



## Community Needs Assessment Survey –Pennsylvania

**Neighborhood Legal Services and Summit Legal Aid** are working together to understand better the civil legal needs of individuals and families in our communities. Together, these organizations provide free legal services to people with low to moderate income across ten counties in southwestern Pennsylvania.

This survey is part of a needs assessment to identify the most common and urgent legal issues facing community members and determine how we can make legal services more visible, accessible, and responsive.

**Your responses will help shape how services are delivered and where support is most needed.** You can choose to remain anonymous or provide your contact information for follow-up and to be entered in a drawing to receive a \$100 gift certificate!

### Before We Get Started

We ask a few quick questions about you so we can better understand who we're hearing from. This helps us make legal help more fair, accessible, and responsive to our whole community. Your info stays private — thanks for taking a moment to share.

1. **What is your Zip Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **What county do you reside in?**

- ☐ Allegheny
- ☐ Armstrong
- ☐ Beaver
- ☐ Butler
- ☐ Cambria
- ☐ Clarion
- ☐ Fayette
- ☐ Greene

- ☐ Indiana
- ☐ Jefferson
- ☐ Lawrence
- ☐ Somerset
- ☐ Washington
- ☐ Westmoreland
- ☐ Other

3. **What is your age?**

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–49

- ☐ 50–64
- ☐ 65+
- ☐ I prefer not to say.

**4. What is the primary language spoken at home?**

- ☐ American Sign Language (ASL)
- ☐ English
- ☐ Arabic
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ French
- ☐ Creole
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. How do you identify your race? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Another race: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Multiracial or Biracial
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**6. How do you describe your ethnicity?**

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x
- ☐ Not Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**7. What is your military service status?**

- ☐ I am currently serving (active duty, National Guard, or Reserves)
- ☐ I am a veteran (previously served)
- ☐ I have never served in the military
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**8. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Transgender – Male
- ☐ Transgender - Female
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**9. Do you identify as LGBTQIA+? (Why are we asking? By understanding who our local community members are, we better understand their legal needs. Remember: this survey is anonymous.)**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure or Questioning
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**10. Do you identify as a person with a disability? (Select one option below)**

- ☐ No, I do not have a disability
- ☐ Yes – Physical disability (e.g., mobility, chronic pain, etc.)
- ☐ Yes – Sensory disability (e.g., vision, hearing, etc.)
- ☐ Yes – Cognitive or learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, ADHD, etc.)
- ☐ Yes – Mental health condition (e.g., anxiety, depression, PTSD, etc.)
- ☐ Yes – Other disability (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**11. Which best describes your marital status?**

- ☐ Living with partner



- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Unknown
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

### ***A Few Basics About Your Household***

Before we dive into legal questions, we want to get a sense of your current situation — like your work status, household size, and income. This info helps us understand what kinds of support people need and make sure services are reaching the right folks. Your answers stay private.

#### **12. What is your current employment status?**

- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed and not looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Unable to work due to disability or health reasons
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. How many people live in your household, including yourself?**

Number of people under 18 years old \_\_\_\_\_ (#)

Number of people 18-34 years old \_\_\_\_\_ (#)

Number of people 34-64 years old \_\_\_\_\_ (#)

Number of people 65 years and older \_\_\_\_\_ (#)

**14. What is your household's approximate monthly income? *Select the range that matches your monthly income.***

- ☐ \$0 to \$2,608/month
- ☐ \$2,609 to \$3,525/month
- ☐ \$3,526 to \$4,442/month
- ☐ \$4,443 to \$5,358/month
- ☐ \$5,359 to \$6,275/month
- ☐ \$6,276 to \$7,192/month
- ☐ \$7,193 to \$8,108/month
- ☐ \$8,109 to \$9,025/month
- ☐ More than \$9,025/month
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**15. What is your highest level of education completed?**

- ☐ Less than High School
- ☐ Some High School
- ☐ High School Diploma or GED
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ Associate Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Post-graduate Degree
- ☐ Trade/Vocational School
- ☐ Non-degree Certificate or Certification
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**16. Do you or anyone in your household receive any of these benefits? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ SNAP (food stamps) or WIC
- ☐ Medicaid or CHIP
- ☐ LIHEAP
- ☐ SSI or SSDI
- ☐ Section 8, subsidized, or public housing
- ☐ TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
- ☐ Unemployment Compensation
- ☐ Veteran Benefits
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### ***Legal Needs***

Sometimes people experience problems that seem personal, financial, or bureaucratic — but they may actually have a legal solution.

