

4.2 Discussion Regarding the Convenings to Protect Californians in 2025 and Beyond



The State Bar of California

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Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion

PDI Committee Meeting, May 6, 2025

Coordinated Touchpoints with Grantees

November 2024

The State Bar identified need for a series of touchpoints in anticipation of changes in policy and funding.

The State Bar and LAAC convened two focus groups with grantees that provide immigration legal services.

December 2024

January 2025

The State Bar and LAAC surveyed grantees to assess grantees' needs, priorities, and capacities related to the changing policy and funding landscape.

The State Bar and LAAC convened a virtual roundtable to share preliminary survey results.

Governor Newsom signed SBX1-2, providing an additional \$10 million in EAF grant dollars.

February 2025

March 2025

The State Bar and LAAC hosted two grantee Convenings on Protecting Californians in 2025 and Beyond.



EAF Additional Funds

- On February 7, 2025, Governor Newsom signed [SBX1-2](#) into law.
- SBX1-2 amended the Budget Act of 2024 to provide legal aid organizations an additional \$25 million, including \$10 million more for 2025 Equal Access Fund (EAF) awards.
- These funds must be used to “provide legal services to vulnerable persons at risk of detention, deportation, eviction, wage theft, intimate partner violence, and other actions that put their safety at risk, as a result of potential or actual federal actions.”
- The funds must be distributed using a modified version of the IOLTA formula, including a minimum award size of \$25,000.
- 108 out of 115 grantees (or 94 percent) opted in to receive these additional EAF funds:
 - 88 QLSPs and 20 support centers.
 - On average, participating QLSPs will receive \$93,020, but awards ranged from the \$25,000 minimum to \$740,084.
 - All participating support centers were awarded \$73,124.



Agenda for the Convening in Los Angeles

9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Registration
10:05 a.m.–10:15 a.m.	Opening Remarks <i>Amin Al-Sarraf, Co-Chair, Legal Services Trust Fund Commission</i> <i>Efrain Escobedo, Co-Vice-Chair, Legal Services Trust Fund Commission</i> <i>Zach Newman, Directing Attorney, Legal Aid Association of California</i> <i>Joyce Song, Program Director, Office of Access & Inclusion</i>
10:15 a.m.–10:35 a.m.	Office of Access & Inclusion Presentation <p>The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of additional findings from the Office of Access & Inclusion (OA&I) and Legal Aid Association of California survey and participant insights from the February 10 Virtual Roundtable. It highlights how this data will be used in ongoing legislative advocacy efforts to support legal aid organizations.</p>
10:35 a.m.–11:20 a.m.	Panel: Innovative Responses to a Changing Policy Landscape <p><i>Moderator: Jennifer Zelnick, Lead Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i> <i>Panelists: Christian Abasto, Associate Executive Director and General Counsel, Disability Rights California</i> <i>Silvia Arqueta, Executive Director, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles</i> <i>Connie Chung Joe, Chief Executive Officer, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California</i> <i>Shashi Hanuman, Executive Director, Public Interest Law Project</i></p> <p>This panel showcases innovative service and advocacy approaches across various areas of law. Panelists will share the strategies and approaches their organizations are using to respond to evolving client needs and discuss how they have navigated challenges in a rapidly shifting policy and funding landscape.</p>
11:20 a.m.–noon	Breakout Session I <p>In small groups, attendees will build on takeaways from the previous panel to discuss how their organizations are adapting to the changing policy landscape. The breakout session is designed to encourage cross-field dialog, while giving attendees space to surface key challenges and exchange strategies responsive to the current moment.</p>
noon–12:45 p.m.	Lunch

12:45 p.m.–1:15 p.m.	Discussion: Responses and Resources to Executive Orders <p><i>Moderator: Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i> <i>Discussant: Kathryn Eidmann, President and Chief Executive Officer, Public Counsel</i></p> <p>This session provides a general overview of DEI- and immigration-related Executive Orders, with guidance and approaches to protecting programs, staff, clients, and communities. The goal is to share practical resources and responses, while also providing space to answer participant questions.</p>
1:15 p.m.–2:00 p.m.	Panel: Disaster Legal Assistance–Southern California Fires and Beyond <p><i>Moderator: Christopher McConkey, Program Manager, Office of Access & Inclusion</i> <i>Panelists: Diego Cartagena, President and Chief Executive Officer, Bet Tzedek Skip Koenig, Director of Pro Bono, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County</i> <i>Matt Kugizaki, Pro Bono Director, Inland Counties Legal Services</i></p> <p>The panel highlights the work of disaster legal assistance providers who mobilized in response to the recent fires in Southern California. Panelists will offer insights on how legal aid programs can prepare for disasters in their own regions and discuss the impacts of changing federal and state policies on this work.</p>
2:00 p.m.–2:40 p.m.	Breakout Session II <p>In small groups, attendees will have an opportunity to discuss how their organizations are addressing the cross-cutting legal issues that arise in disaster response. Participants can also use this time to explore actionable next steps based on the insights from the morning's OA&I presentation.</p>
2:40 p.m.–2:55 p.m.	Closing: Care and Community in Times of Uncertainty <p><i>Facilitator: Arwa Zakir Kakavand, Associate Attorney, Casa Cornelia Law Center</i></p> <p>This closing session will explore how access to justice is connected to restorative care—including for legal aid advocates and attorneys themselves. Guided by a trauma-informed yoga practitioner, attendees will participate in restorative exercises designed to support well-being in challenging times.</p>
2:55 p.m.–3:00 p.m.	Closing Remarks <p><i>Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i></p>



