



The Legal Needs of Low-Income Households in Southern Minnesota

*Report for Southern Minnesota
Regional Legal Services, Inc.*

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 1 6

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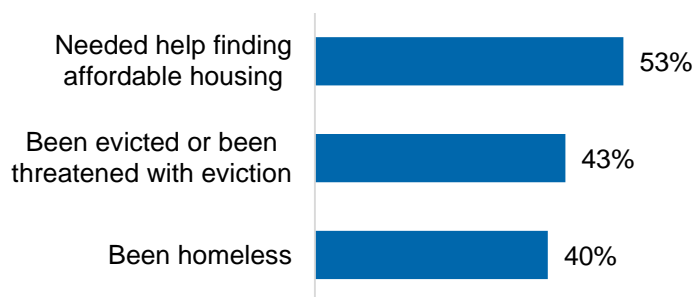
Executive summary

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) provides free legal representation to low-income individuals in civil legal matters in 33 counties in southern Minnesota, including the east side of the Twin Cities metro area. In spring of 2015, SMRLS contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a needs assessment of the legal problems people in their service area are currently experiencing. The purpose of this study is to assist SMRLS in establishing priority areas for the coming years and gather information from low-income community members about how SMRLS should allocate resources. The study consisted of a paper survey with 224 clients (both prior clients and those deemed ineligible for services), 12 focus groups with community members, and an online survey of 143 legal professionals (stakeholders) who have worked with SMRLS in the past. The following is a summary of the results.

Housing is the number one legal issue for clients

The top three legal needs noted by client survey respondents were housing-related issues. In the past year, 40 percent or more indicated they, or someone in their household, has needed help finding affordable housing, been evicted or threatened with eviction, or been homeless. In addition, 75 percent of stakeholders said housing-related issues were among the top three legal needs facing low-income communities, with eviction being the number one legal need identified by stakeholders.

A. Percent of clients indicating they experienced the following housing-related issues in the past year

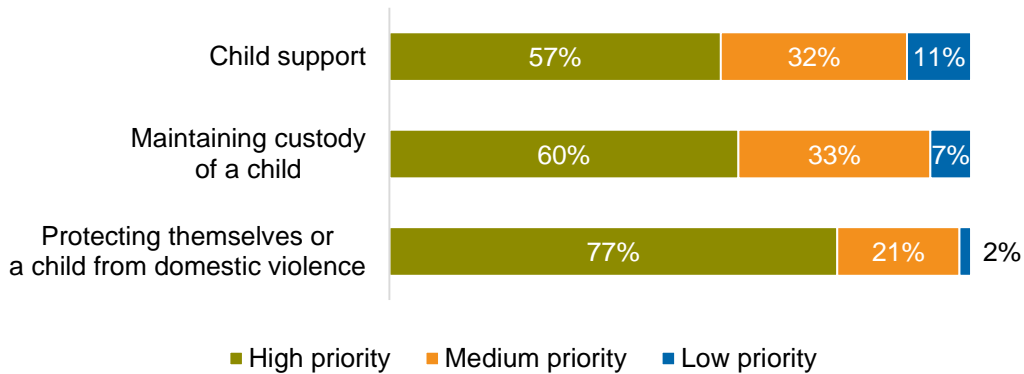


Clients need legal assistance resolving child custody, support, and domestic violence issues

While family law issues were not among the top 10 legal needs identified by clients, stakeholders rated these issues very highly. Three-quarters (77%) rated addressing domestic violence a high priority, and over half (57-60%) indicated child custody and

support are high priority issues (Figure B). In addition, when asked what top three legal needs are facing low-income families, a large majority (83%) of stakeholders indicated family law issues. It may be that families experience domestic issues less frequently than other legal issues, but the lasting impacts of domestic violence, divorce, and child custody on children and families raise the priority for stakeholders.

B. Importance of family law needs of people living with low incomes (N=136-139)



Applying for or being denied public benefits is a challenge for clients

Applying for or being denied public benefits were among the top issues facing clients, as well as among the top legal needs identified by stakeholders. Many survey participants indicated that someone in their household had been denied or terminated from cash assistance or food support (26%) or had difficulty applying for public benefits (20%) in the past year (Figure C). In addition, denial of public benefits was noted as a high priority by over half (57%) of stakeholders.

C. Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey (N=235-243)



Potential outreach strategies

Almost all stakeholders (94%) felt the population is aware of SMRLS, with a quarter (26%) indicating they are very aware. Most focus group participants noted they were aware and had positive opinions of SMRLS. To better reach target populations, stakeholders' and clients' main suggestion was increased capacity. They noted the need for free legal services is far greater than the resources available. Suggestions included more staff, more offices in different parts of the state, and more staff who speak other languages. Participants also suggested that SMRLS increase their outreach activities in the community by attending more community events, and providing brochures to agencies that work with target populations.

Demographics of SMRLS' service area

SMRLS serves low-income households, primarily in the 33 counties of southern Minnesota.¹ The 2015 income eligibility guidelines are 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. A family of four would have to have an annual income of less than \$30,313 to qualify for SMRLS' services, though in certain circumstances SMRLS may accept clients up to 187.5 percent of federal poverty guidelines. SMRLS also represents farm workers in all of Minnesota and North Dakota.

According to Minnesota Compass (www.mncompass.org), the 33 counties in SMRLS service area have a combined population of 2.27 million, about 41 percent of Minnesota's total population. Over 600,000 people in southern Minnesota are living below the federal poverty line. This is 39 percent of the state's poverty population.

The Minnesota city with the highest poverty rate is Mankato, at 26 percent, which is in SMRLS' service area.

Racial diversity and immigrants

Minnesota as a whole has become more diverse. The population of people of color has increased from 12 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2013. Since 2010, Minnesota's population of color has increased 13 percent compared to the national rate of 9 percent. Within the SMRLS service area, 432,000 people identify as being from a racial or ethnic group that is nonwhite. Excluding the Twin Cities metro, southern Minnesota has the largest number of people of color (88,000) in the state.

In addition, the SMRLS service area is home to about 186,000 people who are foreign-born. The fastest growing immigrant groups in Minnesota are from Mexico, India, Laos, and Somalia.

The Twin Cities metro area ranks high nationally for the overall portion of adults working. However, the area has some of the worst racial disparities in employment in the nation. The employment gap between whites and people of color is 13 percent, the third highest out of the 25 largest metro areas in the United States.²

¹ These 33 counties are: Blue Earth, Brown, Carver, Cottonwood, Dakota, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Jackson, LeSueur, Martin, McLeod, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Olmsted, Pipestone, Ramsey, Redwood, Rice, Rock, Scott, Sibley, Steele, Wabasha, Waseca, Washington, Watonwan, and Winona.

² <https://www.theitascaproject.com/20150316%20EmployOpp%20Final.pdf>

Cost-burdened households

Nearly 3 in 10 households in Minnesota are housing cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. In southern Minnesota, 28 percent of households are cost-burdened. Homeowners are much less likely than renters to be cost-burdened.

Top legal needs

Housing

Housing-related legal needs were the top issue and concern among clients and stakeholders alike.

Clients

On the paper survey, the three top legal needs noted by clients were housing related. Over half of respondents (53%) indicated that in the past year, they, or someone in their household, has needed help finding affordable housing. Similarly, 43 percent had been evicted or threatened with eviction, and 40 percent had experienced homelessness. Other problems related to housing that were also experienced by many survey respondents include: having utilities shut off or threatened with a shutoff (31%), been denied housing due to a criminal background (28%), and needing help because a landlord is not making repairs (23%; Figure 1).

1. Housing-related legal needs, client ratings

Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes" N=236-246
Needed help finding affordable housing	53%
Been evicted or been threatened with eviction	43%
Been homeless	40%
Had your utilities shut off or been threatened with a shutoff	31%
Been denied housing due to a criminal background check or past evictions	28%
Needed help because your landlord is not making repairs	23%
Been threatened with losing subsidized or Section 8 housing	18%
Been denied access to housing or housing programs because of your race, disability or because you have children	8%
Lost your house due to a mortgage foreclosure or the cancellation of a contract for deed	8%

In an open-ended question, survey respondents (N=73) also indicated housing as one of the top three most important legal problems facing low-income individuals and families in their community. They primarily mentioned difficulty finding or affording housing in general, but also specifically finding housing near schools or work, or in areas that feel safe.

