

# Legal Needs Assessment



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## Introduction and Summary

Periodically, Northeast Legal Aid (NLA) on behalf of both itself and its subsidiary, the Northeast Justice Center (NJC), conducts a Legal Needs Assessment. NLA's most recent Legal Needs Assessment was completed just over four years ago in November 2015. These assessments are designed to answer the following question:



### **What are the most pressing legal needs of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts?**

NLA's approach to answering this question is to use the following methods:

1. **Survey:** conduct a survey designed to identify and rank the severity of the legal problems facing low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.
2. **Data Mining of Case Management System:** conduct a study of the legal problems for which residents of northeastern Massachusetts contact Northeast Legal Aid seeking help.
3. **Listening Sessions:** conduct a series of meetings with agencies, local individuals, and other stakeholders designed to elicit from them their opinion concerning the legal problems facing low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.

The results of this Needs Assessment will be used by NLA to strategically plan with its board, managers, staff, and stakeholders to target its resources to most effectively deliver legal services in northeastern Massachusetts. The strategic planning process will examine how NLA and NJC are, or are not, focused on the most pressing legal needs of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts, the strategies currently used to deliver legal services, and the strategies it will adopt going forward.

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## Survey

NLA's 2020 Legal Needs Assessment included a survey. The goal of this survey was to identify the most pressing civil legal needs of low income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.



### Language Access to Survey

The survey was offered in both English and Spanish and could be completed on-line, on paper, or on a tablet device provided at NLA's offices.

### Distribution and Promotion of Survey

The survey was distributed directly to individuals seeking legal services at NLA's offices in both a paper format and via an iPad, on NLA's website, and on NLA's Facebook, and Twitter pages. It was sent to clients at case closing. Additionally, upon completion of an online application for NLA's legal services, individuals were redirected to the survey. Finally, the survey was also made available to staff, clients, local attorneys, elected officials, community members and other stakeholders of NLA, NJC, and other social service agencies via email link and paper format.

NLA's distribution and promotion of the survey resulted in 1,480 survey responses over a two-year period running from January 2018 through January 2020.<sup>1</sup>

### The Survey Questions

The survey included a list of 24 legal problems low-income and elderly people may have. Participants were asked to:

**rate how big an impact you think each legal problem has on low-income and elderly people in northeastern Massachusetts generally.**

The rating scale ranged from 1 to 5 meaning:

- 1: Generally, the legal problem has no impact;
- 2: Generally, the legal problem has a small impact;
- 3: Generally, the legal problem has a moderate impact;
- 4: Generally, the legal problem has a more than moderate but not a great impact; and
- 5: Generally, the legal problem has a great impact.

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<sup>1</sup> NLA decided to use responses over a two-year period in order to garner a robust set of survey responses, while still providing timely results.

NLA's hope was that aggregation of the respondent's rating would allow NLA to assess not only the most pressing civil legal need of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts, but to rank them as well.

The 24 legal problems participants were asked to rate were drawn from the experience of NLA. Input from NLA and NJC staff was received in developing this list of legal problems. The list of civil legal problems presented to the survey respondents included:

1. **EDUCATION PROBLEMS**, such as quality of public primary and secondary education offerings, Special Education, Suspensions and Expulsions, transportation, access to education for the homeless, and higher education costs;
2. **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS**, such as needing assistance in the formation of community groups, tenant organizations, and non-profit organizations focused on the needs of low-income and elderly people;
3. **VETERANS PROBLEMS**, such as Veterans Benefits, homelessness, domestic relation, employment, healthcare, mental health care, and discharge upgrades;
4. **EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS**, such as unlawful firing, wage and hours disputes, unlawful discrimination, access to job training, and dangerous workplaces;
5. **LAW ENFORCEMENT/POLICE PROBLEMS**, such as mass incarceration of young men, school to prison pipeline, and selective enforcement of laws against certain communities/races/ethnicities/income-groups/religions/nationalities/sexual-orientations;
6. **BUSINESS PROBLEMS**, such as business formation, zoning issues, licensing, start-ups generally and taxes;
7. **DIGNITY PROBLEMS**, such as disrespectful, humiliating or denigrating treatment by those who are supposed to help;
8. **ELDER LAW PROBLEMS**, such as elder financial abuse, elder physical and emotional abuse, elder access to health care (including nursing home disputes), legal problems associated with behaviors traceable to medical conditions such as Alzheimer's Disease, disability, guardianships of adults and housing accessibility;
9. **PRIVATE BENEFITS PROBLEMS**, such as employer provided health insurance claims and retirement benefits disputes;
10. **FINES AND PENALTIES PROBLEMS**, such as parking and traffic tickets, court fines and restitution orders, late payment penalties, overdraft fees.
11. **IMMIGRATION PROBLEMS**, such as naturalization, deportation, human trafficking, and immigrant victims of domestic violence.
12. **HOUSING PROBLEMS**, such as eviction defense, foreclosure prevention, bad housing conditions, condominium disputes, housing affordability, housing discrimination, and subsidy denials and terminations;
13. **CONSUMER PROBLEMS**, such as unfair debt collection, identity theft, bankruptcy, utilities, mortgage servicer abuses, consumer fraud, payday lender abuses, loan sharks, student loans, and access to bank accounts and loans.
14. **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and ABUSE PROBLEMS**, such as protective orders (209As), safety planning, relocation, child abuse and neglect (Care and

- Protection Cases), child requiring assistance (formerly CHINS), guardianship of children, and related family law matters;
15. **PUBLIC BENEFITS PROBLEMS**, such as TAFDC ("Welfare"), SNAP (Food Stamps), Emergency Assistance (Family Shelter Benefits), Disability (SSI and SSDI), Social Security Retirement, Health (MassHealth and Medicare), Veterans benefits (DVA and Veterans Services), and Unemployment Compensation;
  16. **CRIMINAL RECORDS PROBLEMS**, such as the effect a criminal record (CORI) has on getting or keeping a job, accessing an education, qualifying for subsidized housing and other benefits;
  17. **TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS**, such as accessibility and affordability of public transportation, "The RIDE", taxi services, and license suspensions;
  18. **TAX PROBLEMS**, such as tax-return preparation, tax disputes and tax collection;
  19. **FOOD AND NUTRITION PROBLEMS**, such as access to quality nutritious foods, cost of food, and "Food Deserts";
  20. **PRIVACY PROBLEMS**, such as surveillance by government and private entities, unlawful release of private information, and failure to protect private information;
  21. **FAMILY LAW PROBLEMS**, such as divorce, custody, child support, visitation, paternity and property division;
  22. **LEGAL INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROBLEMS**, such as a lack of information about the law and opportunities to learn it;
  23. **UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION PROBLEMS**, such as discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, immigration status, disability, language, and family status; and
  24. **HEALTH PROBLEMS**, such as access to health care, cost of health care, environmental and pollution issues, pest infestations, and community health/communicable diseases.

