



2019 | 2020

Community Impact

R E P O R T



[NewMexicoLegalAid.org](https://www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org)

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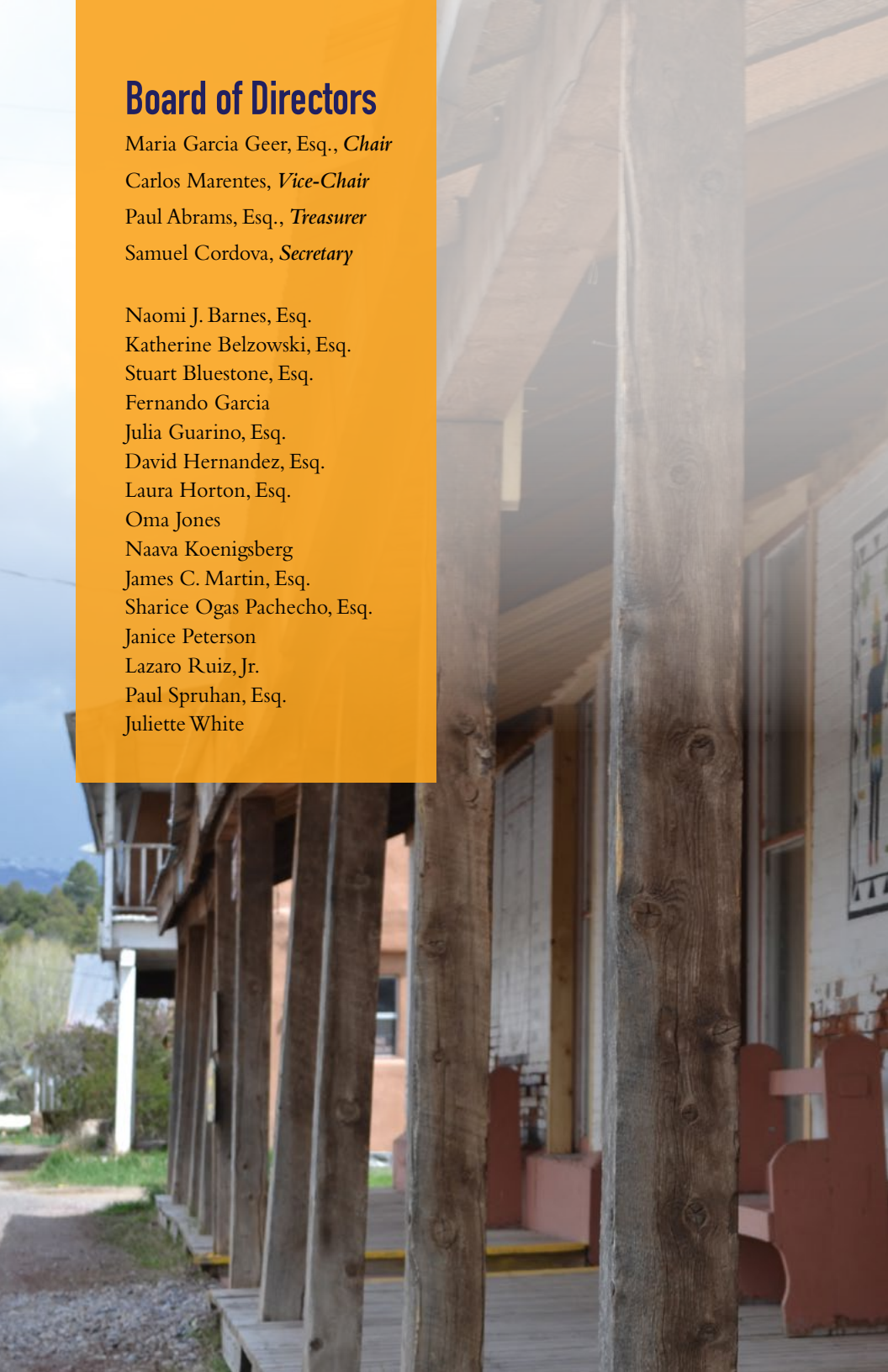
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The year 2020 will be remembered as the year of the pandemic. It will also be remembered as the year of unending calamity for low-income New Mexicans. Nearly 40% of all renters in the state are at risk of eviction for inability to pay rent. Unemployment rates have soared. Food insecurity is widespread. Predatory schemes to rob people of their resources proliferate. Families suffer greatly reduced safety and severely deteriorated economic circumstances.