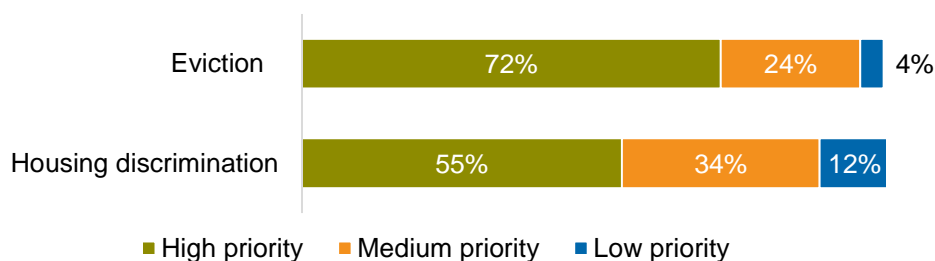
Focus group participants were asked what kind of legal problems their community is facing in terms of housing; landlord/tenant issues, discrimination, and eviction were among the top issues noted. They reported that some landlords refused to make repairs, blamed them for bed bugs, or refused to work with government housing programs. Others noted that landlords discriminated against them by asking for higher rent, denying housing based on the state they came from, credit or criminal background, race or age; youth and immigrants felt particularly scrutinized. Focus group participants also reported facing eviction for damaging the house, not paying rent on time, not having sufficient money to pay rent, or due to the police coming to the house even though the tenants did not do anything wrong. Immigrant participants in particular mentioned issues facing eviction for having bed bugs.

Other issues clients experienced include general challenges finding housing, or long wait times for subsidized housing. These were noted as particular challenges for seasonal farm workers and/or large families that were requiring larger rental units. Housing and utility costs prevented some families from maintaining housing.

Stakeholders

In the web survey, a large majority of stakeholders (72%) indicated eviction as a high priority issue, and over half (55%) indicated housing discrimination as high priority (Figure 2). In addition, when asked about the top three legal needs among the people they serve, 80 percent of stakeholders said housing-related issues, with eviction being the top (see Appendix B).

2. Housing-related legal needs, stakeholder ratings (N=134-136)



Family

While family law issues were not among the top 10 legal needs identified by clients, stakeholders rated these issues very highly.

Clients

Relative to other issues, family issues ranked in the middle in terms of issues survey respondents had faced in the last year. The most commonly reported issue was abuse (15%). Eleven percent of respondents reported being denied the right to see their child and needed help collecting child support in the past year. Respondents also have lost or been threatened with the loss of custody of a child (10%), needed legal help for a divorce (8%), or had not been able to afford child support (7%; Figure 3).

3. Family-related legal needs, client ratings

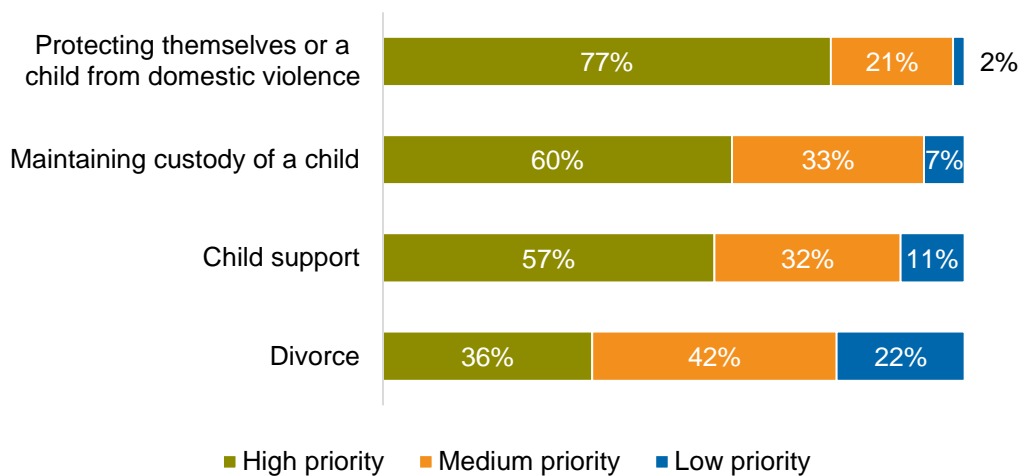
Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes" N=238-241
Been abused and needed help protecting yourself and/or your children	15%
Been denied the right to see your child	11%
Needed help collecting child support	11%
Lost or been threatened with the loss of physical custody of a child	10%
Needed legal help for a divorce	8%
Not been able to afford child support you are required to pay	7%
Needed help with paperwork after a parent or relative passed away	6%

Though a low number of survey respondents reported needing legal help for family issues in the past year, focus group participants identified several family legal issues their communities face. When asked what kind of legal problems their community is facing in terms of family issues, participants acknowledged challenges filing for divorce, and understanding the child support and custody issues resulting from divorce or separation. Some immigrant families noted there are cultural differences in how children are raised and disciplined, and it may not be culturally appropriate to ask for child support. In addition, law enforcement either do not understand cultural differences or approach children at school to ask if they are beaten or not fed at home. Immigrant families may not know how to report or seek help for family problems and/or domestic violence when they do not speak English.

