



LOS ANGELES COUNTY

CONSUMER & BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Board of Supervisors

February 17, 2026

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First District

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To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Director

Rafael Carbajal

From: Rafael Carbajal
Director

Chief Deputy
Joel Ayala

BIANNUAL WORKLOAD REPORT NO. 33 FOR SELF-HELP LEGAL ACCESS CENTERS (ITEM NO. 23, AGENDA OF MAY 3, 2016) [REPORT #08878]

On May 3, 2016, your Board directed DCBA to submit written quarterly reports on the Self-Help Legal Access Centers (SHLAC) program to track services provided to self-represented litigants in the Los Angeles Superior Court (LASC). In Report No. 27, dated March 22, 2023, DCBA notified your Board that reporting would transition from a quarterly to a biannual schedule.

The County of Los Angeles (County) contracts with Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County (NLSLA) to administer the SHLAC services. The program provides in-person and remote self-help legal assistance at nine regional locations throughout the County.

On December 8, 2020, your Board approved the motion *Saving Our Self-Help Legal Access Centers*, authorizing continued funding for the program. Most recently, in June 2025, DCBA executed a new contract with NLSLA to provide SHLAC services from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030.

During the July through December 2025 reporting period, the Self-Help Legal Access Centers program continued to provide high-volume, high-impact legal assistance to unrepresented litigants throughout Los Angeles County. The program supported access to justice, promoted court efficiency, enhanced personal safety, and contributed to housing and family stability. The execution of a new five-year contract with NLSLA ensures continued service delivery and program stability through June 2030.



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I. REPORTING PERIOD SUMMARY (JULY 1 – DECEMBER 31, 2025):

During the reporting period, SHLAC continued to experience sustained demand for self-help legal services. The program provided an average of 10,000 services per month across all service locations and virtual platforms.

The primary areas of assistance requested by individuals remained consistent with prior reporting periods and included divorce (27%), restraining orders (23%), housing and eviction defense (22%), and paternity and custody matters (17%). Collectively, these service areas accounted for approximately 89 percent of all services provided.

Among individuals served, 45 percent were first-time users of self-help legal services, and 37 percent were referred directly through the LASC system, reflecting continued coordination between SHLAC and the courts.

II. REGIONAL SUMMARY:

From July 2025 through December 2025, SHLAC reported the following outcomes for litigants served:

- **39,732** litigants obtained a general or in-depth understanding of their legal situation, including their rights and responsibilities under the law.
- **15,372** litigants received information on free or low-cost legal assistance options and were referred to legal and social service resources.
- **11,110** litigants obtained or modified an enforceable court order.
- **10,419** litigants experiencing mental or physical threats reported feeling safe from abuse and/or threats of harm.
- **8,287** litigants removed barriers that prevented their cases from advancing or closing.
- **6,706** litigants preserved tenant housing in the short term and avoided lockouts.
- **3,516** litigants improved stability in a child's life.
- **3,348** litigants preserved their ability to meaningfully participate in their case and were better prepared to represent themselves at trial.
- **3,122** litigants mitigated the risk of legal misunderstandings related to their cases.

III. PEOPLE STORIES:

The following narratives highlight SHLAC achievements from a more personal perspective. While SHLAC services include assistance with court forms and legal procedures, these stories demonstrate the program's broader impact in improving access to justice, reducing barriers to court participation, and supporting housing stability, personal safety, and family well-being for self-represented litigants across the County.

District 1 – Pomona:

In early 2025, a couple sought assistance at the Pomona SHLAC to move their divorce case forward after experiencing prolonged difficulty navigating the court process on their own. Both parties were monolingual Spanish speakers who had opened their divorce case in 2023 but were unable to properly set the matter for trial due to the complexity of procedural requirements and language barriers.

SHLAC staff provided culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance, helping the parties understand the court process and identify the necessary steps to advance their case. Following initial support, the couple was able to obtain a status-only divorce. However, additional work was required to complete mandatory property disclosures and prepare trial briefs to fully resolve the matter.

In October 2025, SHLAC staff assisted the couple with completing the required property disclosure documents and trial-related filings. Staff ensured that their property requests were clearly articulated and properly presented to the court. The couple left SHLAC with completed and filed forms, reducing the risk of procedural errors or further delays.