After rating all of the legal problems listed above, participants were asked an additional question:

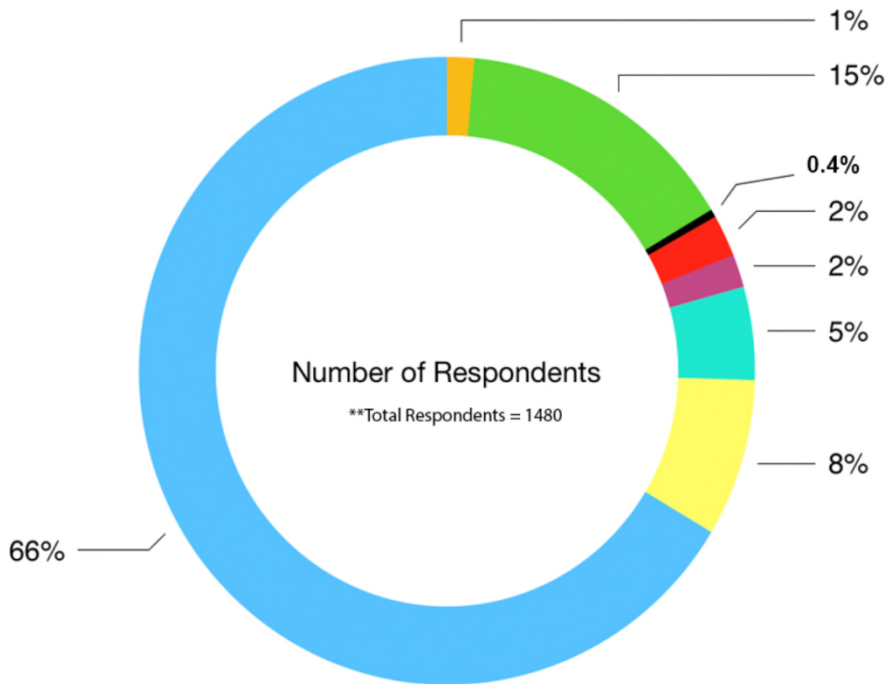
“Of all the legal problems you rated, please select the ONE that you feel is the most pressing legal problem facing low income and elderly people in northeastern Massachusetts.”

### Survey Respondents

As part of the survey, all 1,480 survey respondents were asked to select the choice which most accurately described their relationship to legal aid. The survey participants identified themselves as follows:

	Number of Respondents
Attorney: Non-Legal Aid	21
Community Member who has never been a client of a legal aid program	222
Elected Official or Legislative Aid	6
Employee or Board Member of a legal aid program	32
Governmental Agency/Organization	25
Non-Governmental Agency/Organization	71
Other	120
Seeking Legal Services, Current Client or Former Client of a legal aid program	983
Total	1,480

- Attorney: Non-Legal Aid
- Community Member who has never been a client of a legal aid program
- Elected Official or Legislative Aid
- Employee or Board Member of a legal aid program
- Governmental Agency/Organization
- Non-Governmental Agency/Organization
- Other
- Seeking Legal Services, Current Client or Former Client of a legal aid program

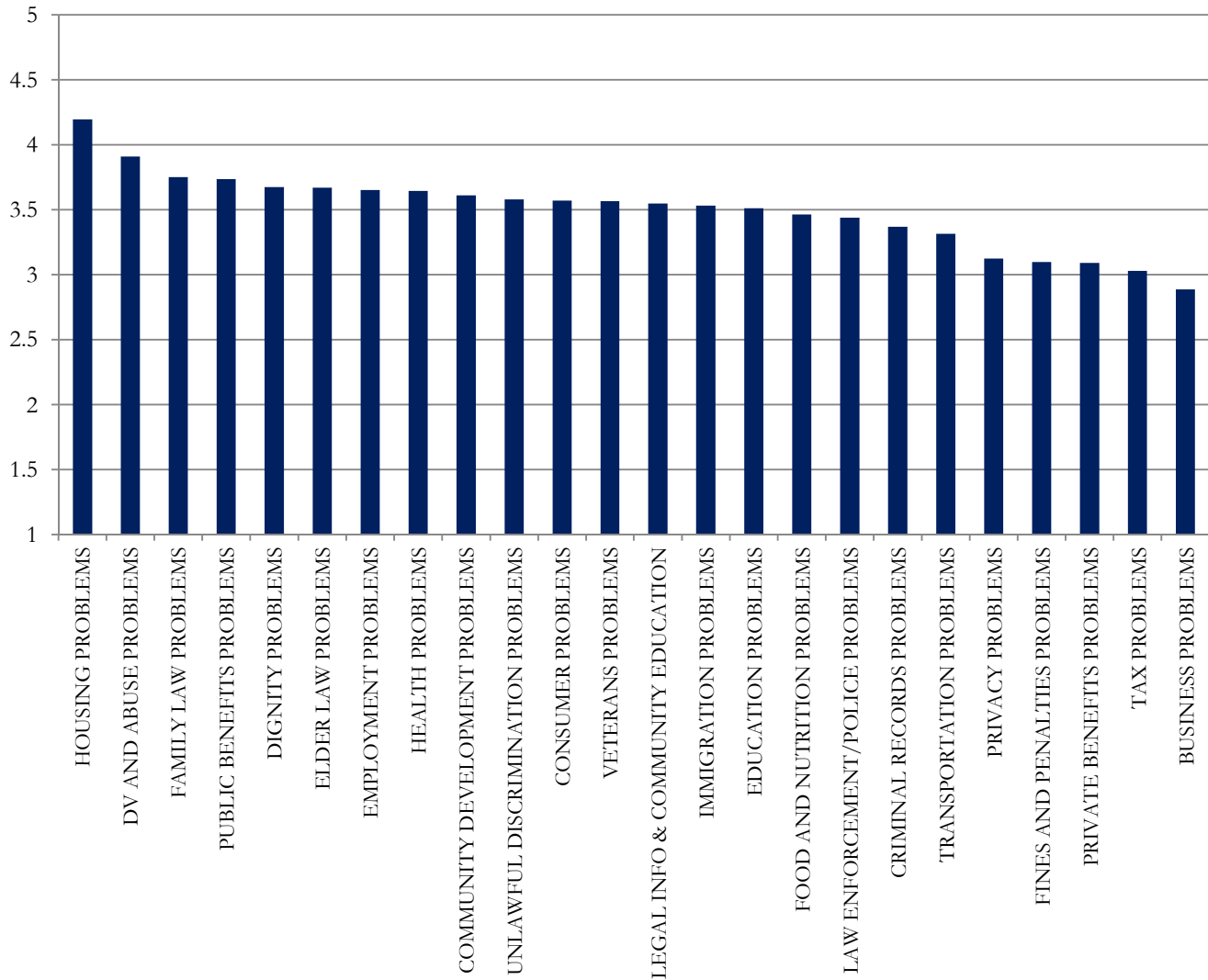


## Survey Results

Survey participants were asked to rate the 24 legal problems regarding how big of an impact they think each legal problem has on low-income and elderly people in northeastern Massachusetts.