New Mexico has never needed New Mexico Legal Aid more than it does now.

Our ability to provide essential legal services to low-income families is a testament to the support of our donors and funders. We offer our heartfelt thanks to our supporters, longtime and new, who help us meet this challenge and ensure that we remain strong, reaching as many New Mexicans as possible. Every person we help is a victory for justice and a reminder of the good our donors and funders do.

Our advocates serve low-income New Mexicans in many areas of law. The pandemic has exacerbated the need, particularly threatening shelter, access to basic supports like unemployment benefits, and monetary resources.

Our skilled consumer attorneys gained national attention when the National Association of Consumer Advocates recognized their achievements on behalf of too many New Mexicans who were “scammed, ripped-off, or otherwise unlawfully taken advantage of.” In 2019, our clients recovered \$99,000 in damages and defeated \$715,000 in unjust debt liability, including debts that were decades old and statutorily barred, debts that the debt collector could not prove were owed, debts due to predatory practices, and unfair and deceptive sales practices.

At this time I feel particularly honored to work with the staff, Board, and you — to do this important work. **Thank you** for all you do to support our mission.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lewis G. Creekmore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Lewis G. Creekmore, Executive Director

Coordinated Intake Services

When partner legal services provider Law Access New Mexico closed in August 2018, New Mexico Legal Aid stepped in to assure that New Mexico residents can reach help by telephone regardless of where they live. We established the Intake Unit staffed by intake specialists and attorneys who qualify clients' income eligibility, check for any conflicts of interest, offer brief advice and counsel, or refer individuals to other agencies. When legal issues are more complex, clients may be referred within New Mexico Legal Aid to attorneys in a practice group or special program matching the clients' needs.

Need Help? Here's How to Reach Us

New Mexico Legal Aid has an easy-to-remember statewide, toll-free telephone number, 833-LGL-HELP, answered by Intake Specialists on weekdays. (Check our website www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org for current hours which may vary during COVID-19). You can also access an easy-to-use 24/7 online portal from the website.

Special Helplines

With funding from the New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission, New Mexico Legal Aid runs a free telephone helpline dedicated to assisting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence. Callers speak confidentially with an experienced, trauma-informed attorney. Language translation services are available.

DV Helpline: 877-974-3400

With funding from the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women and in partnership with the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Equality New Mexico Foundation, NMLA's Safe To Be You project serves LGBTQ+ victims.

Safe To Be You Helpline: 877-545-7270

Email: Safe2BU@nmlegalaid.org



**In 2019,
NMLA recovered
for clients more than**

**\$4.8
million**

**in benefits, damages
and attorney's fees**

What We Do Our Major Practice Areas Are:



Family Law, including interpersonal violence assistance and custody



Housing, including evictions and foreclosures



Economic Security, including accessing public benefits and insurances, debt and tax relief



Consumer Protection, including auto repossession, payday loans, and predatory lending

NMLA also has **special programs** and projects that focus on particular needs of New Mexicans:

Native American Program, helping clients with Indian Law issues

Farmworker Program, providing legal services to migrant and seasonal workers, especially migrant farmworkers

Veterans' Advocacy Project, assisting veterans access benefits they are entitled to

Land and Water Rights Project, helping acequias and historic land grant communities protect their communal water and land rights

Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, serving low income people who have disputes with or are in debt to the IRS

Safe To Be You Project, focusing on the legal needs of LGBTQ+ survivors of interpersonal violence

Volunteer Attorney Program, helping individuals with legal needs connect to pro bono volunteer attorneys at legal fairs and clinics across the state, in coordination with the State Bar and Judicial District Pro Bono Committees

