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Central Jersey Legal Services

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Annual Report

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2022

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Central Jersey  
**Legal Services**  
Inc.



# 2022 IN REVIEW

Central Jersey  
Legal Services  
Inc.



The story of 2022 was one of growth, change, and innovation.

At CJLS, we brought on new staff to meet a significant increase in demand.

We adapted to the changing pandemic, opening our offices to in-person meetings and bringing staff back on a hybrid schedule.

We used social media to stay connected to our client community and partner organizations. We launched an online intake to make us easier to reach.

We did what we needed to, so we would be there when our clients needed us.

In 2022, pandemic eviction protections ended, and landlord/tenant courts began working through a backlog of tens of thousands of cases.

Inflation was at historic highs and rents rose out of control.

An eviction crisis was coming. We secured funding to hire and train housing advocates in preparation. We doubled staff in our Housing Unit, from 8 attorneys and 4 paralegals in July 2020 to 16 attorneys and 8 paralegals today. When new housing cases increased by 82% over the course of the year, we were ready. Our advocates helped hundreds of families to avoid eviction and maintain affordable housing. We engaged in statewide advocacy to ensure that new landlord/tenant procedures protected the rights of low-income tenants and participated in projects to develop new models of legal assistance in eviction.

But it wasn't all housing.

Cases were up in every area of law.

Bankruptcies and other consumer matters increased, as long periods of un- and underemployment caught up with low-income workers.

Domestic violence restraining order cases rose when pandemic restrictions were lifted and victims felt it was safe to seek help.

New benefits cases jumped halfway through the year when New Jersey again allowed adverse actions in TANF, GA, and EA cases. CJLS' dedicated staff rose to the challenge, closing nearly 50% more cases in 2022 and helping more than 7,000 clients get the legal help they needed.

The Legal Aid Society of Mercer County, Middlesex County Legal Services Corp, and Union County Legal Services Corp merged to form Central Jersey Legal Services in 2003. In 2023, we mark our 20th year as a unified organization with a renewed dedication to our vision of equal justice for all.

# CASES IN 2022

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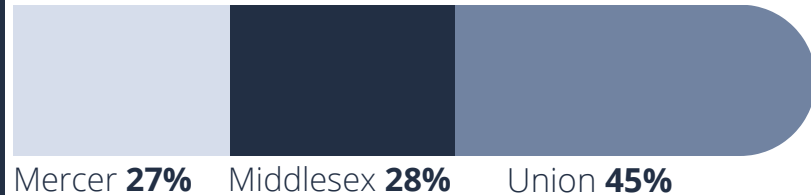
**7,840**  
Cases Closed

**8,539**  
Intakes

**2,108**  
Extended Service/Litigation  
Cases Closed

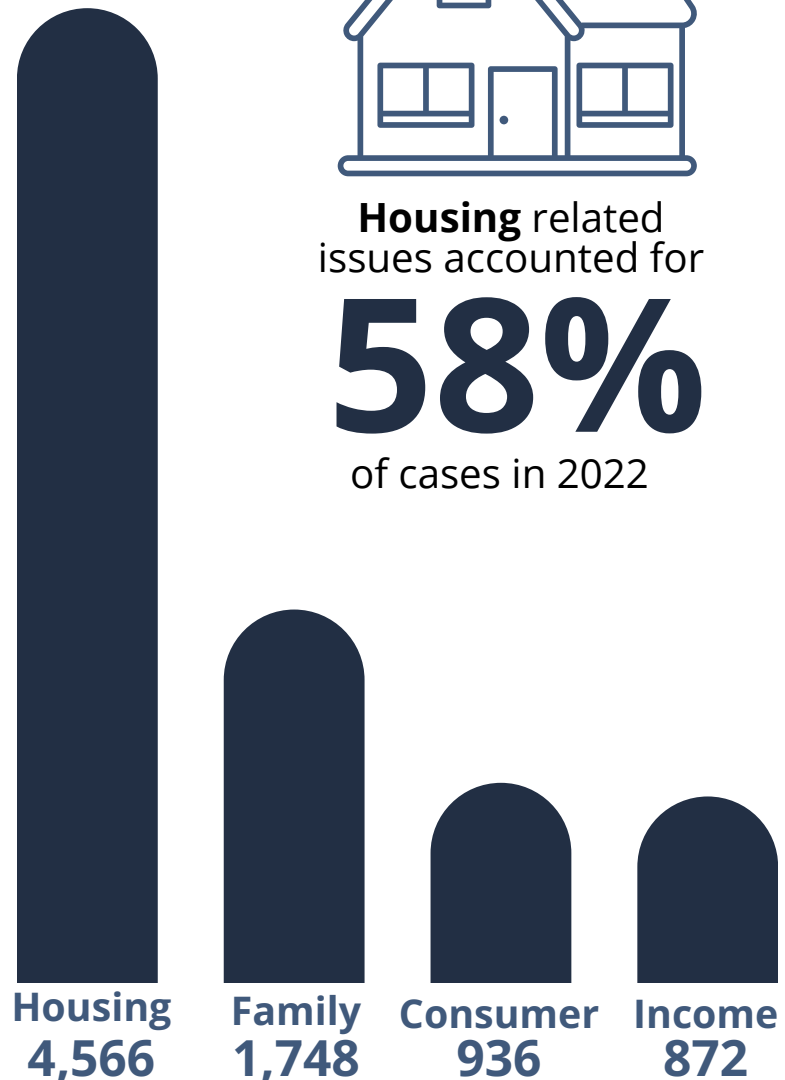
**5,732**  
Counsel and Advice  
Cases Closed