The responses of all respondents averaged as follows:

### Average Ratings of All Respondents

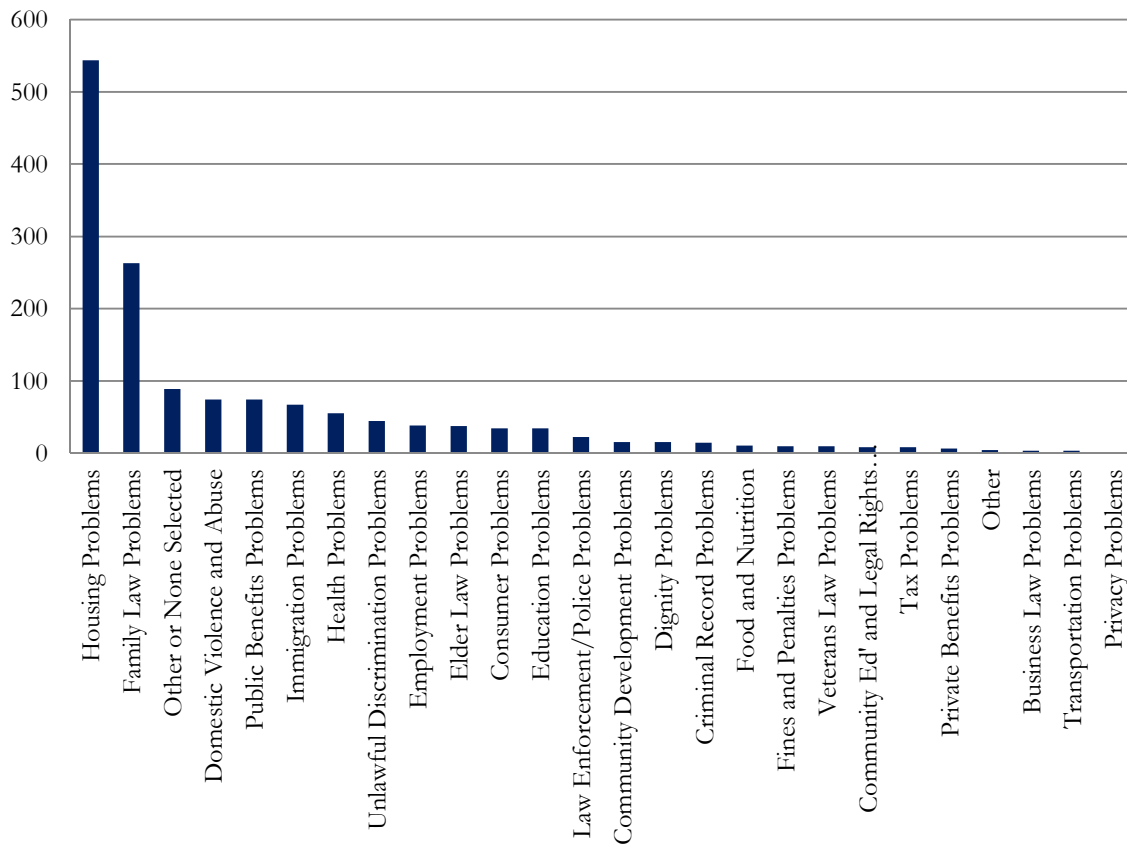


When asked to pick the most pressing legal problem low-income and elderly people in northeastern Massachusetts face, there was a strong consensus:

Housing problems were the most pressing.



## Total Responses as Most Pressing Legal Need



### Subcategories of Respondents

As part of the survey, NLA made an effort to differentiate between the ratings of different categories of respondents to identify differences between them as regards their ratings of the 24 legal problems studied. Survey participants identified themselves into one of seven different categories.<sup>2</sup>

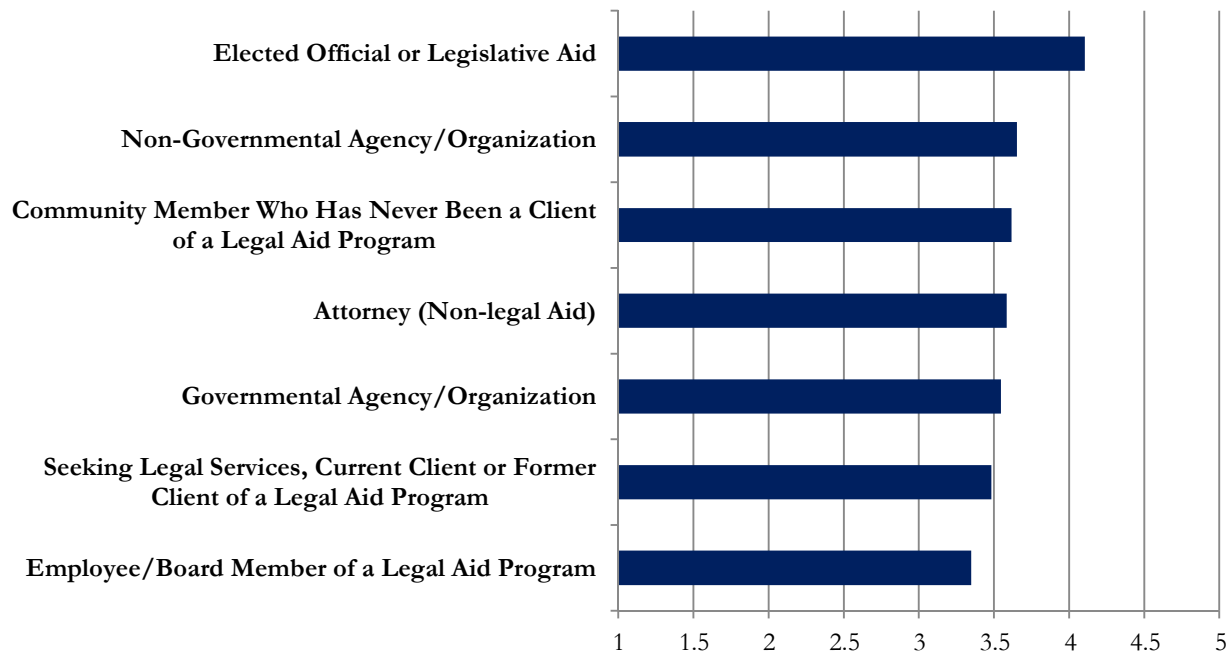
1. Attorney (non-legal aid)
2. Community Member who has never been a client of a legal aid program
3. Elected Official or Legislative Aid
4. Employee or Board Member of a legal aid program
5. Governmental Agency/Organization
6. Non-Governmental Agency/Organization
7. Seeking Legal Services, Current Client or Former Client of a legal aid program

<sup>2</sup> Of note, the “elected official or legislative aid” category only includes 6 survey participants. Additionally, these comparisons do not include individuals who either chose not to respond to this questions or identified themselves as “other.”