For example, being denied benefits, facing eviction, or dealing with debt collectors might be legal issues even if they don't feel like it at first.

**17. Have you ever experienced a problem that you thought was just a personal or financial issue, but later found out it might be a legal problem?**

- ☐ Yes (go to 17b)
- ☐ No (go to 18)
- ☐ Not sure (go to 18)

17b. If you answered "Yes," what type of issue did you experience that you originally thought was personal or financial, but later realized might be a legal issue? (Please check all that apply)

- ☐ Housing (e.g., eviction, unsafe conditions, landlord dispute)
- ☐ Public benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, disability benefits)
- ☐ Consumer issues (e.g., debt collection, scams, credit problems)
- ☐ Family issues (e.g., custody, divorce, protection orders)
- ☐ Employment (e.g., unpaid wages, discrimination, leave issues)
- ☐ Immigration (e.g., visa, asylum, legal status)
- ☐ Education (e.g., special education services, school discipline)
- ☐ Civil rights or discrimination
- ☐ Other civil legal issue (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Not sure / Prefer not to say

**18. Which types of legal issues have you experienced in the past year?** (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Eviction or threat of eviction
- ☐ Unsafe conditions (mold, no heat, etc.)
- ☐ Problems with rent or landlord
- ☐ Security deposit not returned
- ☐ Mobile home issues
- ☐ Trouble with Section 8 / subsidized / public housing
- ☐ Own home but don't have deed, or deed is inaccurate
- ☐ Own home and couldn't afford to pay property taxes
- ☐ Problem with the homeowner's insurance company
- ☐ Lien placed on my home
- ☐ Not being paid or underpaid
- ☐ Unsafe working conditions
- ☐ Fired unfairly
- ☐ Denied unemployment
- ☐ Wage garnishment/attachment
- ☐ Denied food stamps, Medicaid, or cash aid

- ☐ Lost benefits without explanation
- ☐ Denied LIHEAP (low-income heating assistance)
- ☐ Problems applying for benefits
- ☐ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) issues
- ☐ Denied veterans disability or pension benefits
- ☐ Denied healthcare at VA facility
- ☐ Someone taking benefits from you
- ☐ A reduction in benefit amount received
- ☐ Needed expungement or sealing of a conviction or arrest
- ☐ Appealed the denial of a job, housing, or other opportunity based on past arrest or conviction record
- ☐ Tried to correct the arrest or conviction record because it was wrong
- ☐ Was not given a copy of the arrest conviction record used against me
- ☐ Harassment by debt collectors
- ☐ Scams or fraud
- ☐ Credit report problems
- ☐ Trouble with car loans or payday lenders
- ☐ Mortgage foreclosure
- ☐ Property tax debt/issues
- ☐ Utility termination
- ☐ Identity theft
- ☐ Divorce
- ☐ Custody or visitation
- ☐ Paternity had to be established
- ☐ Safety concerns with the other parent and my children
- ☐ Physical, emotional and/or financial abuse
- ☐ Child support or alimony problems
- ☐ Couldn't afford a court-ordered payment amount
- ☐ Property or assets that needed to be divided
- ☐ Guardianship



- ☐ Adoption
- ☐ Elder Abuse
- ☐ Visa or work permit issues
- ☐ Deportation concerns
- ☐ Applying for asylum or DACA
- ☐ Problems with Individual Education Plans (IEP), 504s or special education
- ☐ Suspension or expulsion
- ☐ Language access at school
- ☐ Problems transferring to a new or different school or staying at same school
- ☐ Bullying issues with peers
- ☐ Needed a will, Power of Attorney or Health Care Directive
- ☐ Probate issue
- ☐ Driver's license suspension
- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Wanted a name change
- ☐ Needed an ID or drivers' license
- ☐ Wanted to start a business
- ☐ Want to start a nonprofit organization
- ☐ Could not afford to pay taxes
- ☐ Didn't receive a tax credit
- ☐ Someone else claimed me or my dependents on tax returns without my permission
- ☐ Someone else used my Social Security number to earn income
- ☐ Did not receive my refund and could not reach the IRS to get status
- ☐ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**We're asking this next question to better understand which legal issues have the biggest impact on people's lives. This helps us improve how we prioritize services and make sure we're addressing the most urgent needs.**