## Closed Cases by County



**Housing** related  
issues accounted for

**58%**  
of cases in 2022



## Top Problem Categories 2022

# CLIENTS IN 2022

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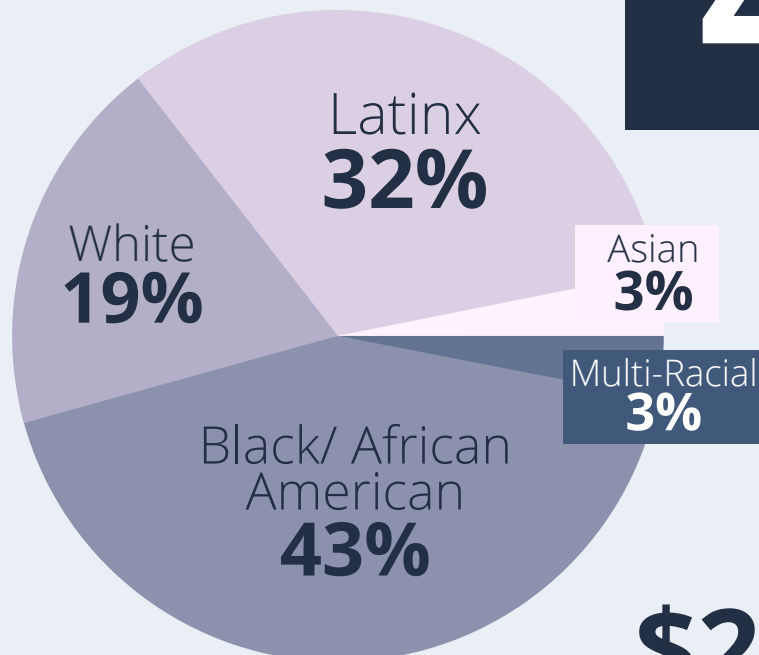


**73%** of clients were **WOMEN**



**AVERAGE  
AGE**

**47**



Assisted  
**1,409**  
victims of  
**Domestic  
Violence**

**1,857 clients  
were over the  
age of**

**60**

**\$21,950**

**Average Household Income**

**2022 clients spoke  
22 different  
languages**

**2,693**

clients living with a  
**physical or mental disability**

American Sign Language Arabic Bengali  
Chinese Cantonese English French French  
Creole Gujarati Haitian Creole Hindi  
Italian Korean Polish Portuguese Punjabi  
Russian Spanish Swahili Urdu Vietnamese

# CASE OUTCOMES

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**130**

Protection Orders  
obtained for  
Domestic Violence victims

**872**

Prevented Evictions

**176**

Child Custody &  
Support Secured

**188**

Disability, Unemployment, and  
other public benefits secured

**249**

Cases of Excessive &  
Unlawful Debt Resolved

**91**

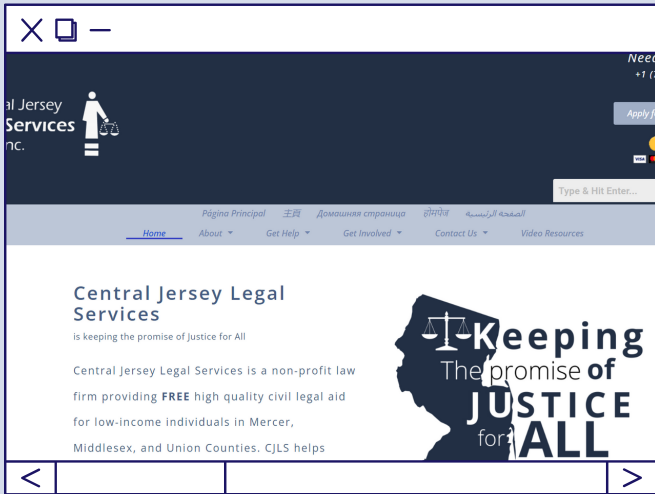
Competed wills,  
power of attorney, or  
health care proxy

