



SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
LEGAL AID SOCIETY



CELEBRATING
50



YEARS OF SERVICE



2024/2025 ANNUAL REPORT

**101 W PALMETTO AVE.
LONGWOOD, FL 32750**

**407-834-1660
www.scbalas.com**



Fifty Years of Justice, Compassion & Community



Since 1975, Seminole County Legal Aid Society has stood beside those who had nowhere else to turn; providing free legal help to low-income families, veterans, seniors, survivors, and vulnerable residents across Seminole County.

This milestone honors five decades of commitment to access to justice, one case, one family, and one community at a time.

Commemorating 50 Years of:

- Free civil legal services for those who cannot afford an attorney
- Housing stability for families on the brink
- Protection for survivors of violence
- Guardianship and support for children and disabled adults
- Advocacy for veterans
- Stronger, safer, more stable communities

1975–2025

Honoring the Past. Empowering the Present. Building the Future.

Thank You for 50 Years of Standing With Us.



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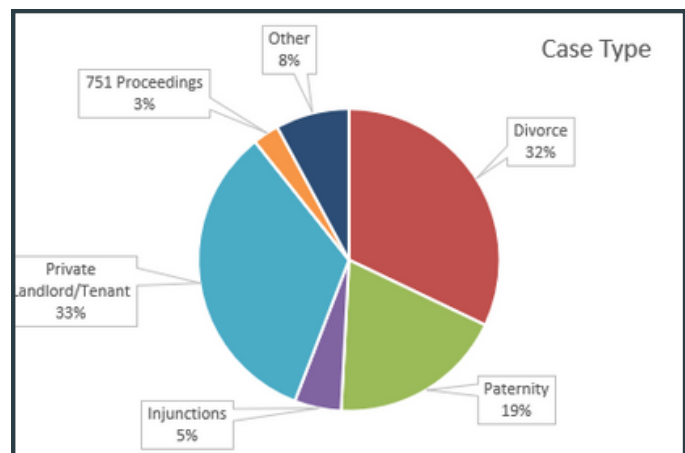
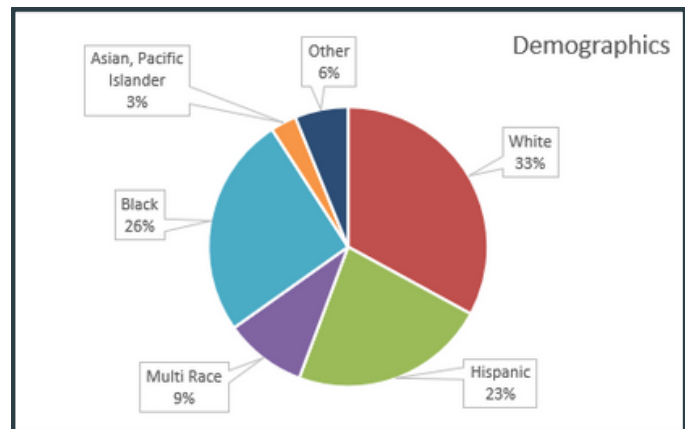
OUR MISSION:

THE HEART OF SCBALAS



Our mission is to provide free, high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income and vulnerable residents in Seminole County, ensuring equal access to justice regardless of income, background, or circumstance.

We empower individuals and families by protecting their rights, promoting stability, and strengthening our community through compassionate advocacy and unwavering commitment to access to justice system.



ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS:

How we Served Seminole County This Year



- Assisted **1,388** families who came to us for legal help.
- Supported **1,741** children, ensuring greater stability and access to essential resources.
- Secured **\$914,540.08** in child support, helping families cover housing, food, medical needs, and other essentials.
- Volunteer attorneys contributed **\$161,415** in pro bono legal services.
- Volunteers also donated an additional **\$28,985**, reinforcing their commitment to our mission.
- Launched new legal Advance Directive workshops for survivors of domestic violence, veterans and vulnerable older adults.
- Launched new legal tenant-rights presentations focused on maintenance issues and safe, habitable housing.
- Staff and volunteers provided direct legal assistance in family law, housing, guardianship, veterans' issues, and other civil legal matters.

*Behind every number is a family whose life we
were able to help change.*

2025 HOUSING PROJECT

According to a recent Orlando Sentinel article, the Orlando–Kissimmee–Sanford metro area now ranks **49th out of 50 major U.S. metro regions** for median wages. With some of the lowest wages in the nation and rapidly rising rents, families across Central Florida face an unprecedented affordability crisis.