**19. Which one of these legal issues has been the most difficult or important for you?** (Please only select one)

- ☐ Eviction or threat of eviction
- ☐ Unsafe conditions (mold, no heat, etc.)
- ☐ Problems with rent or landlord
- ☐ Security deposit not returned
- ☐ Mobile home issues
- ☐ Trouble with Section 8 / subsidized / public housing
- ☐ Own home but don't have deed, or deed is inaccurate
- ☐ Own home and couldn't afford to pay property taxes
- ☐ Problem with the homeowner's insurance company
- ☐ Lien placed on my home
- ☐ Not being paid or underpaid
- ☐ Unsafe working conditions
- ☐ Fired unfairly
- ☐ Denied unemployment
- ☐ Wage garnishment/attachment
- ☐ Denied food stamps, Medicaid, or cash aid
- ☐ Lost benefits without explanation
- ☐ Denied LIHEAP (low-income heating assistance)
- ☐ Problems applying for benefits
- ☐ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) issues
- ☐ Denied veterans disability or pension benefits
- ☐ Denied healthcare at VA facility
- ☐ Someone taking benefits from you
- ☐ A reduction in benefit amount received
- ☐ Needed expungement or sealing of a conviction or arrest

- ☐ Appealed the denial of a job, housing, or other opportunity based on past arrest or conviction record
- ☐ Tried to correct the arrest or conviction record because it was wrong
- ☐ Was not given a copy of the arrest conviction record used against me
- ☐ Harassment by debt collectors
- ☐ Scams or fraud
- ☐ Credit report problems
- ☐ Trouble with car loans or payday lenders
- ☐ Mortgage foreclosure
- ☐ Property tax debt/issues
- ☐ Utility termination
- ☐ Identity theft
- ☐ Divorce
- ☐ Custody or visitation
- ☐ Paternity had to be established
- ☐ Safety concerns with the other parent and my children
- ☐ Physical, emotional and/or financial abuse
- ☐ Child support or alimony problems
- ☐ Couldn't afford a court-ordered payment amount
- ☐ Property or assets that needed to be divided
- ☐ Guardianship
- ☐ Adoption
- ☐ Elder Abuse
- ☐ Visa or work permit issues
- ☐ Deportation concerns
- ☐ Applying for asylum or DACA
- ☐ Problems with Individual Education Plans (IEP), 504s or special education
- ☐ Suspension or expulsion
- ☐ Language access at school
- ☐ Problems transferring to a new or different school or staying at same school
- ☐ Bullying issues with peers

- ☐ Needed a will, Power of Attorney or Health Care Directive
- ☐ Probate issue
- ☐ Driver's license suspension
- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Wanted a name Change
- ☐ Needed an ID or drivers' license
- ☐ Wanted to start a business
- ☐ Want to start a nonprofit organization
- ☐ Could not afford to pay taxes
- ☐ Didn't receive a tax credit
- ☐ Someone else claimed me or my dependents on tax returns without my permission
- ☐ Someone else used my Social Security number to earn income
- ☐ Did not receive my refund and could not reach the IRS to get status
- ☐ I did not experience any legal issues in the past year
- ☐ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**20. Did you try to get legal help for that issue?**

- ☐ Yes (go to 21)
- ☐ No (got to 20b)
- ☐ Not yet, but planning to (got to 20b)

**20b. If not, why not? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ Didn't know where to go
- ☐ Couldn't afford it
- ☐ Didn't qualify for free help
- ☐ No transportation
- ☐ No internet access
- ☐ Worried it wouldn't help
- ☐ Afraid or uncomfortable talking about it
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. What type of help did you receive for that issue?**