Medical-Legal Partnerships, where legal aid attorneys work on site in a health clinic or hospital, helping patients with legal issues

Services We Provide

New Mexico Legal Aid provides free legal services to low-income New Mexicans and to victims regardless of their income. Help can come in many forms:

Brief advice and counsel

Negotiation assistance

Providing legal information to those representing themselves

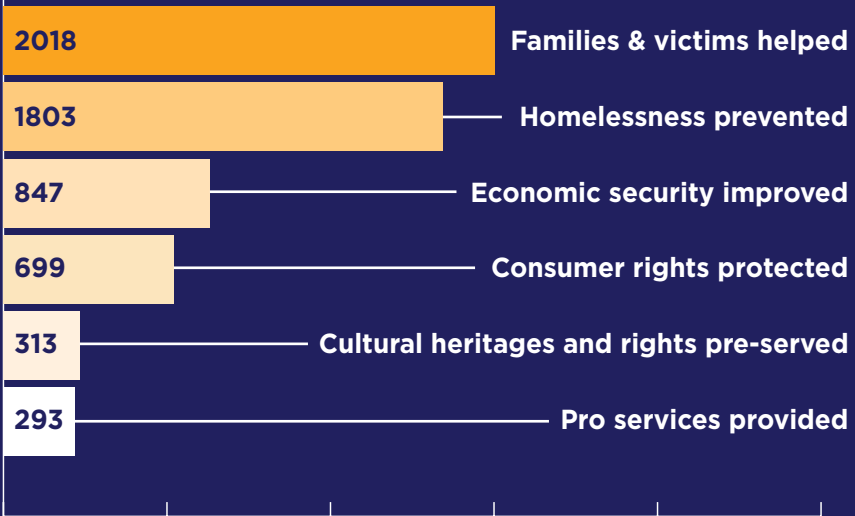
Full representation, including appearance in court and administrative hearings.



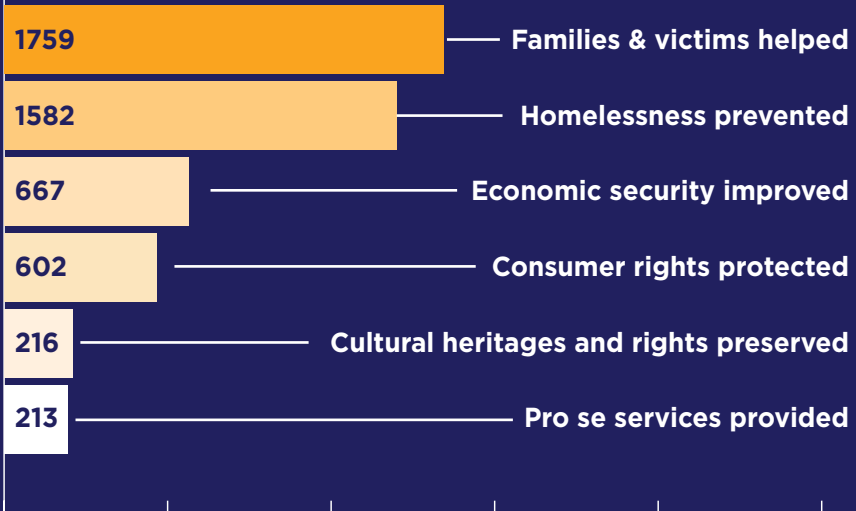
Because there is no guaranteed right to counsel in civil cases, legal aid is the ONLY alternative for those who cannot afford a lawyer.