Comparisons between these categories revealed several insights.

- All subcategories of respondents produced an average rating of over 3.0.
- Only one subcategory, “elected official or legislative aid,” had an average rating above 4.0.
- On average, clients (prospective, current, and former) as well as legal aid program employees and board members gave the lowest severity ratings.

## Average Severity Rating by Subcategory



### Comparison of Opinions: Individual Types of Legal Problems

The comparison chart on the following page shows:

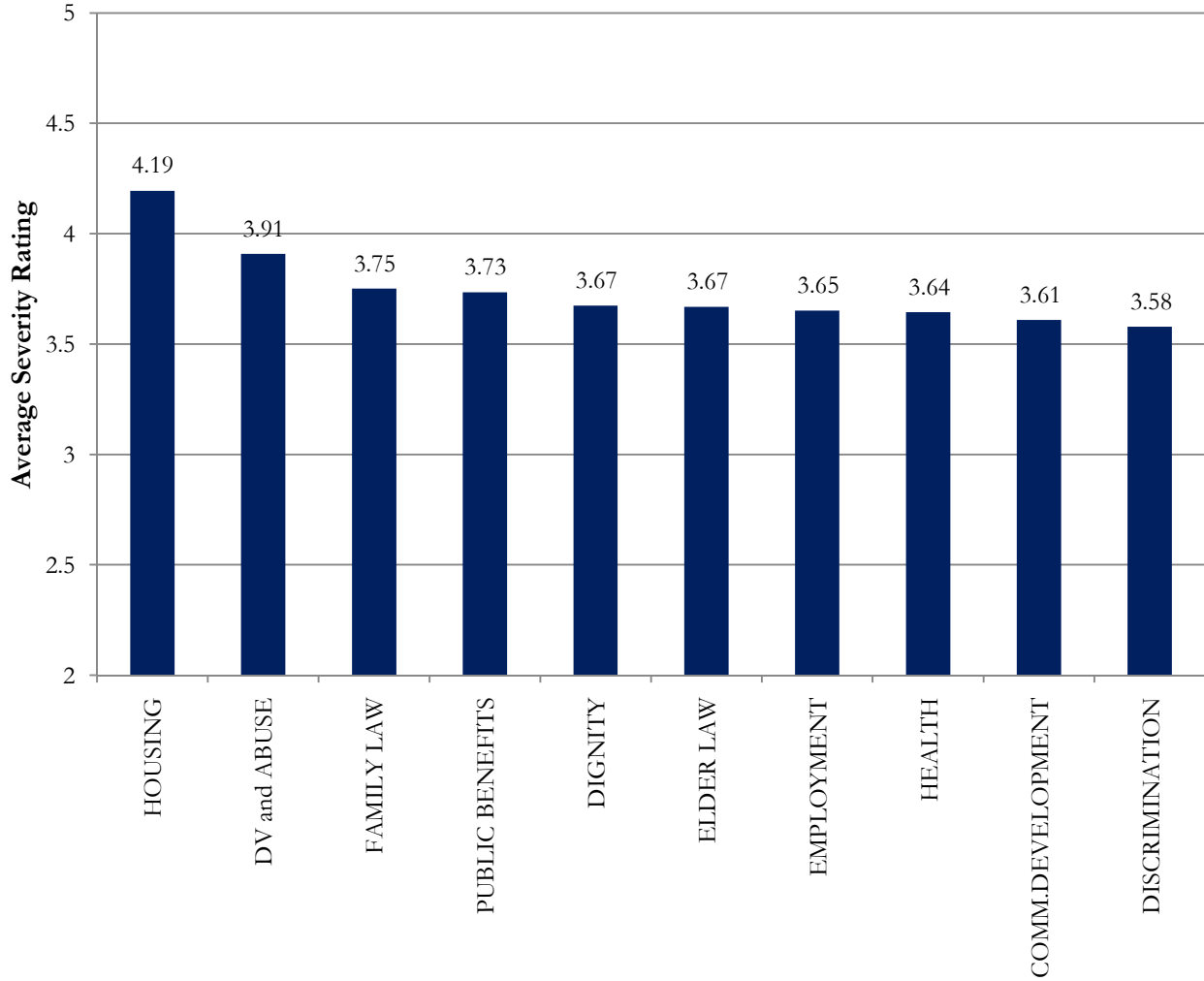
1. Each subcategory had a similar view of the relative severity of the 24 listed legal problems as compared to each other.
2. Most subcategories viewed housing as the most pressing problem facing low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.
3. Each of the subcategories tended to view business, private benefits, tax, and privacy problems as the least severe problems facing low-income and elderly residents or northeastern Massachusetts.

### Average Severity Rating by Subcategory



### Top 10 Legal Problems

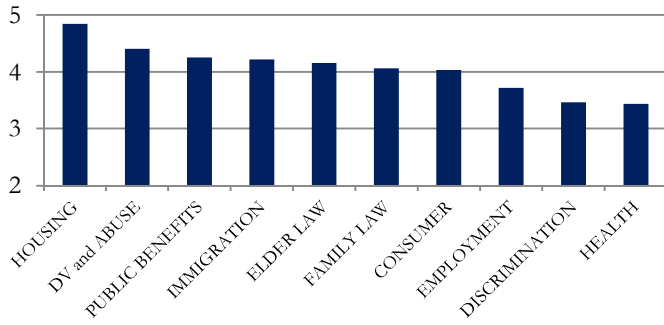
The ten most pressing legal problems as rated by all 1,480 survey participants were:



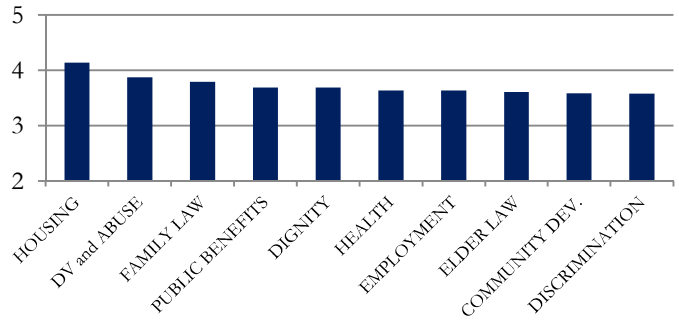
### Top 10 Legal Problems by Subcategory

On the next page are eight charts displaying the top 10 most pressing legal problems as rated by each of the subcategories of participants.