As a result of this assistance, the parties were able to meet with the court's daily settlement officer, where they successfully reached an agreement and entered into a stipulated judgment. Through SHLAC's intervention, the couple was able to resolve a long-pending divorce case, avoid continued litigation, and achieve a final resolution that complied with court requirements.

This case highlights SHLAC's role in promoting access to justice for limited English proficient litigants, reducing barriers to court participation, and supporting timely case resolution within the LASC system.

District 2 – Inglewood:

A tenant facing eviction sought assistance from the Inglewood SHLAC after filing an answer in her unlawful detainer case. Despite having taken the initial step to respond, the tenant expressed significant fear and uncertainty about appearing at her scheduled trial and indicated she was considering not attending. Absent her appearance, the case would have proceeded by default, likely resulting in a judgment against her.

SHLAC staff provided individualized assistance to educate the tenant on what to expect during the trial process, including courtroom procedures, potential outcomes, and her rights as a tenant. Staff also discussed possible settlement scenarios, helping the tenant understand available options and prepare to advocate for herself effectively.

Through this guidance, the tenant gained confidence and clarity regarding the process and chose to appear at her trial. As a result, she was able to engage in negotiations and successfully reach an agreement that included a negotiated move-out date and the 'sealing' of the eviction record.

Following her court appearance, the tenant returned to SHLAC to report the outcome and express gratitude for the assistance received. This case illustrates SHLAC's role in preventing default judgments, supporting tenant participation in court proceedings, and promoting fair and equitable outcomes in housing-related cases.

District 3 – Van Nuys/Chatsworth:

A returning tenant sought assistance at the Van Nuys SHLAC in December 2025 after he was served with a new Unlawful Detainer (UD) lawsuit. SHLAC staff had previously assisted the tenant with a UD answer in October 2025, which resulted in the dismissal of his prior case. Upon returning to SHLAC, the tenant disclosed that he has ADHD and indicated that he would require additional time and support to complete his response.

During the initial interview, the tenant appeared frustrated and had difficulty focusing, answering questions, and making decisions. SHLAC staff and a fellow JusticeCorps provided patient, trauma-informed assistance, allowing the tenant the time and accommodation necessary to understand the process and work through the required forms. Due to the length of the interview, the tenant was asked to return the following day to complete the filing.

When the tenant returned the next morning, staff again provided individualized assistance at the pace needed for him to fully understand and complete his UD answer. At the end, the tenant left SHLAC with his forms completed and expressed appreciation for the staff's patience and support.

In a separate instance in District 3, a tenant sought assistance at the Santa Monica SHLAC to file a last-minute UD answer. The tenant was experiencing significant distress and faced the imminent risk of default. SHLAC staff assisted the tenant in completing and filing a timely response, allowing the case to proceed. As a result of this intervention, the tenant's case was subsequently dismissed.

Together, these cases demonstrate SHLAC's capacity to provide accessible, trauma-informed, and responsive assistance, as well as prevent default judgments and support fair housing outcomes for vulnerable tenants across District 3.

District 4 – Torrance/Long Beach:

A person sought assistance at the Long Beach SHLAC after repeatedly receiving rejection notices from the clerk's office while attempting to obtain a default divorce judgment. Upon reviewing the case, SHLAC staff identified that the issue originated with deficiencies in the initial divorce petition, which had prevented the case from moving forward. SHLAC staff assisted the person with preparing an amended petition and provided her with education regarding proper service of process. Staff also explained that if the respondent again failed to respond, the litigant could proceed toward a default judgment. With this guidance, the litigant was able to correct earlier filing errors and continue advancing her case.

Approximately four months later, the litigant returned to SHLAC seeking assistance with finalizing her default judgment. After struggling independently with the divorce process for several years, she was able to successfully finalize her divorce in 2025 with SHLAC's continued support. She expressed appreciation for the time staff took to explain the procedural issues and for providing consistent assistance throughout the case.

In a separate matter at the Torrance SHLAC, a litigant sought assistance after multiple court denials of her requests to pursue alternate service of divorce papers. The litigant participated in a SHLAC workshop, where staff guided her through the service requirements and assisted her in completing the necessary worksheet. Upon returning to SHLAC, staff helped her prepare a revised request to publish the summons that included needed information.

