

Civil Legal Aid in Family Law



Line Item 0321-1600

Survivors of domestic violence face a critical need for help with restraining orders and other family law issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic (FY20-FY22), there was a 40% increase in domestic abuse cases, a 55% increase in support cases, and a 25% increase in custody/visitation cases.

Legal aid helps people stabilize their families by:

- Providing advice and representation, and enforcing legal protections, for survivors of domestic violence
- Securing favorable property settlements and preventing foreclosure and eviction
- Enforcing divorce and child support orders
- Addressing denial of benefits

\$126 million

in economic benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including:

\$1.6 million

in health care savings for survivors of domestic violence

\$3.2 million

in total lifetime child support

2,888

family law cases were closed in FY22 including:

1,011 Divorce, Separation, and Annulment

853 Custody and Visitation

427 Domestic Abuse

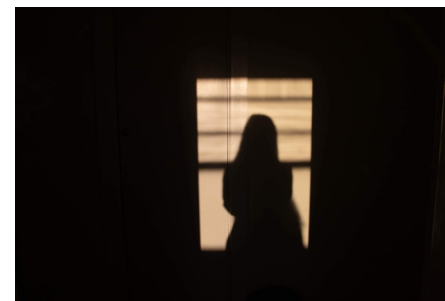
211 Child and Spousal Support

230 Other Family

113 Adult Guardianship and Conservatorship

43 Paternity, Name Change, Parental Rights Termination, and Adoption

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four; \$18,225 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.



Shirley* wanted to divorce her abusive husband, but he refused to negotiate the terms of a joint divorce petition. He was also defying the abuse protection order she had obtained against him and was engaging in increasingly threatening behavior. Shirley's immediate concern became extending that order, which was set to expire soon.

She contacted **Veterans Legal Services** and an attorney got right to work on her case. Thanks to the attorney's advocacy in court, Shirley succeeded in extending the protection order, which provided her more time to finalize her divorce and secure new, safe, and stable housing.

*Name changed for privacy