Stakeholders

In the web survey, 77 percent of stakeholders rated protection from domestic violence as the legal need with the highest priority. Child support and custody issues ranked among the top five legal needs of families with low incomes, with 57-60 percent of stakeholders indicating it was a high priority (Figure 4). Similarly, when asked what the top three legal needs are in an open-ended question, 90 percent indicated family-related issues with child custody/support and domestic violence identified by a quarter of respondents (see Appendix B).

4. Family-related legal needs, stakeholder ratings (N=136-139)



While clients were less likely to indicate they experienced family law issues in the past year, the long-lasting impacts domestic violence, divorce, and child custody can have on children and families may raise the priority for stakeholders.

Public benefits

Applying for or being denied public benefits are among the top issues facing clients, as well as among the top legal needs identified by stakeholders.

Clients

Many survey participants indicated that someone in their household had been denied or terminated from cash assistance or food support (26%) or had difficulty applying for public benefits (20%) in the past year (Figure 5). These two items were also among the top of all legal needs.

5. Public benefit legal needs, client ratings

Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes" N=235-243
Been denied or terminated from cash assistance or food support	26%
Had difficulty applying for public benefits for any reason	20%
Been told by the state or federal government that you need to repay benefits	10%
Tried to get a child care subsidy	9%
Been denied public assistance because of your race, national origin, gender or disability	4%

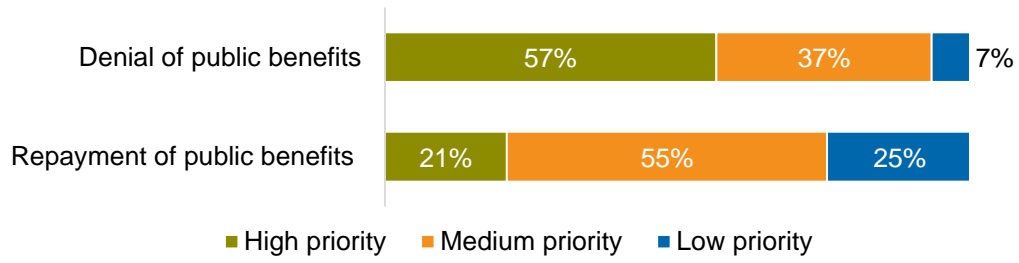
In addition, focus group respondents noted issues they faced in terms of accessing public benefits, including not being aware of what public benefits are available to them. They also mentioned that they did not know where to go in order to apply for public benefits or how to use public benefits. Some focus group members complained there was no one to help them apply for public benefits, and they get in trouble if they try to assist others in filling out application forms. They were particularly unclear about how they should report their income and the number of people in their household. Others said that undocumented immigrants are terrified to apply for public benefits, even if their children qualify and are United States citizens. Lack of awareness of the availability of benefits or how to apply for them is further heightened by language barriers.

Focus group participants reported that the system is delayed and it can take up to three months to process benefit applications or even get any response. They specifically mentioned food stamps and MNSure being delayed or unresponsive. Others experienced challenges accessing benefits either because they do not have children, or do not work enough or work too much. These were particular problems noted by farm workers.

Stakeholders

In the web survey, denial of public benefits was noted as a high priority by over half (57%) of stakeholders (Figure 6), with a quarter of stakeholders indicating benefits-related issues are among the top three (see Appendix B).

6. Public benefit legal needs, stakeholder ratings (N=132-137)



Other legal needs

Survey respondents were asked about multiple categories of legal needs. Housing, family, and public benefit-related legal needs were the most common expressed by both clients and stakeholders, however many clients also experienced legal needs in the following areas:

- Education
- Health
- Consumer issues
- Immigration
- Employment

Education

Few survey respondents experienced education-related legal issues in the past year. The most commonly experienced issue was needing help to make sure that a child with a disability, emotional problem, or learning difficulties were assigned the appropriate education program (15%). A small number of respondents experienced other education-related legal issues, including needing help because of a child being bullied (10%), for a child being unfairly expelled or suspended from school (8%), keeping a child in school while experiencing homelessness (8%), and getting school services for English Language Learners (6%; see Appendix B).