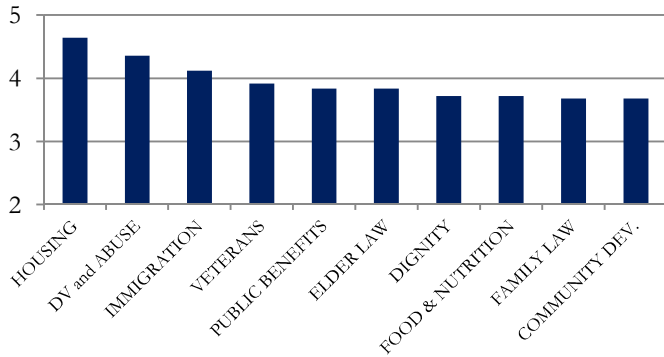
**Employee/Board Member of a Legal Aid Program**



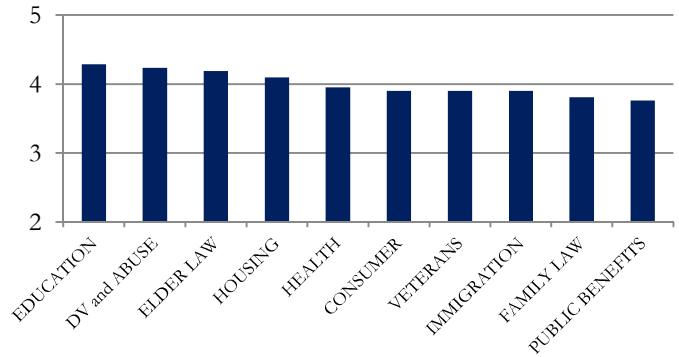
**Prospective, Current Client or Former Client of a legal aid program**



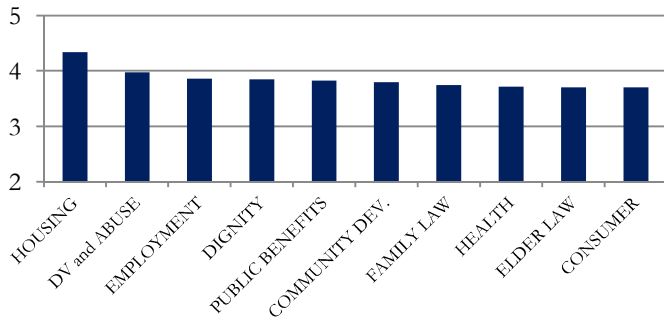
**Governmental Agency/Organization**



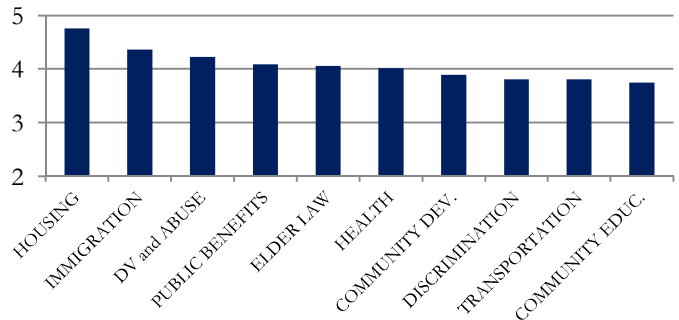
**Attorney (Non-legal Aid)**



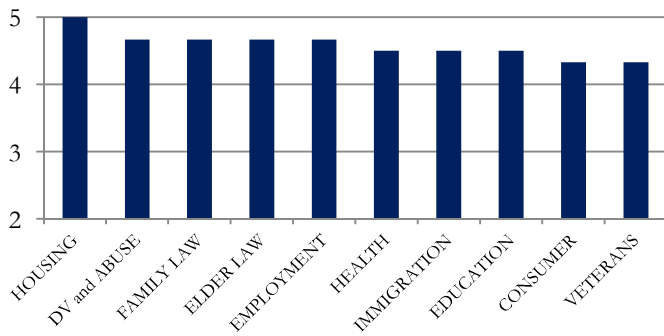
**Community Member Who Has Never Been a Client of a Legal Aid Program**



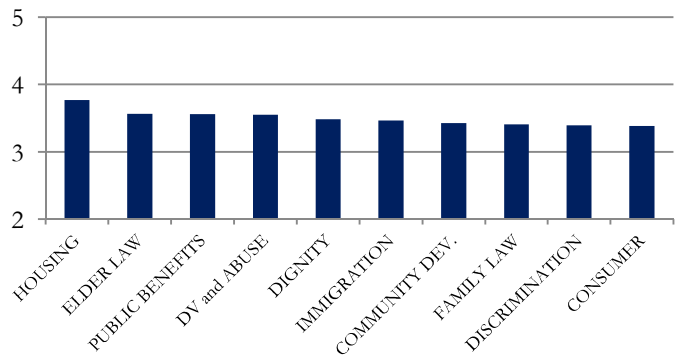
**Non-Governmental Agency/Organization**



**Elected Official or Legislative Aid**



**Other**



## Conclusion

According to the survey, the most pressing civil legal problems low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts face are:

**HOUSING PROBLEMS**, such as eviction defense, affordability, lack of housing stock availability, foreclosure prevention, poor housing conditions, housing discrimination, and subsidy denials and terminations.

The list of 24 types of legal problems appears well chosen and revealed that nearly all were significant problems facing low-income and elderly individuals. As such, the “Top 10” should not preclude those that scored slightly lower from being considered a “pressing legal problem” facing low-income and elderly individuals of northeastern Massachusetts.

## Data Mining Case Management System

Here we examine the legal problems for which people contact NLA and its subsidiary, NJC.

Presumably, the problems for which people contact NLA and NJC are an indication of what the most pressing legal problems are facing low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.



### Data Collection and Results

NLA operates a central “intake unit” that screens all requests for legal services for both NLA and NJC and records the dispositions of each request. The intake unit disposed of the requests as follows:

1. Rejected immediately for reason, or
2. Opened for some level of legal services by Northeast Legal Aid or Northeast Justice Center

The total number of requests for legal services is the sum of the cases rejected (11,987) and the cases opened for some level of legal service (2,611). For the two-year period studied, the intake unit processed 14,598 requests for legal aid.