New Mexico Legal Aid Making an Impact | 2019 by the Numbers

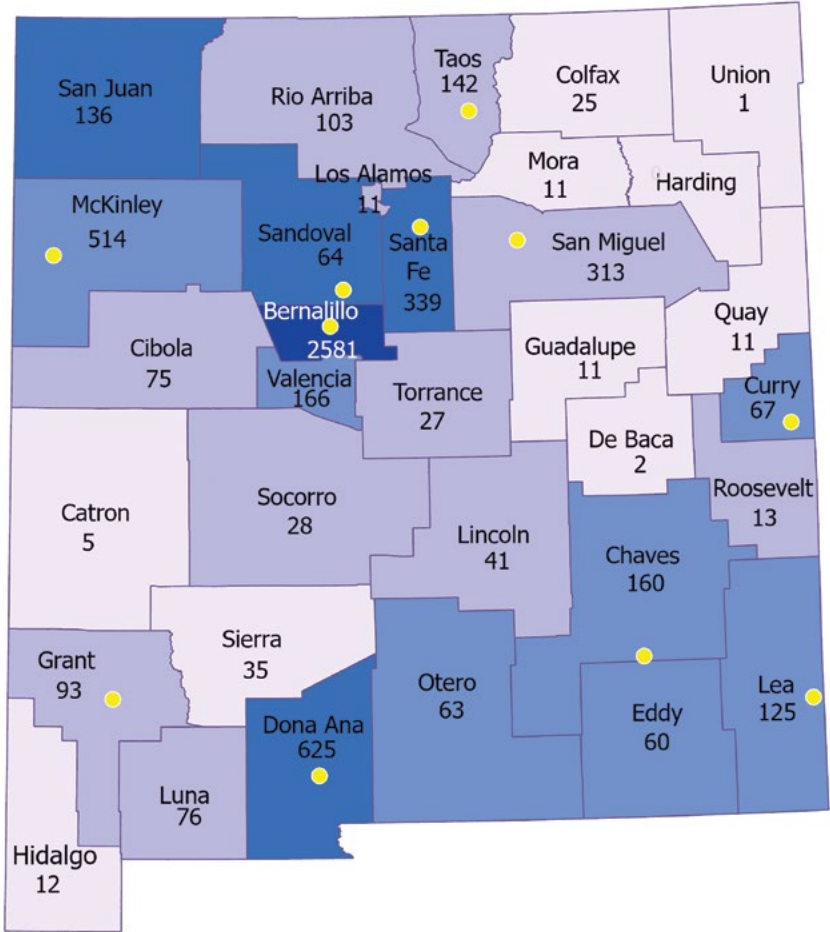
Cases Handled in 2019



Cases Closed in 2019



NMLA Handled **5973** Cases Across the State



2019 Population



NMLA Offices

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Albuquerque | Las Cruces | Santa Fe |
| Clovis | Las Vegas | Silver City |
| Gallup | Roswell | Taos |
| Hobbs | Santa Ana | |

Client Impact Stories

A Story of Restoration and Security

New Mexico Legal Aid works to help level the playing field, standing with those not being treated fairly under the law. That was the case for a disabled Navajo veteran who had been receiving Section 8 rental assistance and case management services through the Housing & Urban Development / Veterans Administration Supportive Housing Program (HUD/VASH). His voucher was administered by the Gallup Housing Authority. He was arrested and charged with a crime, but the charges were subsequently dropped. Because of the arrest, the Housing Authority terminated his voucher without notice. Then homeless and without his supportive case management services, he sought help from New Mexico Legal Aid.

After unsuccessful attempts to negotiate the restoration of his voucher with the Housing Authority, his NMLA attorney filed suit for injunctive relief and damages, alleging deprivation of property without due process of law and racially discriminatory impact of policies that punish arrests not leading to convictions. The Housing Authority restored his voucher, paid damages and attorneys' fees, and agreed to amend its policies so that all proposed Section 8 voucher termination notices include information about how tenants can apply for free legal services. This gentleman is now in better housing, is financially more secure, and is mentally and emotionally better off.



A Story of Help and Gratitude

In the wake of COVID-19, New Mexico Legal Aid and community partners are working together to get families back on the path of economic security.

Rita Martinez was no stranger to hard work, putting herself through college, working many jobs, and ultimately being a medical technician in labs and hospitals. But disabled at age 66 with three grandchildren to care for, she needed help – and got it from New Mexico Legal Aid and a community of caring people who stepped up during COVID-19.