As a result of SHLAC's assistance, the litigant's request for service by publication was granted, allowing her case to proceed after extended delays. These cases highlight SHLAC's effectiveness in resolving procedural obstacles, supporting self-represented family law litigants, and facilitating timely case progression in the LASC system.

District 5 – Antelope Valley:

In August 2024, a litigant sought assistance at the Antelope Valley SHLAC regarding a petition for guardianship of her stepdaughter. The child had previously been removed from her biological parents' care through Dependency Court due to substance abuse concerns and was later placed with the litigant by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) under specific safety conditions.

Over time, ongoing instability in the household raised continued concerns regarding the child's safety and well-being. The litigant reported that she was the primary responsible caregiver for the child and ultimately determined that pursuing guardianship was necessary to protect the child and provide a stable and safe home environment.

SHLAC staff helped with the guardianship process, helping the litigant understand court requirements and complete the necessary filings. As a result of this support, the litigant was granted legal guardianship of the child in December 2025. Following the court's order, the litigant relocated to establish a safe and stable home for the child.

After successfully securing guardianship, the litigant expressed her intent to return to SHLAC for assistance with filing for dissolution of marriage. She consistently conveyed appreciation for the guidance and support received from SHLAC staff.

This case illustrates SHLAC's role in supporting vulnerable caregivers, promoting child safety and stability, and assisting self-represented litigants in navigating complex family law matters in District 5.

Remote Services:

An Armenian-speaking litigant sought remote assistance from SHLAC regarding a UD case. The tenant had limited English proficiency, had been in the United States for only a few years, and faced significant barriers to accessing in-person services due to mobility limitations. She was facing eviction for nonpayment of rent and was not employed at the time. The tenant initially contacted SHLAC after receiving a courtesy notice from the court indicating that a UD Summons and Complaint had been filed against her. Due to the language barrier, she did not understand the documents or the eviction process. During the initial consultation, SHLAC staff explained the notice and provided an overview of the UD process in her language.

Once the tenant was formally served with the Summons and Complaint, SHLAC staff assisted her remotely with completing and electronically filing a timely UD answer. Staff continued to provide follow-up support, reviewing court paperwork and explaining the court's orders. As a result of her participation in the process, the litigant was able to settle her case through a negotiated payment plan, allowing her to remain in her home. Several weeks later, the litigant contacted SHLAC again after receiving jury service paperwork, concerned that it was related to her eviction case. SHLAC staff clarified the nature of the notice and reassured her that her housing matter had been resolved.

This case highlights the critical role of SHLAC's remote services in serving people who speak languages other than English, addressing accessibility barriers, preventing harm through informed court participation, and reducing confusion that could otherwise result in adverse legal outcomes.

IV. REFERRALS:

During the reporting period, SHLAC referred litigants to a variety of legal and social services to ensure access to comprehensive support beyond self-help assistance.

Referral outcomes included:

- **2,565** litigants referred to the Lawyers Referral Service.
- **1,910** litigants referred to Community Legal Aid SoCal., Neighborhood Legal Services Los Angeles, and the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles.
- **1,446** litigants referred to the Stay Housed LA program.
- **804** litigants referred to other legal aid providers.
- **174** litigants referred to social service agencies for elder abuse, child abuse, suicide prevention, domestic violence, and other crisis counseling.
- **169** litigants referred to DCBA services.
- **14** litigants referred to mediation services.

V. FUTURE OF SHLAC:

DCBA continues to support SHLAC's long-term sustainability and remains engaged in efforts to secure additional funding to maintain and expand service capacity. As part of the Fiscal Year 2026–27 Recommended Budget, DCBA requested an increase in annual funding from \$3.0 million to \$5.1 million to address current operational shortfalls and support continued service levels across the County. This funding request was identified as a critical unmet need during DCBA's Department Budget Presentation to your Board on February 12, 2026.

The next biannual report will cover the period from January through June 2026 and will be submitted in August 2026.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me or Rigo Reyes, Deputy Director, at (213) 247-1365 or rreyes@dcba.lacounty.gov.

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