When focus group participants were asked about education-related legal issues in their communities, they mentioned several issues specific to immigrant communities, including a lack of regular ELL classes for adults, tutoring for children, unfair treatment by school administrators and staff, language barriers for immigrant children, bullying, and discrimination.

Over a third (34%) of surveyed stakeholders indicated that accessing public education services, such as ELL services, special education, and transportation should be a high priority for SMRLS (see Appendix B).

Health

Survey respondents reported experiencing several health-related legal issues in the past year. Most frequently reported was needing assistance when Medicare, Medical Assistance,

or Minnesota Care did not cover full medical bills (21%). This particular issue was also among the top ten most experienced legal issues of the past year. Other problems included being denied health insurance or treatment (8-14%). A very small number of respondents reported facing very high nursing home costs (3%; see Appendix B).

Focus group participants were asked what kind of legal problems their community is facing in terms of health. Focus group members reported trouble finding health care providers who accept medical assistance, obtaining necessary medical coverage, and high medical and prescription drug costs. Participants also discussed their difficulties in understanding the medical and insurance process and where to go for certain services/coverage.

Stakeholders indicated that health-related legal needs should be a high priority for SMRLS, particularly issues related to denial of and paying for medical care (45-56%; see Appendix B).

Consumer Issues

Survey respondents have experienced a variety of consumer-related legal issues in the past year, with the most common being a target of harassing bill collection practices (32%) and having problems borrowing money for a large purchase (22%). These two issues were also in the top ten most commonly experienced legal issues. Other issues experienced included needing help filing for bankruptcy (13%), having state or federal tax problems (13%), being a victim of identity theft or fraud (13%), having wages garnished (10%), and being threatened with repossession of important items (9%; see Appendix B).

Focus group participants identified the main consumer issues as concerns about fraud, and issues related to taxes such as filing, deductions, and being audited.

Stakeholders did not think consumer issues should be of high priority for SMRLS. Only 16 percent indicated that tax issues should be a high priority and 34 percent indicated that bank or creditor issues should be a high priority (see Appendix B).

Immigration

Few survey respondents reported being foreign-born (9 percent), in part because the survey was not offered in other languages. Thus, survey respondents reported few immigration-related legal issues overall. Four percent of respondents reported needing help applying for U.S. citizenship. Three percent of respondents also needed help applying for permanent residency, replacing lost, stolen, or expired immigration documents, or

needed help to bring a spouse or child to the United States. Two percent reported being a victim of abuse or a violent crime and needed help applying for immigration status. Few respondents reported being placed in deportation proceedings in the past year (<1%; see Appendix B).

The focus groups were intended to obtain information from immigrant populations whose perspectives were not captured in the survey. Nine of the twelve groups were made up of immigrant participants. These participants discussed a variety of immigration-related legal issues such as: the long legal process involved in bringing family members to the United States, a lack of understanding of the overall process, high costs for lawyers and filing fees, and an overall lack of information and assistance for people filing for residency or citizenship. They also mentioned employment discrimination and unfair hiring practices, and educational discrimination as a result of their status or ethnicity. Hispanic participants, in particular, noted that lacking documentation impacted most other issues such as the ability to get public benefits, employment, housing, and education.

Stakeholders felt that assistance for immigration legal needs should be a high priority for SMRLS (56%; see Appendix B).

Employment

Few survey respondents reported employment-related legal issues in the last year. The most commonly cited issue was being denied employment because of a criminal background (16%). Less than 10 percent of respondents reported the following legal issues: needing help with business contracts (7%); being fired from a job because of national origin, age, gender, disability, or race (6%); being denied leave to care for a sick family member (6%); working in dangerous or unsafe conditions (3%); having a health care or day care license threatened due to a background check (3%); needing help getting unpaid wages (3%); having unfair or illegal deductions from pay (3%); receiving false employment or wage information by an employer or recruiter (3%); and having problems with an employer not accepting immigration documents (<1%; see Appendix B).

Focus group participants also mentioned several employment-related legal needs including assistance getting business licenses or time off for pregnancy, help getting workers compensation, sexual harassment, unlawful termination based on gender or ethnicity, and trouble finding a job because of language barriers and discrimination.