Agenda for the Convening in San Francisco

9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Registration
10:05 a.m.–10:15 a.m.	Opening Remarks <i>Erica Connolly, Co-Chair, Legal Services Trust Fund Commission</i> <i>Salena Copeland, Executive Director, Legal Aid Association of California</i> <i>Doan Nguyen, Program Director, Office of Access & Inclusion</i>
10:15 a.m.–10:35 a.m.	Office of Access & Inclusion Presentation <p>The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of additional findings from the Office of Access & Inclusion (OA&I) and Legal Aid Association of California survey and participant insights from the February 10 Virtual Roundtable. It highlights how this data will be used in ongoing legislative advocacy efforts to support legal aid organizations.</p>
10:35 a.m.–11:20 a.m.	Panel: Innovative Responses to a Changing Policy Landscape <i>Moderator: Salena Copeland, Executive Director, Legal Aid Association of California</i> <i>Panelists: Maeve Elise Brown, Executive Director, Housing and Economic Rights Advocates</i> <i>Claudia Center, Legal Director, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund</i> <i>Rachel Kafele, Director of Programs & Advocacy, Oasis Legal Services</i> <i>Laura McMahon, Executive Director, Legal Aid of Marin</i> <p>This panel showcases innovative service and advocacy approaches across various areas of law. Panelists will share the strategies and approaches their organizations are using to respond to evolving client needs and discuss how they have navigated challenges in a rapidly shifting policy and funding landscape.</p>
11:20 a.m.–noon	Breakout Session I <p>In small groups, attendees will build on takeaways from the previous panel to discuss how their organizations are adapting to the changing policy landscape. The breakout session is designed to encourage cross-field dialog, while giving attendees space to surface key challenges and exchange strategies responsive to the current moment.</p>
noon–12:45 p.m.	Lunch

12:45 p.m.–1:15 p.m.	Discussion on Executive Orders: Responses and Resources <i>Moderator: Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i> <i>Discussants: Bianca Sierra Wolff, Executive Director, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights</i> <i>Rachel Sheridan, Director of Programs, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights</i> <p>This session provides a general overview of DEI- and immigration-related Executive Orders, with guidance and approaches to protecting programs, staff, clients, and communities. The goal is to share practical resources and responses, while also providing space to answer participant questions.</p>
1:15 p.m.–2:00 p.m.	Panel: Disaster Legal Assistance—Southern California Fires and Beyond <i>Moderator: Alexa Montalvo, Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i> <i>Panelists: Jennifer Anders-Gable, Regional Counsel, Legal Services of Northern California</i> <i>Genevieve Richardson, Executive Director, Bay Area Legal Aid</i> <i>Rachel Williams, Pro Bono Counsel, Morrison & Foerster</i> <p>The panel highlights the work of disaster legal assistance providers who mobilized in response to the recent fires in Southern California. Panelists will offer insights on how legal aid programs can prepare for disasters in their own regions and discuss the impacts of changing federal and state policies on this work.</p>
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2:40 p.m.–2:55 p.m.	Closing: Care and Community in Times of Uncertainty <i>Facilitator: Christopher Punongbayan, Executive Director, California ChangeLawyers</i> <p>This closing session will explore how access to justice is connected to restorative care—including for legal aid advocates and attorneys themselves. Guided by a mindfulness practitioner, attendees will participate in restorative exercises designed to support well-being in challenging times.</p>
2:55 p.m.–3:00 p.m.	Closing Remarks <i>Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Access & Inclusion</i>



Los Angeles Convening



San Francisco Convening



Insights from the LA Convening

Challenges

- Law firms pulling back from pro bono work due to perceived political risk.
- Inadequate or unpredictable funding.
- Staff retention and burnout amid increasing demand.

Funding

- Contingency budgeting and funding, and budget adjustments.
- Survey insights to educate funders and improve messaging.
- Diversification, i.e., corporate sponsorships, philanthropy, private donors.