Last fiscal year, the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society assisted **410 Seminole County families** with housing-related legal issues—work aimed at maintaining family unity, preserving stability, and preventing the sudden displacement that can uproot children, interrupt schooling, jeopardize employment, and deepen financial insecurity.



Assisting residents with housing matters not only helps keep families safely housed—it reduces the long-term community costs associated with homelessness, supports better health and educational outcomes, and strengthens the overall stability of our neighborhoods.



Strengthening these vital community services, the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society opened their Legal Housing Assistance Office in the Civil Courthouse of Downtown Sanford, FL on the 17th of March this past year.

This new office expands the reach of our organization's services providing a new location for in office client visits, and a new home for some of our outreach or educational programs.

Domestic Violence Project:

Protecting Survivors. Strengthening Families. Rebuilding Lives.



Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society's **Domestic Violence Project** provides free, trauma-informed civil legal services to survivors of domestic violence throughout Seminole County.

Our mission is to help survivors achieve immediate safety and long-term stability for themselves and their children.

Injunctions for Protection

- Assistance obtaining and defending Injunctions for Protection
- Representation at hearings to ensure continued safety
- Legal enforcement when injunctions are violated

Family Law Representation

- Dissolution of Marriage: Safe separation from abusers; timesharing and support established
- Paternity Actions: Securing legal rights, child support, and safe time-sharing
- Related Matters: Emergency custody, financial stabilization, and child safety planning

Impact on Families

Each year, survivors and their children are able to escape violence, secure stability, and rebuild their lives with dignity. Our attorneys ensure that families are not alone during the most difficult moments of their lives—and that every survivor is empowered to move forward safely.

Disabled Child

Legal Assistance Program



The day your child turns 18, everything changes. Suddenly, the law says you can no longer make decisions for the child you've protected their entire life—even though they still need you just as much.

Imagine spending 18 years as your child's voice, their protector, their advocate—and then waking up on their birthday to realize the law has taken away your authority to care for them. Your child still needs you to make medical decisions. They still need you to manage their finances, navigate their healthcare, speak up when they cannot. But legally? You have no say. None.

For parents of children with disabilities, this is not a milestone—it is a crisis. The panic sets in quickly. What happens when your child needs emergency surgery and you cannot sign the consent form? When their medication needs adjusting and the doctor will not talk to you? When someone takes advantage of them and you are powerless to intervene?

This moment brings fear and heartbreak. How does one ensure that a child receives the medical care they need? Who speaks for them when they cannot speak for themselves? Guardian advocacy restores what should never have been taken away—your right to protect your child.

Last year, we walked beside **81 families** through this emotional journey, helping them secure legal guardianship. We supported **36 more families with their annual plans**, ensuring their children remain safe and cared for. Because your love for your child does not end at 18—and neither does our commitment to help you protect them.

Kinship Legal Project

Elderly grandparents thought they were done raising children. But when their daughter's opioid addiction spiraled, they faced a choice: watch their granddaughter enter foster care, or step in and raise her themselves. But navigating the legal system to gain custody? That felt impossible—until they found us. While headlines talk about overdose statistics, another



quiet tragedy unfolds every day; the children left behind. Kids who have seen things no child should ever have to see. Who have gone to bed hungry because addiction took priority. Who have been passed from home to home, just longing for stability and safety. In Seminole County, the opioid epidemic is not just destroying lives: it's shattering families. And when parents can no longer care for their children, it is often grandparents, aunts, uncles, or older siblings who step into the breach, choosing love

DEAR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS,

YOUR STRENGTH HOLDS FAMILIES TOGETHER.

A collage of four photographs showing families and caregivers. The top left photo shows two young girls hugging. The top right photo shows a family of four (mother, father, and two children) smiling. The bottom left photo shows a man and a woman hugging. The bottom right photo shows a man and a woman high-fiving. The text "DEAR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS," is at the top, and "YOUR STRENGTH HOLDS FAMILIES TOGETHER." is written in a curved banner across the middle. At the bottom, the logo for the SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION LEGAL AID SOCIETY is displayed.

SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
LEGAL AID SOCIETY

over ease, sacrifice over walking away. Their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends step up out of love, doing everything they can to keep these kids safe. Without legal custody, these caretakers cannot enroll the children in school, take them to the doctor, or access the support they desperately need. These caregivers are holding families together while navigating a maze of legal barriers

Our Kinship Legal Project transforms impossible situations into new beginnings. This year, we helped 37 relatives secure custody of children whose parents could not care for them. Thirty-seven families who stayed together. Thirty-seven groups of children who got to remain with people who have loved them since birth.

Veteran's Legal Project



Veteran's Free Legal Advice Clinic

Held monthly at the Seminole County Public Library in Casselberry, FL (Central Branch). Walk-ups available for all veterans to receive advice from a Pro Bono Attorney or Staff Attorney. Last year, we were able to help 68 veterans at the clinic with housing, advance directives, family, and civil matters.

This clinic is Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society's way of saying thank you, and giving back to the veteran community.

Veteran's Day Virtual Gratitude Wall

This year, in honor of **Veteran's Day 2025**, Seminole County Legal Aid hosted a *Virtual Veterans Gratitude Wall*, inviting community members, partners, and staff to share messages of appreciation for those who have served our country.

We are grateful not only for the opportunity to provide meaningful services to our veterans, but also for a Seminole County community that continues to uplift and honor those who have sacrificed so much.



POWER IN PRO BONO

OUR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS
TURN COMPASSION INTO ACTION,

AND CHALLENGES
INTO OPPORTUNITIES.



Pro Bono Work in Action

Our dedicated Pro Bono Attorneys continued to strengthen access to justice in Seminole County throughout the past fiscal year. Together, they handled 142 pro bono cases and contributed an extraordinary 746.9 hours of volunteer legal service. Their commitment, compassion, and expertise make a measurable difference for our low-income clients and remain a cornerstone of Seminole County Legal Aid's mission.

142
PRO BONO
CASES

746.9
HOURS FOR
PRO BONO CASES



Pro Bono Attorney Lounge

With the opening of SCBALAS' Housing Legal Office in the Downtown Courthouse we were able to repurpose additional space to better support our Pro Bono volunteers. This allowed us to create a dedicated lounge designed with their needs in mind. Attorneys now have a comfortable place to prepare for hearings, meet with clients, conduct research, enjoy a coffee, and recharge between cases. This space enhances the volunteer experience and strengthens our ability to serve the community.

Pro Bono Attorneys in Action



Judge Bravo, Attorney Jonathan JA Paul & Attorney Sue Selsky attending Monthly Veterans Clinic



Pro Bono Attorney Zahra Manekia Presenting on Evictions for Project Rise Class



Attorney Andrew Chmelir at Sealing and Expungement Clinic



Attorney Kavita Sookrajh and Attorney Richard Leigh assisting at Veteran's Clinic

Sealing & Expungement

Clinic Held Both Virtually & In-Person Each Month

A mistake from your past should not steal your future.

He was 19 when he made a choice he regrets every day. Now he's 32, clean for a decade, educated, responsible, and he can't get a job. Every application ends the same way: a background check, then silence. His arrest record has become a life sentence to poverty.

Twice a month, at our free sealing and expungement clinics; in person at the North Branch Library in Sanford (first Wednesday) and virtually over Zoom (third Wednesday). Volunteer attorney Andrew Chmelir is available to help participants clear their records and reclaim their lives.

Because even a minor criminal record can destroy everything: job opportunities vanish, educational programs reject you, professional licenses become impossible. One mistake becomes a lifetime of closed doors, unless someone helps you fight back.

Community Outreach

Seminole State College Legal Clinics

Every second Thursday at Seminole State College's Student Center, we provide free legal advice to students facing family law and housing crises that threaten to derail their education. When you are worried about eviction or a custody battle, calculus homework feels impossible. We step in so students can focus on building their futures instead of surviving their present.

In celebration of Pro Bono Month, we hosted special seminars on housing, family law mediation, wills and trusts, and sealings and expungements—all free, all designed to empower our community with knowledge that can change lives.

Change in Action

Empowering Our Neighbors & Advancing Justice



Attorney Matthew Gripp
NITA's Public Service program



Staff - Sophia U.
Oviedo Woman's Club Event



Staff Regan S. - Seminole State College's Fall
2025 Welcome Back Community Resource Fair



Attorney Evan Greene
Advance Directives Presentation

Change in Action

Getting out into the community and meeting people where they are remains one of the most meaningful parts of our work. Through outreach events, presentations, and partnerships, we connect directly with the individuals and families who need support the most.