# DIGITAL REACH




Central Jersey  
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www.centraljerseylegalservices.org



## Website

Page Visitors: 13,414  180%  
New Visitors: 13,329  178%  
Pageviews: 26,161  50%

The CJLS YouTube  
Channel reports



# 63.9

hours of watch  
time in 2022

91% of CJLS social media  
traffic comes from  
Middlesex, Mercer, &  
Union Counties



## Facebook

Page Reach: 11,063  
Page Visits: 1,435



## Instagram

Reaching more  
individuals age **25-34**

# CLIENT STORIES

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## Jane

Jane is a senior citizen who contacted CJLS regarding flood damage to her condo, including electrical issues and damaged appliances. Jane was living with diabetes and her broken refrigerator became a potentially life threatening problem as she was unable to refrigerate her insulin.

CJLS helped Jane apply to government assistance programs that would aid her situation. An inspector came out and the program agreed to replace her appliances and fix electrical issues. The inspector also found a gas leak that Jane was unaware of. Emergency services fixed the potentially fatal problem.

## Elza

Elza was in an abusive marriage for years. Her husband controlled her movements and was physically abusive to her and their son. He refused to file for legal status for Elza and threatened to report her to ICE. When he threatened to kill her and her son, Elza got a restraining order and came to us for help. We helped Elza get an FRO and her husband left the home. Over a year working together, Elza's team of attorneys helped her save her home from eviction and secure benefits to buy food and clothes. They connected her to counseling, housing assistance, and food pantry services. Our immigration project helped her secure work authorization and social security cards for her and her oldest son. Elza is working now and she and her children are safe from violence.

# CLIENT STORIES

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## Jaida

Jaida came to CJLS with a TRO she got after her husband assaulted her in their home. He pushed and shoved her into furniture and walls, and held her in a restraint position for over 10 minutes while she struggled to get away. She managed to break free and ran from the house in winter with little clothing on. A CJLS attorney agreed to represent Jaida and help her secure a final restraining order. They worked together to assemble photos, police reports, and video as evidence. The FRO trial lasted two days. Jaida was issued a Final Restraining Order and moved out of county with her child. She was able to start fresh in a new home without fear of violence.

## Mary

Mary was a victim of human trafficking who was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, and BiPolar disorder. She filed for SSI benefits and was denied initially and on appeal. She asked for another hearing and came to us for help. A CJLS paralegal helped Mary gathered the necessary medical records to update her SSA file. Before the hearing date the judge reviewed her file and found that Mary was disabled and awarded SSI benefits.

## Jesmyn

Jesmyn lived in a rented house with her mother, her son, and her daughter and two grandchildren. They paid monthly but didn't have a lease. The family was surprised when they received an ejectment action against them, claiming they were squatters. They brought the notice to CJLS for help. Our attorney helped the family assemble documents proving they were in fact tenants. She then sent the documents to the landlord's attorney and advised that she intended to ask for dismissal because the case belonged in landlord/tenant court. The landlord agreed to dismiss and proposed a deal for them to leave. After a lot of negotiation, the family agreed to vacate within two months. The landlord suspended rent for the remaining months and paid them \$10,000 toward moving expenses. They found a new place in a better location and moved out as planned.



# CLIENT STORIES

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## Tony

Tony been waiting on unemployment benefits for over a year. CJLS discovered that Tony had been disqualified for benefits, and quickly helped him to file an appeal. CJLS won the case for Tony, and he received over \$16,000 in benefits that the Department of Labor was holding.

## Rosie

Rosie was a senior citizen living in a trailer park. She fell behind on rent and her landlord filed to evict her. She was in the hospital and missed her trial. Her landlord got a judgment and padlocked her trailer. We helped Rosie's daughter get a Power of Attorney and pay the back rent owed, but the landlord refused to let her back in. We filed an order to force the issue, and the original eviction complaint was dismissed. The landlord was told to remove the padlock, which they did. Rosie was able to return to her home when she left the hospital.

## Louisa

Louisa is a senior citizen with major health issues and limited physical mobility. She came to CJLS for assistance with prescription drug coverage, but we quickly realized Louisa was also facing eviction and imminent homelessness. A paralegal in the Senior/Disability unit helped Louisa get housing assistance to pay back rent and save her home. She also helped Louisa enroll in prescription drug coverage and secure utility assistance.