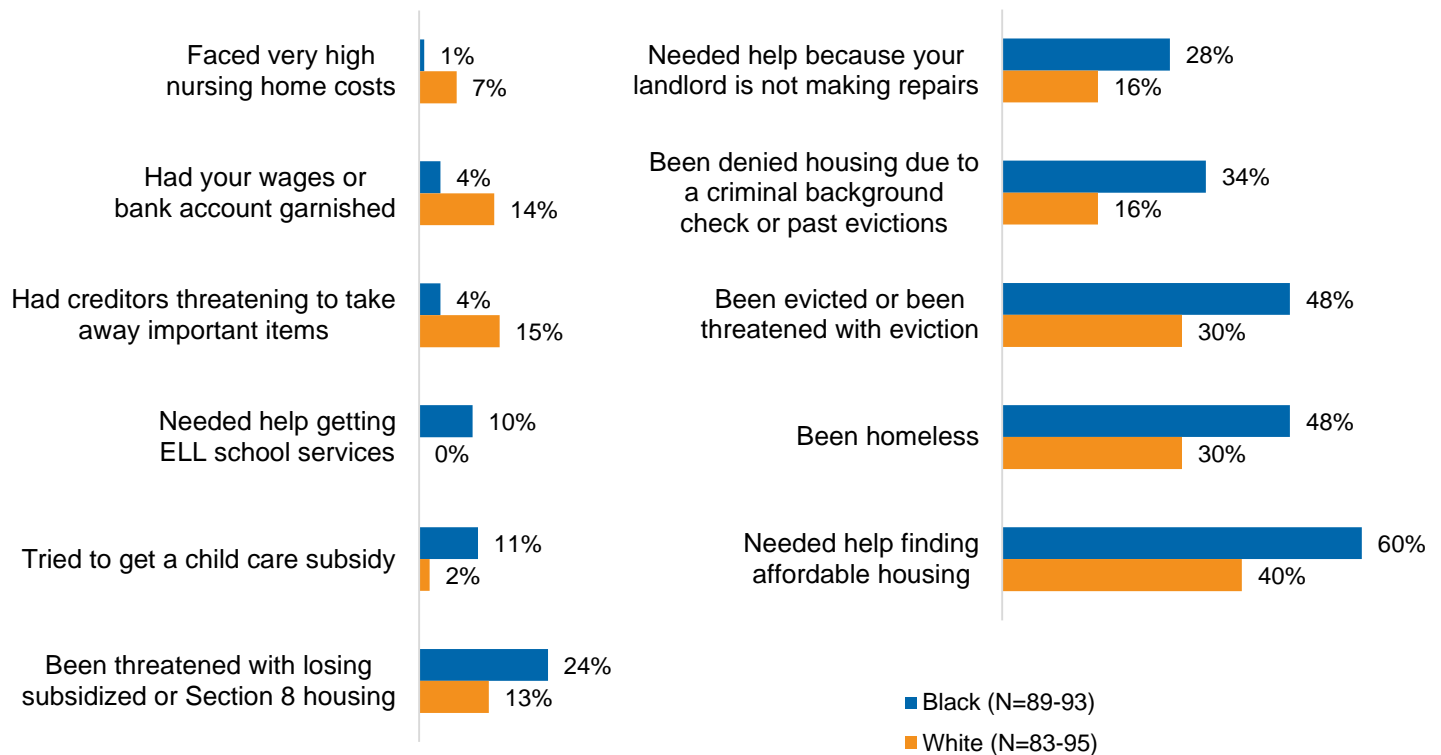
Stakeholders indicated that employment issues should be a high (39%) or medium (47%) priority for SMRLS (see Appendix B).

Differences by population group

Racial differences

In looking at differences by race of respondent, a higher percentage of black clients indicated they experienced most legal issues in the past year as compared to white respondents (Figure 7).³ Black (including African and African-American) clients were more likely to have housing and education-related legal needs, whereas white clients were more likely to have dealt with repossession, wage garnishing, and faced very high nursing home costs.