- ☐ Full legal representation – A lawyer handled the issue for me from start to finish
- ☐ One-time legal advice or consultation – I talked to a lawyer once to get advice, but they didn't take on my case
- ☐ Help with forms or paperwork – Someone helped me fill out forms, write letters, or prepare documents
- ☐ Online resources or self-help materials – I used websites, guides, or videos to try to solve the problem on my own
- ☐ Support from a non-lawyer or community partner – I got help from a social worker, advocate, or other non-legal person
- ☐ None / I didn't get any help – I didn't get any kind of support for this issue
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Access to Legal Help**

**22. How do you find out about services that can help you (including legal help)? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ Word of mouth from family or friends
- ☐ Local community organizations or nonprofits
- ☐ Flyers or posters at local businesses or public places
- ☐ Libraries, schools, or churches
- ☐ Healthcare providers
- ☐ Court notices
- ☐ Local government or public assistance offices
- ☐ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- ☐ Online search (Google, websites, etc.)
- ☐ News outlets (TV, radio, newspaper)
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**23. Are you aware of any organizations that provide free legal help in your area?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

**24. Where would you be most comfortable getting legal help? (Choose top 3)**

- ☐ In person at a legal aid office
- ☐ At a community center, library, or church
- ☐ Over the phone
- ☐ By video call
- ☐ Through a mobile legal clinic that comes to town
- ☐ Online chat or email
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***Tech Access & Comfort***

We ask a few questions about your access to technology and how comfortable you are using it. This helps us figure out the best ways to connect with you — whether that's online, by phone, or in person — and make sure our services work for everyone.

**25. Do you have regular access to: (check all that apply)**

- ☐ A smartphone
- ☐ A computer or tablet
- ☐ Reliable internet/Wi-Fi
- ☐ None of the above

**26. Are you comfortable using video calls or online forms?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No

### **Future Legal Needs**

These questions help us understand what legal issues people might face in the near future, and what topics they want to learn more about. Your answers will help us offer better support, resources, and services before problems become harder to manage.

**27. Are you worried about facing any of these issues in the next 12 months?** (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Falling behind on rent or mortgage
- ☐ Facing eviction or losing housing
- ☐ Problems with a landlord or housing repairs
- ☐ Problems with employment
- ☐ Losing or being denied public benefits
- ☐ Debt collection or credit issues
- ☐ Needing a will or power of attorney
- ☐ Issues related to caregiving or elder care
- ☐ Needing custody, divorce, or child support help
- ☐ Facing immigration issues
- ☐ Needing to clear or seal a criminal record
- ☐ Concerns about identity theft or scams
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ I'm not sure
- ☐ No, I don't expect to face these issues

**28. Are there legal topics you'd like to learn more about?** (Select the top 5)

- ☐ How to avoid eviction or housing problems
- ☐ Applying for public benefits
- ☐ Your rights at work
- ☐ Understanding family law (custody, divorce, etc.)
- ☐ Immigration rights and options
- ☐ How to deal with debt or credit problems
- ☐ How to create a will or power of attorney
- ☐ Record sealing or expungement
- ☐ Legal help for seniors or caregivers

- ☐ How to prepare for court without a lawyer
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**29. If a lawyer gave you advice and instructions for you to represent yourself in court, how confident would you feel?**

- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not very confident
- ☐ Not at all confident
- ☐ It depends on the issue

**30. Have you ever tried to handle a legal issue on your own?**

- ☐ Yes, and it went well
- ☐ Yes, but it was difficult
- ☐ No, I've always had help
- ☐ No, I've never needed to
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**31. What was the legal issue you tried to handle on your own? If you handled more than one, pick the one that was most important to you?**

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**32. What was the hardest thing to handle about this issue?**

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### Availability & Contact Preferences

We know that getting legal help isn't always easy — busy schedules, limited internet, or past experiences can all make it harder. These questions help us understand what works best for you, what gets in the way, and how we can make legal help more accessible, respectful, and on your terms.