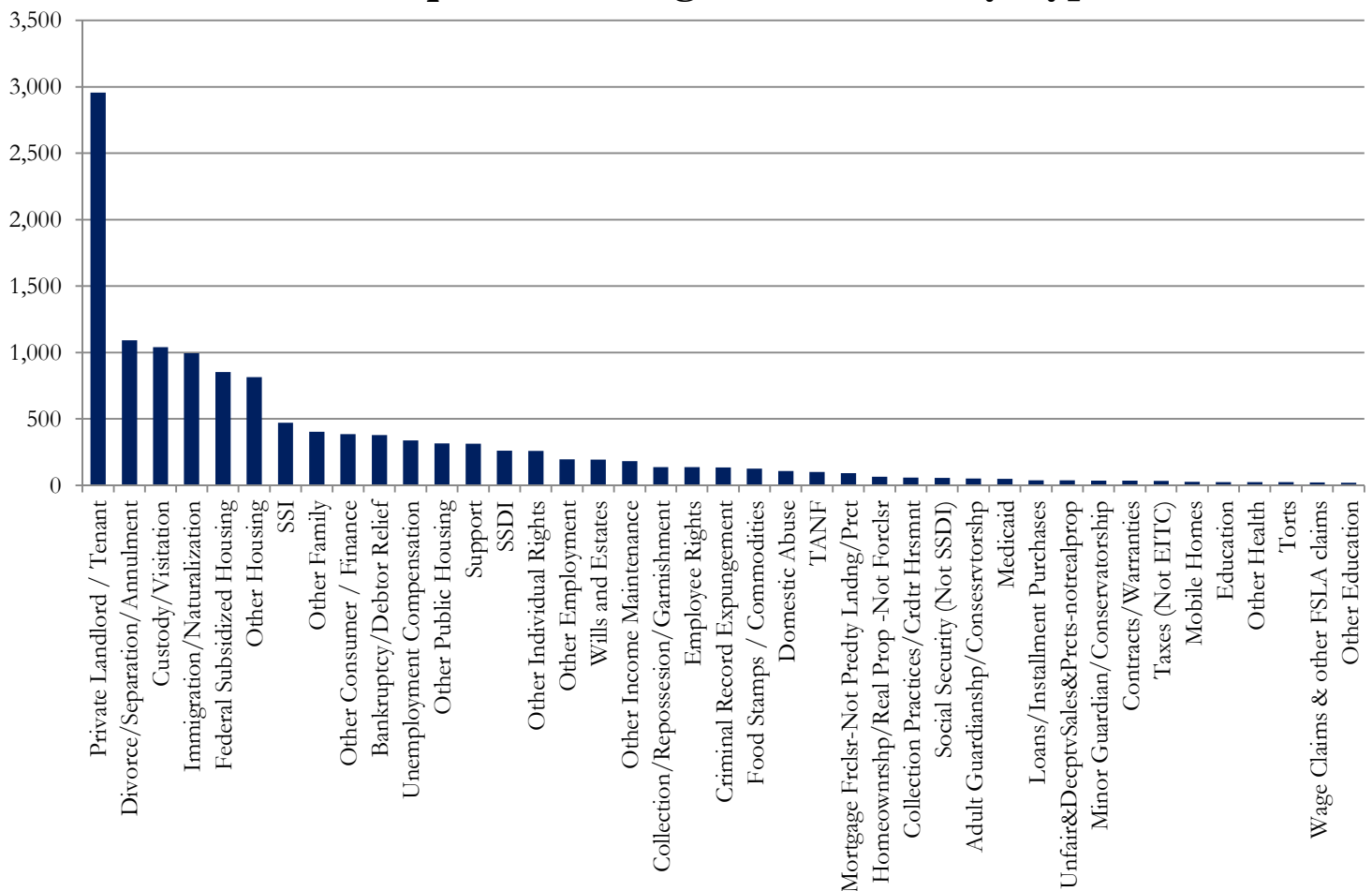
### Types of Legal Problems

Each request for assistance during the period studied, whether rejected or opened, was coded in accordance with standard Legal Problem codes approved by the Legal Services Corporation, thereby allowing NLA to total and compare the demand for assistance for each type of legal problem listed.

For the two-year period studied, 70 types of legal problems were identified among the 14,598 requests processed by the intake unit. Of those 14,598 requests, 1,236 were categorized generally as other.

41 types of legal problems were identified to have at least 20 requests for assistance of that type.

## Total Requests For Legal Assistance By Type



### Categories of Legal Problems

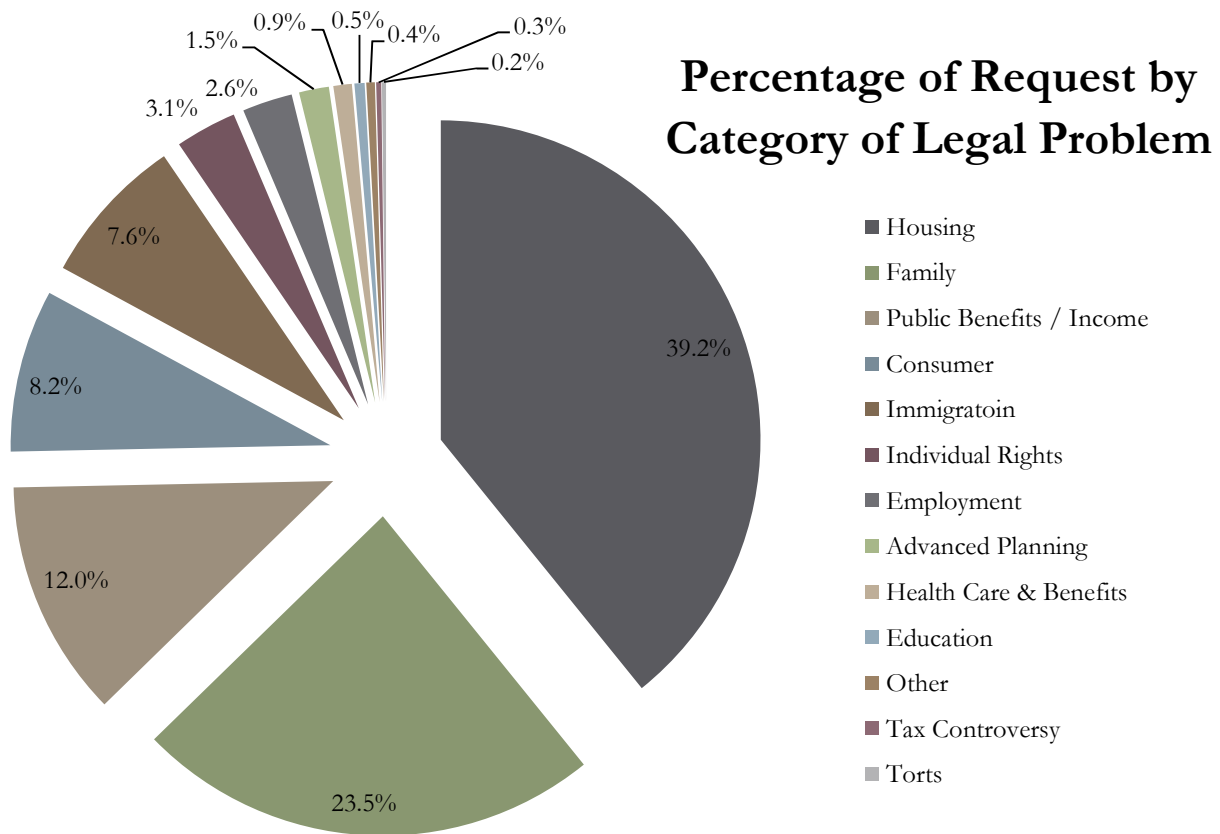
The types of legal problem codes described above can be grouped into the following categories of legal problems:

- Housing
- Family
- Public benefits-income
- Consumer
- Immigration
- Individual rights
- Employment
- Wills, Estates, Advance Directives, Powers of Attorney, and Other Advanced Planning
- Healthcare and Health Benefits
- Education
- Other Miscellaneous
- Tax Controversy
- Torts



More than half (≈62.7%) of the requests for legal services assistance processed by the intake unit for the two-year period studied fell into just two categories: Housing and Family.

