areas
- Expanded alternative service delivery options to better meet community needs
 - Consider use of standing or sequential clinics to provide opportunities for limited services on a repeat basis in high volume case areas where assisted pro se may be valuable
 - Consider enlisting the help of organizations, community advocates, and social workers in rural communities as Community Justice Workers or legal navigators
- Increased collaboration and triage across providers and agencies to better serve the community
 - No wrong door
 - Reduce the burden of seeking different resources for vulnerable populations (survivors of violence, LGBTQIA+ individuals, immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, seniors, unhoused individuals, people with disabilities, mental health diagnoses, and substance use diagnoses)

- Access to intake:
 - Expanding access to online intake, developing pre-screening options, and increasing availability 24/7
 - Developing pathway for agency-to-agency warm referrals
 - Set and meet clearer expectations for client call backs

SYSTEMIC NEEDS

- Court and agency advocacy and training
 - Consider approaching the Court regarding mandatory pro bono or other expansions of existing pro bono expectations and norms
 - Court and agency advocacy and training to help litigants with criminal records or mental health diagnoses receive compassionate support
 - Issues with access to the courts and the need for expanded access to virtual appearances and easy electronic submission of evidence
 - Legal aid and bar foundation collaboration on judicial and court staff training
- Systemic housing efforts
 - Create a system for limited required disclosures and document exchange in landlord-tenant cases
 - Systemic efforts to enforce the warranty of habitability or other efforts to create and enforce statewide housing quality standards
- Systemic protection from violence efforts
 - Protection from abuse advocacy to include coercive control, emotional, financial, and mental abuse as bases for relief (long-term project), more consistent with elder abuse

VULNERABLE POPULATION NEEDS

- Increasing access to services based on membership in a vulnerable population, including people who identify as: people of color, immigrants, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, people with lived experience in the criminal justice system, people with severe mental health diagnoses, people with substance use diagnoses, and people with low English literacy
- Address more farm-related issues, particularly in western Kansas
- Address the needs of meat packing workers, feed lot workers, and their families
- Explore needs in tribal communities

CONCLUSION

Kansas Legal Services (KLS) ensures equal access to justice for the most vulnerable citizens in Kansas. The recommendations in this assessment will help KLS meet community needs and collaborate with other advocates and stakeholders to address the emerging and changing issues impacting low-income people in Kansas.
