

KLS Staff Attorneys Tout KLS in the KBA Bar-O-Meter

Kansas Legal Services

By Megan Storie and Will Hartenstein

Kansas Legal Services is a statewide, non-profit corporation that is devoted to helping low income Kansans. Currently, Kansas Legal Services provides assistance and legal advice for no cost or at reduced fees to income eligible individuals in civil matters, including consumer finance, housing, education, employment, elder law, income maintenance, family law, health and individual rights. Offices are located in Dodge City, Emporia, Hays, Hutchinson, Kansas City, Manhattan, Pittsburg, Salina, Seneca, Topeka, and Wichita.

Kansas Legal Services – Wichita has expanded within the last year, and we have some exciting changes that are taking place. We are in the process of relocating to a new building within the next couple of months. Our Managing Attorney, Rhonda Sullivan, is busy overseeing construction, paint, and a potential “green wall.” Be on the lookout for an invitation to our open house later this year!

Asylum Program:

Kansas Legal Services, in partnership with Kansas State Office Refugee and the International Rescue Committee, has started a new program to provide legal representation in immigration law to Afghan citizens or nationals paroled into the United States between July 31, 2021 and December 16, 2022, part of the Operation Allies Refuge/Operation Allies Welcome (OAR/OAW). Our services primarily focus on assisting them with their asylum application and representing them at their asylum interviews with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This particular immigration benefit will allow them to obtain permanent residence in the United States and eventually, U.S. citizenship.

Parent Advocate Program:

In 2022, Kansas Legal Services, in cooperation with the Department for Children and Families, developed the Parent Advocate Program. This pre-petition program involves advocacy or legal services after a family has come to the attention of DCF but before a petition to remove a child has been filed with the court. The parent advocate works to promote family well-being, and they connect parents to local resources, such as mental health support, employment, and education assistance. The attorney assists in civil legal matters, including protection orders, housing, guardianships, expungements, and family law matters.

WARP Program:

On May 4, 2022, Kansas Legal Services, in collaboration with Wichita Bar Association and Koch Industries, hosted a Driver's License Clinic. As of 2021, Kansas has more than 213,000 suspended licenses, with approximately half being located in Sedgwick County. (<https://www.kake.com/story/42899819/kake-news-investigates-new-life-for-suspended-drivers-license-reform-efforts>). SB 127, which went into effect on May 6, 2021, allows for Kansans with suspended licenses to petition the court to waive or reduce fines and fees that are owed due to traffic citations.

In December Of 2022, the Wichita City Council adopted the Wichita Area Driver's License Restoration Program (WARP). Kansas Legal Services, in conjunction with the City of Wichita, works directly with individuals in an attempt to restore driving privileges. To be eligible, applicants must be residents of Wichita, Kansas, have cases involving fees, fines, renewal fees, and have a suspended driver's license.

Drug Registry Clinic:

Kansas Legal Services has been involved in several clinics within the past year. Most recently, Kansas Legal Services, in partnership with the Wichita Bar Association and the Sedgwick County Public Defender Office, hosted a Drug Registry Clinic. Kansans convicted of drug-related offenses can potentially spend 15 years up to a lifetime of being listed on the drug registry. This has the potential to limit availability for jobs, housing, and opportunities to better one's life. With the passing of Senate Bill No. 366, Kansans convicted with drug-related offenses, and drug-related offenses that have been on the drug registry for five years, can petition the court to be removed from the registry. Eligibility requirements are lined out under K.S.A. Section 22-4908.

Pro Bono Opportunities:

Kansas Legal Services is seeking attorneys interested and willing to volunteer their time and expertise to provide free services to low income clients. Many of the cases referred will be cases that Kansas Legal Services cannot accept, due to conflicts of interest or other barriers. Clients using the program understand that the attorney has agreed to provide services at no cost for the referred case only and that they may be required to pay filing fees, witness fees, etc.

Kansas Legal Services is also seeking the involvement of inactive or retired attorneys in Kansas. If you have either status on your law license, you may be eligible to work as an emeritus attorney with a not-for-profit provider of civil legal services on a pro bono basis under Kansas Supreme Court Rule 1404.

There are a number of limited scope opportunities that are also available. These include helping on the Elder Hotline, various clinics, and assisting at the self-help center located at the Law Library. These opportunities allow attorneys to provide limited services to individuals seeking legal advice, and no conflicts are taken back to your office. Attorneys interested in pro bono opportunities should contact the Director of Pro Bono, Joy Springfield, at 785-233-2068 or springfieldj@klsinc.org.

Lawyers Giving Back Stacy Ortega with Court Appointed Special Advocates

How long have you been on CASA Board?

I joined the Board in March 2020, so three years.

Why have you chosen to support that non-profit?

I have a special place in my heart for kids, and I have worked in juvenile court and family law for 30+ years, advocating for the best interests of children. Having an advocate for the child victim helps focus on their needs, which are sometimes lost in the complicated legal proceedings. Many times, the CASA volunteer is able to help bring stability to the child's life.



How are some ways that attorneys can volunteer or support CASA?

We would welcome volunteers to assist in training new CASA's or assisting with our fund-raising events (keep an eye out for the return of our much loved CASA-ino night in September!). We need more attorneys to serve on the Board. We just moved to our new office space at 2624 E. Central, and we have a "wish list" for some furnishings and equipment. And, of course, we accept one-time or monthly giving at www.casaofsedgwickcounty.org.

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