Slightly over 90% of all requests for legal services assistance processed by the intake unit for the two-year period studied were in on of the following categories of legal problems: Housing, Family, Public Benefits-Income, Consumer, or Immigration.<sup>3</sup>



**Conclusion**

To the extent that the legal problems for which people contact NLA are an indication of the types and significance of the legal problems facing low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts, the types of legal problems that are most pressing are housing problems followed by family law matters, public benefits problems, consumer problems, and immigration problems.

<sup>3</sup> Northeast Legal Aid does not collect demographic data such as: age; ethnicity; and geographic location of those who request legal services but are rejected by the intake unit. As such, Northeast Legal Aid cannot use its case management system to differentiate between age groups, ethnic groups, or geographic locations in regard to the problems with which applicants are seeking assistance.

## Listening Sessions

### Listening Sessions

As part of NLA/NJC's Needs Assessment, it held one two-hour Listening Session at each of its three office locations (Lowell, Lynn, and Lawrence, Massachusetts).

These sessions were held on:

- November 22, 2019 from 12-2 in Lowell, MA
- November 25, 2019 from 12-2 in Lynn, MA
- December 16, 2019 from 12-2 in Lawrence, MA



Lunch was served at each session. All participants and staff wore name tags to encourage dialog. The sessions were held in a round table format to foster conversation, and to give equal voice to all participants.

Invitations to attend the listening session of their choice were sent to the directors of over 90 organizations located throughout northeastern Massachusetts. The organizations that were invited were organizations that delivered services to low income or elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts and were considered by NLA to be part of a network of service providers most likely to have thoughtful opinions concerning the legal needs of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts.

A total of 25 organizations (54 people) attended these sessions:

**Lynn Session:** 28 people from 12 organizations attended this session:



**Lynn Community Health Center**

Provider of comprehensive health care of the highest quality to everyone in the community, regardless of their ability to pay.



**Mass Senior Action Council**

A statewide, grassroots, senior-led organization that empowers its members to use their own voices to address key public policy and community issues that affect their health and well-being.



**My Brother's Table**

Provider of food, addressing the nutritional needs of the hungry.



**YWCA Greater Newburyport:**

Supporter of women and their families through programming that addresses their health and wellness, aids in the development of job skills and provides access to affordable housing and childcare programs.



**Essex County Community Organization**

A multi-faith network advocating for Immigration Reform, Workers Rights and Equal Justice.



**Pathways**

A multi-faith network advocating for Immigration Reform, Workers Rights and Equal Justice.



**Raw Art Works**

Youth organization, rooted in Art Therapy.



**HAWC**

Provider of free help and emergency services to victims of domestic violence.



**Harborlight Community Partners**

Organization working to develop, manage and advocate for quality, service-enriched housing that is affordable and inclusive.



**Action Inc.**

Organization working with the people of Cape Ann, providing services that address a wide range of needs.



**Lynn Economic Opportunity:**

A Community Action program that delivers a wide variety of services to the poor.



**Greater Lynn Senior Services:**

Multi-serviced organization addressing the needs of Elderly individuals in the community.

**Lawrence Session:** 10 people from 6 organizations attended this session:



**Methuen Housing Authority**

Provider of safe, decent, sanitary and affordable housing for low to moderate income individuals and families.



**Lawrence Community Works**

Community Action Program providing a wide variety of services to those in Lawrence.



**Office of Congresswoman Trahan**

Representative aid on behalf of Congresswoman Lori Trahan.

**Point After Club**

**Point After Club**

Provides a wide range of community based services to individuals with Mental Health Issues.



**St. Vincent De Paul**

Faith based volunteer organization that provide person-to-person services to the needy and suffering.



**Lawrence Public Schools**

Public Schools (LPS) system was established, the district is in the midst of a historic transformation to better serve our students.

**Lowell Session:** 11 people from 7 organizations attended this session:



**MassHire Lowell Career Center**

Organization providing those in the Employers, Job seekers and Youth in the community with a wide range of services.



**Community Teamwork**

Community Action Program providing a wide variety of services to lower income individuals in the community.



**Saheli Boston**

Organization that provides Support to South Asian Women and Families, offering free services to women and families in Massachusetts.



**International Institute of New England**

Organization creating opportunities for refugees and immigrants to succeed through resettlement, education, career advancement and pathways to citizenship.



**Center for Hope and Healing**

Organization advocating for and providing support to survivors of sexual assault.



**New Lynn Coalition**

**New Lynn Coalition:**

Community organization based in Lynn that provides a wide variety of services and support to those in the

## North Canal Apartments

**North Canal Apartments**

Apartment complex in Lowell that offers housing to a mixed-income population through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program.

## The Listening Sessions' Results

During each two-hour listening session, the participants shared their thoughts and observations on the most pressing legal concerns for low-income and elderly residents in the community. All of the conversations were moderated, and several open ended questions were asked by the moderator to get the sessions started. Participants often cited issues of concern that were most relevant to their particular program, but they also collaborated with other participants to voice their concern for shared community problems. Domestic violence and housing issues pervaded many of the discussions, as these issues were either the source of the conflict or were added to another legal issue. Legal problems discussed at the Listening Sessions included, in no particular order, the following:

### HOUSING ISSUES:

- *Affordability* of housing: People cannot afford the rising rents in the community because of gentrification and rising cost of living. People are mostly renting rooms. Clients are not able to find housing within their budgets, rents for one bedrooms are \$1300- \$1600, and 2 bedrooms are \$1400- \$1700, forcing people to live with 6-10 people in a household.
  - Actual median incomes for constituents is reported as closer to \$600- \$800/month, especially for those who are disabled, and those receiving DTA benefits may only get \$300.
  - Apartments require first and last month's rent, and they need references, which acts as a substantial barrier to accessing housing.
  - There is an increase in the number of working families and those families are still losing housing and cannot afford the rising rents.
- *Rent control*: In some communities, housing costs are spiraling out of reach for residents. Rent is increasing but income is not.
- *Shelters*: Shelters are full and some families not eligible for shelter.
- *Housing discrimination*: landlords unfairly refuse housing to individuals due to background, demographics, and income.
  - Some apartment complexes have unfair barriers to entry, including income requirements.
  - Landlords run background checks and unfairly deny housing based on the background checks.
  - Landlords often deny housing to individuals with CORIs.
  - Landlords often refuse families with young children based on lead certification requirements, costs, etc.
- *Lack of housing stock*: There are more people than apartments, and people are over-crowded because of affordability.
  - When families lose housing many become homeless but shelters are full, they may have to go to Springfield or Fall River to get into a shelter. This causes a disruption in children's schooling and is traumatic for children and families who lose support networks.
  - In some communities, including in Lowell, large institutions are displacing people by buying properties.