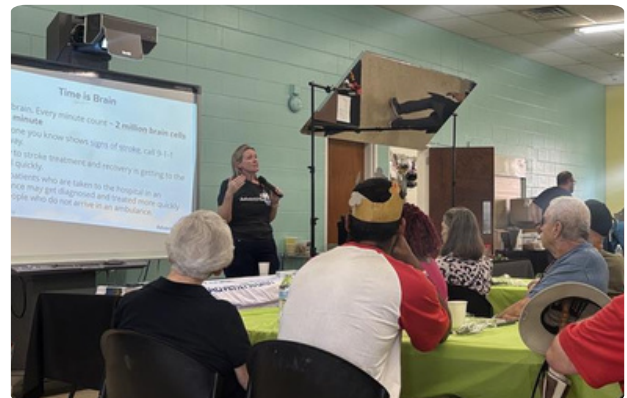
Attorney Shannon Smythe and client speaking on homelessness in Central FL with Channel 6 News



Staff Paralegal Sophia Ulloa Representing SCBALAS at FAMU's Fall 2025 Externship Fair



Staff Attorney Evan Greene and Staff Paralegal Denice Garza at Tenant Rights to Maintenance Clinic



Tabling at The Picnic Project's "Eat Well, Live Well" Event with Presenter Advent Health



Staff Paralegal Charity S. & Volunteer Kailey S. attended Seminole County Public Schools Transitions Fair for children with disabilities



Staff Attorney Matthew Gripp & Staff Pro bono Coordinator Julian Suero, J.D. attending the Seminole State College Legal Advice Clinic

2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS



President's Award:

Erin Lynette Greene

Honoring your exemplary leadership and enduring support.

Visionary Leadership Award:

Thomas Gene Freeman JR.

In grateful recognition of your leadership, vision, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Legacy of Service Award:

Richard Louis Mamele

In honor of your unwavering commitment to justice, compassion, and service — a legacy of empowering lives through the law.

Attorney of the Year Award:

John N. Knutton

Honoring your generous gift of time, expertise, and justice.

Outstanding Public Servant Award:

Grant Maloy

For your outstanding achievements and contributions to serve the public.

Outstanding Civil Service Award:

Kelly Bierfreund

Honoring your exceptional commitment to integrity, service, and civic duty.



2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AWARDS



Central Branch Public Library

*In recognition of your valued partnership
and your excellent commitment to
community impact.*



North Branch Public Library

*In recognition of your valued partnership
and your excellent commitment to
community impact.*



thank you!

PRESENTING SPONSOR



The mission of the Harper Family Charitable Foundation, Inc. is for the health, education, maintenance and well being of disabled children/adults of all ages only in the Central Florida area, wherever the need is found to be the greatest.

The Harper Family Charitable Foundation, Inc. is funded +/- 99% by the Harper Family.

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Director	Deborah Warner
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“The first duty of society is justice.”
-Alexander Hamilton

OUR DEDICATED TEAM

2024 / 2025



Executive Director



Silvia McLain

Attorneys

Shannon Smythe

Debra Rosenbluth

Evan Greene

Matthew Gripp

Sue Selsky

Yvonne Alonso

Emilia Todd

Pro Bono Coordinator

Julian Suero, J.D.

Finance and Admin Coordinator

Tunala Connell

Intake Supervisor

Abigail Stewart

OUR DEDICATED TEAM

2024 / 2025

Paralegals

Charity Steinbach

Denice Garza

Christopher Giard

Sophia Ulloa

Chloe Mills

Alyssia Antrim

Caci Baer

Boris Coronado

Intake Specialists

Kellen Matthews

Clara Wait

Roah Connell

Director of Communications & Volunteer Coordination

Regan Stanton

Intake Specialist & Web Design

Audyn Kamalzadeh

2025 VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS



Aaliyah Sims

*FAMU College of Law
2026 J.D. Candidate*



Carissa Iszard

*University of Florida
Levin College of Law*



Miranda Schnitker

*Barry University, Dwayne
O. Andreas School of Law*



Emily English

*University of Central
Florida Pre-Law*



Matthew Paolini

*Bright Futures -
Trinity High School*

Event Sponsors

2025



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Climate First Bank
Ferguson Vickaryous Charitable Fund Foundation
Nancy Freeman
Anonymous
Silvia McLain

