



# 2024 IMPACT REPORT

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Since 1972, Senior Legal Services is driven by a commitment to ensure that seniors have equitable access to justice. Our dedicated team of 17 professionals works tirelessly to empower older adults in our community, providing essential legal support during their most challenging times.

In 2024, we achieved significant milestones across our five core programs: **Housing, Consumer Protection, Future Planning, Government Benefits**, and **Elder Abuse and Discrimination**. Through these programs, we provided essential legal guidance and support to seniors facing some of life’s most stressful and uncertain challenges. Our organization provided legal services to **828** individuals and families across Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Additionally, we provided assistance to just under **1,400** tenants and landlords at the Santa Cruz County Law Library.

With the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis in California and beyond, it is no wonder that a major focus of our work was housing related—accounting for **56%** of our overall services provided. Our **Housing Programs** are instrumental in helping individuals and families address issues including responding to and litigating unlawful detainers, tenancy stipulations, move out agreements, and addressing habitability and accessibility concerns. Our **Consumer Protection Program** assisted 102 clients (16%) with credit card debt, bankruptcy issues, and combating predatory consumer practices. Through the **Future Planning Program**, we empowered 76 seniors (12%) to create essential legal documents, such as powers of attorney, advance healthcare directives, and wills. Our **Government Benefits Program**, which accounted for 10% of our cases (64 individuals), provided support to seniors navigating Social Security denials and resolving overpayment concerns. Finally, our **Elder Abuse and Discrimination Program** served 38 seniors (6%), ensuring they received legal protection and safety in cases of abuse.

While our primary focus remains on seniors, we stretch to include programs and services to meet the urgent needs in the community. In 2024 we continued our collaboration with the County of Santa Cruz to assist individuals of all ages experiencing homelessness navigate the Social Security Disability Insurance applications. Additionally, we had staff at the Santa Cruz County Court House providing information and assistance in navigating civil procedure related to the eviction process serving both landlords and tenants and offered landlord tenant mediation. Unfortunately, the Court House Partnership came to a close at the end of December. New services in 2024 included receiving referrals from Tenant Sanctuary for their clients in need of legal representation.

These accomplishments highlight our unwavering dedication to improving the lives of seniors in our community. We look forward to building on this momentum in 2025 and continuing to make a meaningful impact in the years to come.



In unity,

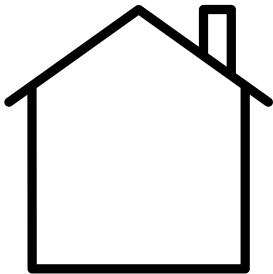
Rebecca Steckler, Executive Director

\$1,181,789	\$1,334,148	828	17
2024 Budget	2024 Revenue & Support	Total Number of People Served	Full-Time & Part-Time Staff

# Our Programs

## Housing

In supporting 350 households, representing 56% of our cases, our Housing Program has proven to be truly vital in both Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. These efforts are especially crucial as California grapples with an escalating housing crisis, marked by both scarcity and soaring costs. Now in it's third year, Senior Legal Services is proud to be a key partner in the Eviction Defense Collaborative (EDC), a coalition that includes Senior Legal Services, Tenant Sanctuary, Community Bridges, and the Conflict Resolution Center. Notably, Senior Legal Services helped prevent displacement or negotiated a soft landing for over 60 primarily monolingual Spanish speaking individuals and families, providing legal defense and offering mediation services when appropriate.



## Court Partnership

In December 2024, we completed a three-year Housing Partnership collaboration between Senior Legal Services, the Conflict Resolution Center and the Santa Cruz County Law Library. Together, we provided assistance to 1,397 individuals. Based at the Santa Cruz Superior Court, this program offered crucial information and procedural support to both landlords and tenants, guiding them through court processes, judicial paperwork and provided unbiased mediation services.

## Consumer Protection



Our Consumer Protection Program is committed to helping seniors navigate challenging financial situations. In 2024, we saw a growing demand for support in this area and assisted over 100 individuals through this program. As part of this initiative, we help clients with Chapter 7 bankruptcy filings, address debt collection issues, and resolve disputes with companies. In addition, we host walk-in Consumer Debt Clinics every other week at local libraries that are often the first touchpoint to our programs for Seniors who are experiencing financial difficulties.

## Future Planning

In 2024, our organization helped over 70 seniors establish power of attorney, create advanced healthcare directives, and draft statutory wills. We continue to host quarterly 'Senior Care Day' events at local senior centers, where attorneys and advocates are available on-site to assist seniors in obtaining these vital documents.



## Government Benefits



In 2024, Senior Legal Services assisted over 60 individuals with Social Security overpayments, benefit denials, administrative hearings and representation. Maintaining government benefits can be a complex and overwhelming process but our team continues to work diligently to investigate and appeal overpayment decisions, ensuring that seniors receive the benefits they are entitled to. In some instances, we also helped with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications.

Through our collaboration with the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program, Senior Legal Services is able to assist individuals experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County with applications for Social Security disability benefits, appeals and hearings. We are proud to offer this support and make a difference in the community.

## Elder Abuse & Discrimination

In 2024, our team provided crucial support to 40 seniors facing some form of elder abuse. We guided them through the process of obtaining restraining orders including aiding in the preparation of documents or representing them in court. While these cases are heartbreaking, our team is unwavering in its commitment to securing fair and just treatment for our clients.