- *Lack of financial coaching:* Tenants cannot afford rents because of rent increases and they do not have access to financial coaching which can ameliorate some financial issues.
- *Advocacy:* Some groups are not being provided the advocacy they need.
  - *Mental health:* Individuals with mental health impairments may face issues preventing those tenants from self-advocating.
  - *Elderly tenants:* Elderly individuals are particularly vulnerable because they are on limited income. This results in many elderly individuals being displaced.
  - Some housing court sessions, including the Salem session, need for more attorneys to provide advocacy, including through lawyer-for-the-day.
- *Conditions* are poor in much of the housing stock, yet rent can remain high.
  - When people, especially immigrant families, find an apartment there are often unhealthy conditions. Immigrant families are threatened by landlords who tell them that the family will be reported to ICE if they report the conditions.
- *Overcrowding:* Overcrowding increases health hazards and unsafe living conditions.
  - Inspectional Services needs to help more.
  - Overcrowding results in children sleeping in basements, on concrete floor, next to water heaters, near furnaces, etc.
  - The Columbia gas explosions illuminated many problems including, but not limited to, multiple families residing in one unit with whole families sharing one bedroom. These families resort to taking shifts for time in the bathroom, kitchen, etc.
  - Many property owners are renting out illegal attic or basement units which do not have proper plumbing or heating.
  - In Lynn, the Mayor and City Council are primarily supporting market rate housing, forcing individuals to “double (or triple) up” so they can afford housing.
- *Survivors of physical and sexual abuse:* Victims of sexual assault and violence cannot leave their current housing because they cannot afford housing on their own.
- *Legal information and education:* Know your rights presentations are needed to inform individuals in the communities. Generally, there is a need for more education for tenants and landlords.
- *Frequent Upheaval:* Tenants move frequently which disrupts education, creates a lack of stability, and otherwise is detrimental to individuals, especially children.
- *Youth homelessness:* Homelessness among youth is a new issue that is growing, especially among LGBTQ children who are kicked out of the house and end up homeless. HUD will not house children under 18. One possible suggestion is youth drop-in shelters.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (D.V.) ISSUES:**

- D.V. intersects many areas of law, including: housing, education, immigration, education.
- Housing authorities require too much documentation, deny D.V. priority, and are inconsistent in applying the rules.
- D.V. cases need full representation as cases are complex and time sensitive. Often, if they are referred to NLA, victims do not hear back or are rejected.
- Some private attorneys do not understand the dynamics of domestic violence.

### ACCESS ISSUES:

- Federally funded organizations are required to provide interpretation but this is not generally being done.
- Law enforcement generally does not providing translation services. Additionally, law enforcement will use sub-par translations such as using friends without checking for conflicts or other vetting processes. This results in inadequate and incorrect translation, shaming the victim, and the translator lying about what the victim says.
- Bad translation happens in court and in hospitals. Clients who experience sexual assault do not have follow-up with translator, which leads to those crimes not being prosecuted.
- Some providers:
  - Lack cultural competency
  - Are not trauma-informed (especially some District Attorneys)
  - Do not provide adequate election information
  - Do not provide translated paperwork
  - Do not verify individuals understand the paperwork being signed.
- There should be more “know your rights” presentations on language access rules and requirements.
- Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are not used enough to disseminate information, especially translated information, even though they may be the best format for translations to get out to the public.

### IMMIGRATION:

- There is a shortage of attorneys assisting in asylum cases.
- Many cases involve family law and immigration issues.
- Adequate help is neither available through clinics nor through private bar.
  - There is a lacking of affordable representation.
  - NJC closed for intake.
  - *Notario* fraud is a big issue in Lawrence and Lynn particularly despite the names of fraudulent *notarios* being available. There are two issues here, notaries not doing adequate work or poor legal work and *notarios* pretending to be attorneys.
- There needs to be more communication about what resources are available at NLA/NJC.
- Lack of available family lawyers is a problem because the abused has to stay with the abuser.
- Need trauma-informed advocates especially in cases where D.V. may exist.
- Safe-link does not have language competency.
- “Know your rights” trainings are needed desperately. Immigrants do not know their rights regarding tenancies, especially relating to conditions, which leads to many immigrants living with bad housing conditions. There are many issues facing immigrants such as living conditions and abuse by landlords. Immigrants are afraid to speak up as they often do not get much information.
- Immigrants do not know about the social services available to them, such as Head Start.



**CONSUMER/EMPLOYMENT:**

- Newly arrived immigrants face much employment discrimination.
- Staffing agencies are not appropriate and do not pay full wages.
- For immigrants, low pay, employers are creatively avoiding benefits, and the system is set-up to minimize workers rights that prevents fair employment practices.
- Undocumented individuals are afraid to speak up regarding the Columbia Gas class-action. Individuals are not clear whether people need to be on the lease to bring an action.

**ENVIRONMENTAL:**

- There remains a lack of lead certification in housing.
- There are flooding issues in Lynn. There is a need for a new plan in low-income area, especially as contractors are not held to standards
  - Sewers back up into people's homes, as well as in the Lynn Shelter.
  - When CSOs overflow, there are sewage problems in homes and the cleanup is inadequate causing mold to also be an issue.
  - CSO issues need to be addresses on an infrastructure level.

**BENEFITS/HEALTH/EDUCATION:**

- Many people eligible for SNAP are not getting the benefit.
- Individuals need a lot of help navigating Social Security and other benefits.
- Due to Public Charge concerns, immigrants afraid and not using benefits.
- Lynn recently lost its only hospital.
- Youth in Lynn Public Schools face several issues, including, some youth who are 17 and over are sent to alternative programs such as GED when they should be educated at the regular schools and issues regarding suspension/expulsion. There is a class action challenging suspension/expulsions being headed by SCCLS in Brockton.
- There are issues with accessing treatment for substance abusers.

**FEEDBACK ON NLA NJC ACCESSIBILITY:**

- The elevator in the Lowell Office makes office hard to access.
- The online resource list is helpful.
- The waitlist is long, and many people are turned away. It is hard to get service, and hard to know when is the best time to apply for help.
- The website has accessibility issues including: the two names "NLA" and "NJC" being confusing, website navigation difficulty, language access limitations, and no list of which substantive legal areas are open for intake.
- The referral system is user friendly.

## Conclusions

The question Northeast Legal Aid sought to answer through its Legal Needs Assessment was:

**What are the most pressing legal needs of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts?**

Based on the survey results, listening sessions, and case management system data mining, the most pressing legal needs of low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts are:

**HOUSING PROBLEMS**, such as eviction defense, poor housing conditions, housing affordability, housing discrimination, with a rising incidence of youth homelessness.

Beyond housing problems, the results of the analysis revealed that the following are also pressing legal problems low-income and elderly residents of northeastern Massachusetts face:

- Family law problems, especially those involving domestic violence and abuse
- Public benefits problems
- Consumer problems
- Immigration problems



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