IMPACT ADVOCATE

Christopher Connell
Dan Newlin
Mandy Pavlakos
Deborah & Scot Warner
Camy Schwam-Wilcox

COMMUNITY ALLY

Yvonne Alonso
Matthews Bark
Maria Espinosa
Elaine Silver

HELPING HAND

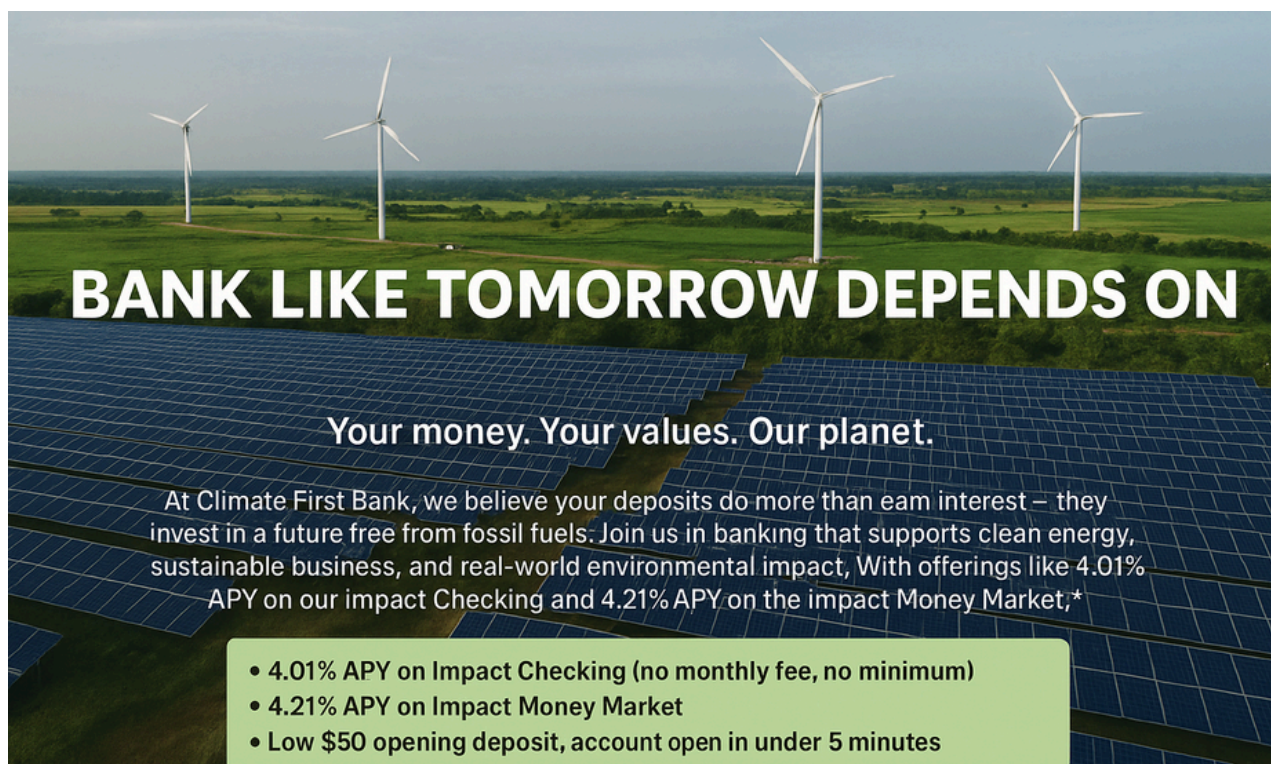
Andrew Chmelir
Carla and Matt Gripp
Kate Latorre
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2025



*Bryant
&
Lynn
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"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision... It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

Thank You!

With great appreciation to the gifted staff, generous pro-bono attorneys and big-hearted volunteers of the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society.

Nancy S. Freeman, P.A.

Nancy Freeman

Marla Schaffer



ANONYMOUS DONOR



THANK YOU
SILVIA McLAIN



to our board of directors,
pro bono attorneys and
outstanding staff

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Event Donors '25