Strategic Partnerships & Knowledge Sharing

- Expanded networks to scale services and advocacy.
- State-specific coalitions for legal aid preparedness and policy defense.

Infrastructure

- Request for universal or coordinated intake across organizations in the state.
- Inquiries about how tech can be used for efficiency gains.



Insights from the SF Convening

Challenges

- Uncertainty around programming and staffing due to loss of city, state, and federal funds.
- Review of federal contracts for vulnerabilities.
- Review of insurance policies to help offset risk.

Funding

- Adjusting program strategies to qualify for or sustain funding.
- Local advocacy for sustained or increased support.

Capacity Building and Adjustments

- Balancing organizational involvement with advocacy with staff bandwidth and mission alignment.
- Scaling up trainings to meet rising demand, including to non-lawyers.
- Shifts from free to fee to help cover costs, ex: printing of Red Cards.

Staff Well-Being

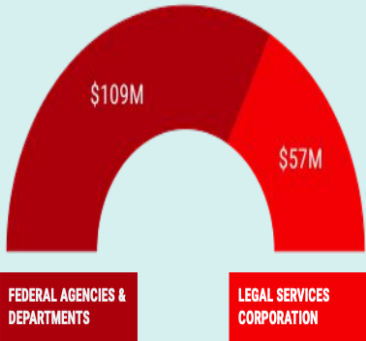
Strategies to address staff burnout and well-being:

- 35-hour work week;
- Mental health stipends (~\$150/month); and
- Four-day work week.



LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFY FUNDING AS THEIR TOP CONCERN DUE TO FUNDING LOSSES, ONGOING AND POTENTIAL POLICY CHANGES, AND AN INCREASE IN REQUESTS FOR LEGAL SERVICES.

FEDERAL FUNDING AT RISK

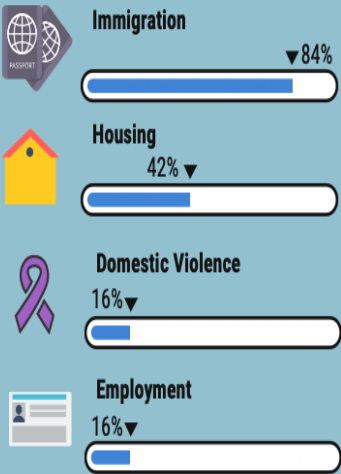


At least \$165.8M of federal funding for legal aid is at risk from:

- \$44.5M—US Department of Health and Human Services
- \$31.2M—US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- \$10.3M—US Department of Justice

MOST URGENT LEGAL NEEDS

68% of State Bar-funded legal aid organizations reported receiving increased requests for services since November 2024. Legal aid organizations are seeing increased demand for services, especially in the following areas:

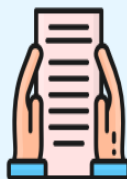


The State Bar's 2024 Justice Gap Study found that 87 percent of all Californians did not receive any or enough legal help the preceeding year. This increase in demand for legal aid will exacerbate existing staff and pro bono capacities.



TOP THREE FUNDING PRIORITIES

62%



Attorney staffing

53%



Program support
staffing

47%



Paralegals and
legal assistants

Additional funding priorities include non-profit/advocacy group collaboration (40%), pro bono support & coordination (34%), and training & resources (32%).



Tentative Policy Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE CHANGING FUNDING AND POLICY LANDSCAPE AND INCREASING DEMAND FOR SERVICES



Prioritize multi-year, flexible funding to ensure that legal aid organizations can respond to crises and offset losses of federal and other funding sources.



Help legal aid organizations modify their service delivery models, including through the use of technology and strategic community partnerships, to increase support to disabled, rural, senior, and limited English proficiency Californians.



Establish a dedicated fund for the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission to rapidly respond to emerging legal services needs.



Provide funding to legal aid organizations serving rural Californians who are disproportionately underserved to increase the number of attorneys in rural areas.



Strengthen the legal aid pipeline by supporting recruitment and retention efforts, including multi-year, post-graduate fellowships.



Options and Next Steps



Virtual touchpoints:

- Workshops.
- Designated liaisons for regular calls.



- Regionally focused convenings, e.g., for the Central Valley and Inland Empire.
- Convening with grantees and other social justice orgs like the ACLU.



- Coordinated intake and resource-sharing through technology.





Questions

1. Are there other next steps that you recommend we explore at this point?
2. Would 1–2 committee members like to work with staff to identify ways for the full LSTFC to support grantees this year?



Thank you!

For questions or to share additional information, please contact:

- Jennifer Zelnick, Lead Program Analyst, jennifer.zelnick@calbar.ca.gov; or
- Sylvia Nam, Senior Program Analyst, sylvia.nam@calbar.ca.gov.