Rita and her grandchildren, ages 15, 13 and 9, live in a two-bedroom apartment at an Albuquerque complex. Getting by was always difficult, but it became impossible when the new manager at her apartment complex would not honor the agreement she had with the previous manager, to pay her rent on the 5th rather than the 1st of the month, when her Children Youth & Families monthly foster care support funds would arrive. The complex charged her a \$98 late fee in January, and things slid from there. In February the middle child needed glasses, and there were other medical bills. In March, Rita had the choice of paying the rent or her final car payment. She chose the car payment because the family relied on the car for their transportation.

And then COVID-19 hit New Mexico. Shortly thereafter, the landlord sued in Metro Court to have Rita and her family evicted. She had a March 24th court date, and was terrified to go into the crowded courthouse in her medically fragile condition. Her older grandson told her, “Grandma, don’t worry. I can take care of the kids.” “I don’t ever want that to happen,” Rita said. She sought help from Pegasus Legal Services for Children who assists foster families, who in turn reached out requesting to co-counsel with New Mexico Legal Aid’s housing eviction experts.

New Mexico Legal Aid, acting on Mrs. Martinez’s behalf, contacted opposing counsel and had discussions that ultimately resulted in the case being dismissed. In the meantime, co-counsel at Pegasus explored negotiations with the apartment complex. A staff person in Albuquerque’s Community Schools where the grandchildren attend school heard about the family’s dilemma and helped arrange a grant from a school fund that would help cover some of the back rent. The middle child’s teacher set up a GoFundMe account with hopes to raise a few hundred dollars more. In 48 hours, the fund raised \$3,000. Rita’s NMLA attorney was able to keep her from having to appear in court, and through the negotiated settlement, donated funds went to pay back rent and better situate the family for the coming few months.

Rita said, “At our level of poverty, there’s no such thing as savings, there’s no such thing as a backup plan.” She is enormously grateful to all those who helped assure that going forward, her family can stay safely in their apartment with bills paid. She and the children plan to pay their gratitude forward, in whatever ways they can, to help others who are similarly challenged.

Snap Shot: Addressing Social Determinants of Health through a Medical-Legal Partnership

New Mexico Legal Aid expanded its work through medical-legal partnerships with the February 2020 launch of a program on site at Christus St. Vincent Hospital in Santa Fe. While COVID-19 precautions limit our attorney's ability to physically work on site daily, she effectively uses videoconferencing, telephone and other means to do her work — proving how resolving patients' legal issues has tremendous payoffs in improved health.

Medical-legal partnership attorneys help with a wide variety of civil legal issues ranging from advance healthcare directives, guardianship, housing, probate, domestic violence matters and unemployment. In one situation, the wife and sole caregiver of a patient with severe dementia died during the patient's admission. The NMLA attorney represented a family member to secure guardianship so that the patient could be transferred to a specialized memory care facility for long term care. In another instance, the attorney successfully made an appeal for an indigent patient resulting in retroactive Medicaid coverage for a large hospital bill, and for ongoing coverage.



Volunteer Attorney Program

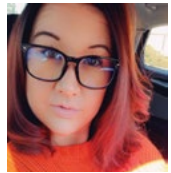


Melanie Fritsche

An interview with Melanie Fritsche, director of the Volunteer Attorney Program

Question: Melanie, you joined New Mexico Legal Aid in February just before the advent of COVID-19 restrictions that included most staff pivoting to work remotely from home. With mostly new staff in the Volunteer Attorney Program, and with no “business as usual” handling legal fairs and clinics around the state, this must have been a difficult time.

Response: The whole world has been turned on its head. Who has been through a pandemic before? Our volunteer attorneys have been outstanding. They have been giving of their time and willing to provide services over the phone or video conferencing. The Volunteer Attorney Program staff are mostly new. As you mentioned, I started as the new Director in mid-February. Meryl Sutton began as the program Paralegal towards the end of June. We will soon have a new Pro Bono Coordinator join us, as Tattiana Kinahan departed at the beginning of August. It has been very helpful to have paralegal Carmen Cortez, who has been with NMLA for many years, continuing to be a part of the Volunteer Attorney Program.