**33. What days of the week are best for you to get legal help?** (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Tuesday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday
- ☐ Friday
- ☐ Saturday
- ☐ Sunday
- ☐ It depends

**34. What time of day works best for you?** (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Morning (8am–12pm)
- ☐ Early Afternoon (12pm–3pm)
- ☐ Late Afternoon (3pm–6pm)
- ☐ Evening (after 6pm)
- ☐ I'm available anytime
- ☐ My schedule changes often

**35. How would you prefer to be contacted for scheduling or follow-up?** (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Phone call
- ☐ Text message
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Mail
- ☐ I would rather reach out myself when I'm ready
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**36. Are there any barriers that make it hard for you to communicate with or schedule time with a lawyer? (Please check all that apply)**

- ☐ No internet or unreliable internet
- ☐ No phone or limited phone access
- ☐ No transportation
- ☐ Not available during regular business hours
- ☐ Lack of childcare
- ☐ Language or communication barriers
- ☐ Disability-related access needs
- ☐ Concerns about privacy or safety
- ☐ Don't know how to find a lawyer
- ☐ Bad past experience with legal help
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Not sure

**37. Do you need any special accommodations to communicate with someone in person or virtually? (For example: a sign language interpreter, live captioning, extra time to process information, sensory-friendly environment, or help with reading or writing.)**

- ☐ No, I do not need any accommodations
- ☐ Yes (please describe what you need): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Not sure

### ***Trust and Perceptions of Legal Help***

For many people, working with a lawyer can feel intimidating, especially if they've had a bad experience or didn't feel heard or respected. These questions help us understand how comfortable people feel seeking legal help, how much they trust legal aid, and what we can do to make services more welcoming, inclusive, and fair for everyone.

**38. How comfortable would you feel working with a lawyer or legal professional?**

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Somewhat comfortable
- ☐ Not very comfortable
- ☐ Not at all comfortable
- ☐ I've never worked with a lawyer

**39. How much do you trust legal aid organizations to treat people in your community fairly and with respect?**

- ☐ Yes, I trust them
- ☐ I trust them somewhat
- ☐ No, I do not trust them
- ☐ I'm not sure / I don't know enough to say

**39b. If you do not trust legal aid organizations, can you share why? (Optional – for example, past experiences, concerns about fairness, how people are treated, etc.)**

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**39c. What would increase your trust in lawyers or legal aid services? (Please share anything that would make you feel more comfortable or confident in getting legal help.)**

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**39d. Have you ever chosen not to seek legal help because you were worried you wouldn't be treated fairly or respectfully, or because of a past bad experience?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

#### ***Experience with Legal Aid***

If you've gotten help from Summit Legal Aid (previously Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid (SPLA) and Laurel Legal Services) or Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS), we'd really like to hear about your experience. Your feedback — whether good or bad — helps us understand what's working, what needs to improve, and how we can better serve people in the future.

**40. Have you ever received legal help from Summit Legal Aid (formerly Southwestern Pennsylvania Aid and Laurel Legal Services)?**

- ☐ Yes (go to 40b)
- ☐ No (go to 42)
- ☐ Not sure (go to 42)

**40b. If yes, how would you rate your experience?**

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**40c. Please share a bit about why you provided the rating in the previous question:**

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**41. Would you recommend Summit Legal Aid (formerly Southwestern Pennsylvania Aid and Laurel Legal Services) to someone who needs legal help?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe / It depends
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**42. Have you ever received legal help from Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS)?**

- ☐ Yes (go to 42b)
- ☐ No (go to 44)
- ☐ Not sure (go to 44)

**42b. If yes, how would you rate your experience?**

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**42c. Please share a bit about why you provided the rating in the previous question:**

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**43. Would you recommend NLS to someone who needs legal help?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe / It depends
- ☐ Prefer not to answer



### ***Final Thoughts (Optional)***

We've asked a lot of questions, but your voice matters most. If there's anything else you'd like to share about legal needs in your community — or anything we didn't ask about — we'd love to hear it.

**44. Is there anything else you want to share about legal needs in your community?**

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**Thank you for participating in the Neighborhood Legal Services and Summit Legal Aid Needs Assessment. Your voice will help us shape the services we can provide inside our community.**

Please provide an email address or phone number that can be used to enter you in the drawing for a \$100.00 gift card. We will notify you after the survey closes on August 8th if you are selected in the drawing.

All survey responses are anonymous and contact information will be used only to deliver the gift card.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_