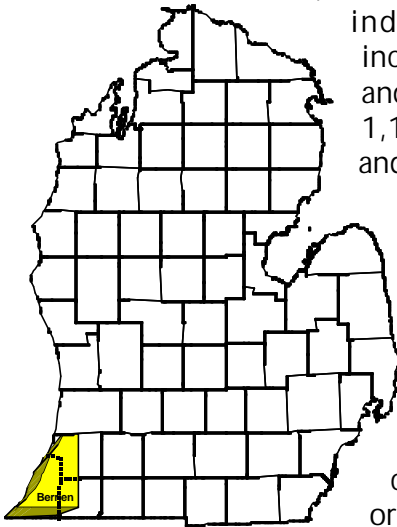


BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

BCLS Office Locations: Niles and St. Joseph

BCLS Service Area: Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties

Service Population: 30,241 individuals are living at or below 125% of the poverty level



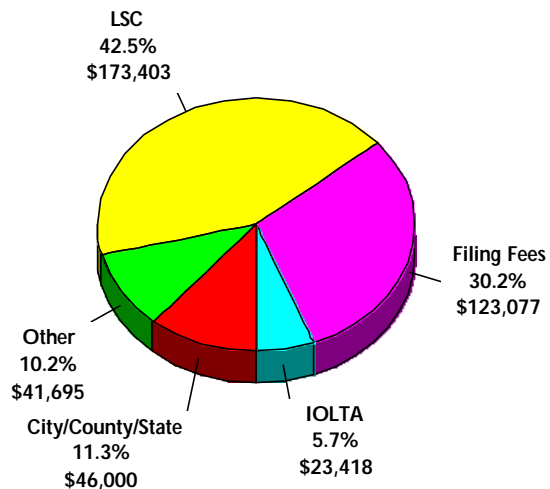
BCLS provided legal services to more than 1,700 low-income people in individual legal matters, including 386 administrative and court hearings. More than 1,100 people received advice and brief service through BCLS' telephone Helpline, including a follow-up letter summarizing the advice and action taken in each case. The program also participated in a wide variety of community activities, assisting both clients and other organizations that provide services to clients. In 1998,

BCLS helped a homebound elderly woman avoid an unfair home repair. Not only were costs disproportionate to the work to be done, but the contractor could end up owning all the equity in the home through a "reverse mortgage." After preventing this unbalanced arrangement, BCLS helped this indigent senior obtain the needed repairs through a local housing rehabilitation program. BCLS also alerted local senior programs about this scheme, and the repair business left the area. Without legal aid, this vulnerable person and others may have lost their savings or their homes.

BCLS expanded access for and outreach to clients and increased the efficiency and quality of services through the use of technology. This effort included the continuation and expansion of the telephone Helpline that allows clients to speak directly to an attorney about their legal problems the first time they call BCLS.

BCLS helped a woman adopt her eight-year-old great-granddaughter whom she had raised from birth. The mother had little contact with the child over the years but contested the adoption. The child's birth father also objected even though he was serving time in prison and had never seen the child. After BCLS worked with the probate judge on a plan for reintegration of mother and child, the mother failed to comply with the plan and decided to consent to the adoption. As a result, the eight-year-old continued in the stable home she had known since birth and will also be provided for through her "new" mom's Social Security.

BCLS Sources of Funding for 1998: \$ 407,593



BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

Contact: Mary Ellen Drolet, Director ! (616) 983-6363

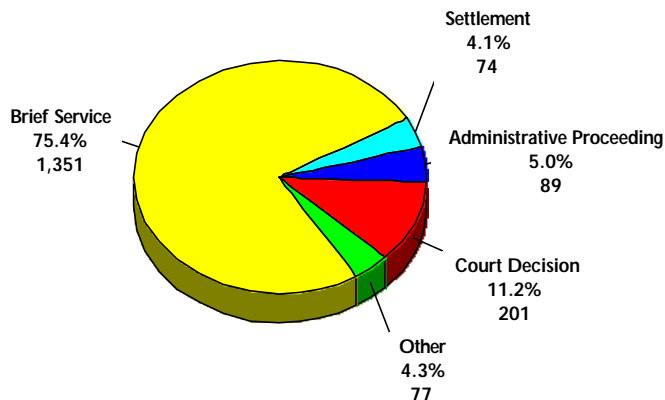
Community Outreach and Collaboration: BCLS also worked to improve the understanding of the problems and concerns of low-income people through continuing involvement with the courts, the bar, and other agencies serving the client community. In 1998, BCLS made a number of presentations to local service clubs about the telephone Helpline. BCLS also worked with the Greater Niles Community Development Corporation to train low-income people who were potential home buyers. BCLS made 18 presentations at senior citizen meals sites in Berrien, Cass, and VanBuren counties about various issues affecting seniors. A BCLS staff attorney continued to work with a Benton Harbor elementary school through the Lawyer/Teacher Partner program initiated by the Center for Civic Education and Law. This project included regular involvement in classroom activities with the children, providing information about the legal system, teaching basic legal concepts, and working on skills for conflict resolution.

18 & Under	17
19-59	1,409
60 & Over	366
Total	1,792

Pro Bono Support: Almost 20 percent of the county's active bar participated in BCLS's efforts to involve private attorneys in assisting low-income people and senior citizens. In 1998, private attorneys handled cases ranging from trusts to divorces involving domestic violence. BCLS concentrated on developing pro bono attorney services in a broader range of areas, including referral of more Supplemental Security Income and landlord-tenant matters. Another focus was pro bono services for senior citizens, such as wills, real property, and consumer law, in which BCLS attorneys are not as experienced. In addition, six pro bono attorneys spent time in the office screening calls and providing advice on the telephone Helpline.

White	1,063
Black	700
Hispanic	17
Native American	8
Asian	4
Other	0
Total	1,792

BCLS Types of Service in 1998



BCLS Cases Closed in 1998: 1,792