Meryl Sutton

Question: A key question for you: How are you adapting the work of Volunteer Attorney Program volunteers to the social distancing constraints under the pandemic? Are there some creative ways you are overcoming the challenges?

Response: The Program now offers tele-clinics. In the first months of working remotely and with the world changing so rapidly, former Pro Bono Coordinator Tattiana Kinahan began figuring out how to put together a tele-clinic. Since then, Meryl Sutton has implemented tele-clinics on a consistent basis. We are finding that New Mexicans from across the state are using this service. We have received calls from Carlsbad, Hobbs, and Shiprock, to name a few.

Question: October, Pro Bono Month, is always the highlight of the year for volunteer activities around the state. What can we expect for this October 2020?

Response: We are planning to celebrate and recognize our awesome volunteers. We would like to see everyone in person, but it does not look like that will happen. The safety and health of staff and volunteers are paramount. We will have a virtual appreciation and awards event which will be fun and festive.

Question: Is there anything you'd like to say to attorneys who might be considering volunteering for the first time?

Response: We'd love to get to know you and for you to volunteer. Helping individuals is rewarding for yourself, and it is good to know that you have made a positive difference in another person's life. Try volunteering at a tele-clinic or taking on a case of direct representation. And thank you!

Funders

We gratefully acknowledge the private, corporate and government funding that made our work in 2019-2020 possible.



Anchorum St.Vincent Hospital
City of Albuquerque
Corporation for National & Community Service, AmeriCorps
Equal Access to Justice, Inc.
New Mexico Acequia Association
New Mexico Civil Legal Services Commission
New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Dept.
New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission
New Mexico Commission for the Blind
New Mexico Land Grant Council
State Bar of New Mexico, Access to Justice Fund
Tribal Civil & Criminal Legal Assistance Program (TCCLA)
U.S. Department of Justice, Native American Rights Fund
U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women
U.S. Department of the Treasury, Taxpayer Advocate Service

To help make the future safer and more secure for New Mexico's most vulnerable, please mail a check to NMLA today, or donate online at www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org.

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Community Health Funder Alliance
Cow Creek Basin Acequia
Envision Fund of the Santa Fe Community Foundation
Feferman, Warren & Mattison, LLC
First Nations Community HealthSource
Hispanics in Philanthropy
McCune Charitable Foundation
New Mexico Plaster & Supply
No Strings Attached Fund of the Santa Fe Community Foundation
Nusenda Credit Union Foundation
Parnall Law Firm
Pregenzer, Baysinger, Wideman & Sale, PC
Rio Grande Community Development Corp.
Roehl Law Firm, PC
Santa Fe Community Foundation
Seahollow Family Gift Fund of the Santa Fe Community Foundation
United Way
Veterans Integration Centers
Wallen-Eloisa Family Fund of the Santa Fe Community Foundation

..and many generous individuals, THANK YOU

To correct any errors, please contact us at Communications@nmlegalaid.org

2019 Audit

Revenue, unrestricted	4,292,419
Revenue, restricted	4,056,617
Total Revenue	8,349,036

Program Expense	7,135,956
Management & General	988,581

Fundraising	82,066
Total Expense	8,206,603

Change in net assets	142,433
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Net Assets, beginning of year	1,024,786
Net Assets, end of year	1,167,219





New Mexico's Statewide Civil Legal Services Provider

The mission of New Mexico Legal Aid, Inc. is to be the voice, defender and advocate for poor people who are seeking justice in all forums, particularly in the communities in which they live. New Mexico Legal Aid is committed to helping poor people in their struggle to access food, shelter, security, and to preserve their unique cultural heritages.

Statewide Toll-free Intake : 833-LGL-HELP (833-545-4357)

www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org

P.O. Box 25486

Albuquerque, NM 87125-5486