7. Client legal needs ratings, by race



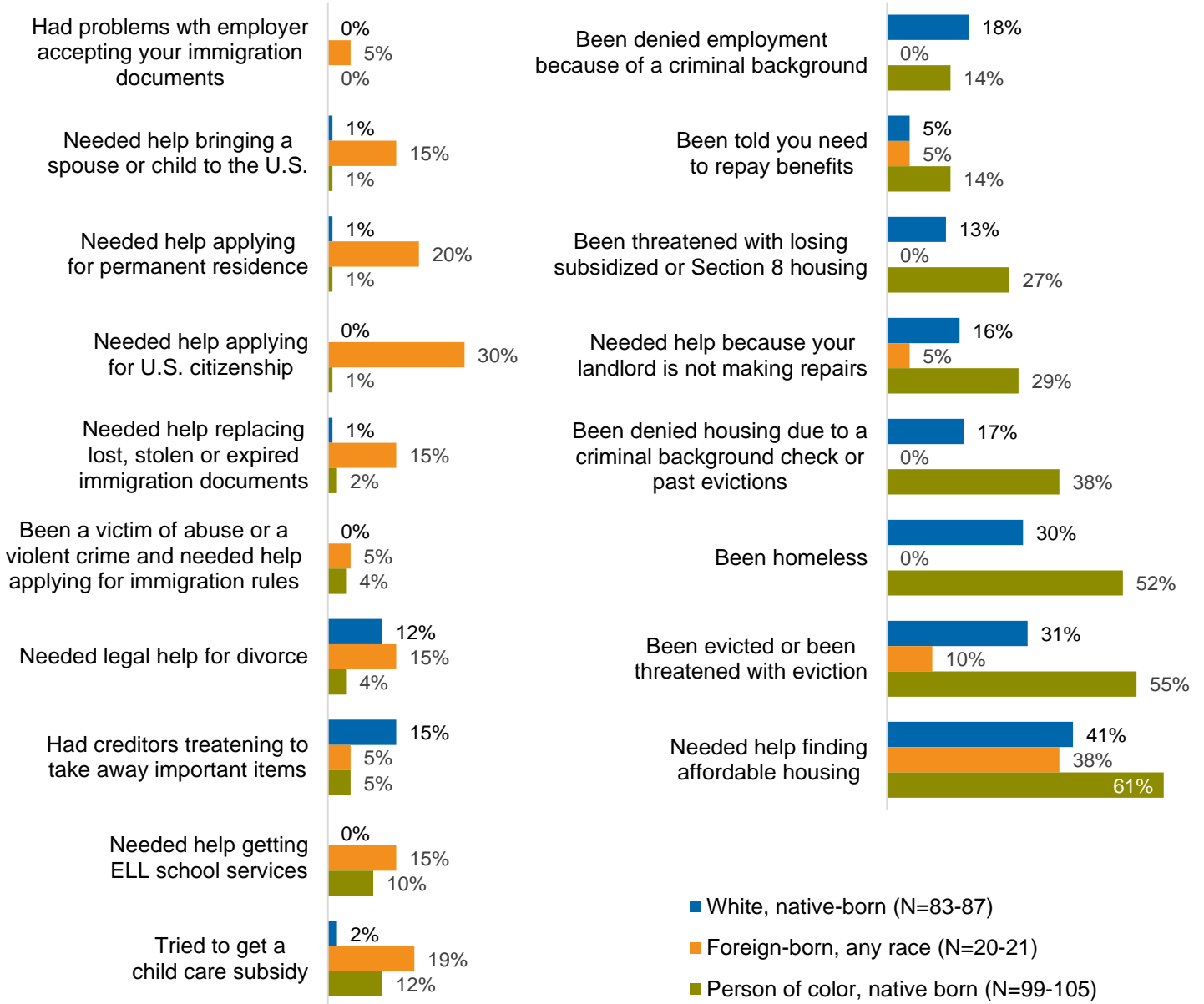
Similarly, foreign-born clients and clients-of-color experienced more legal issues in the past year as compared to white, native-born respondents (Figure 8).⁴ Clients of color were most likely to have experienced legal issues related to housing, and public benefits.

³ There were too few respondents of other races to include them in this analysis. The items noted in this chart are those for which there was a statistically significant difference between respondents identifying as black (African American/African) vs. white.

⁴ The number of respondents identifying as foreign-born was relatively low (N=20-21), thus results should be interpreted with caution. The items noted in this chart are those for which there was a statistically significant difference.

Not surprisingly, foreign-born clients identified numerous immigration-related legal needs they or a household member had dealt with in the previous year.

8. Client legal needs ratings, by foreign-born



Based on the focus group data, the following section describes the major differences of legal issues among immigrant and refugee populations (Hispanic, Karen, Hmong, and Somali), seniors, and youth.

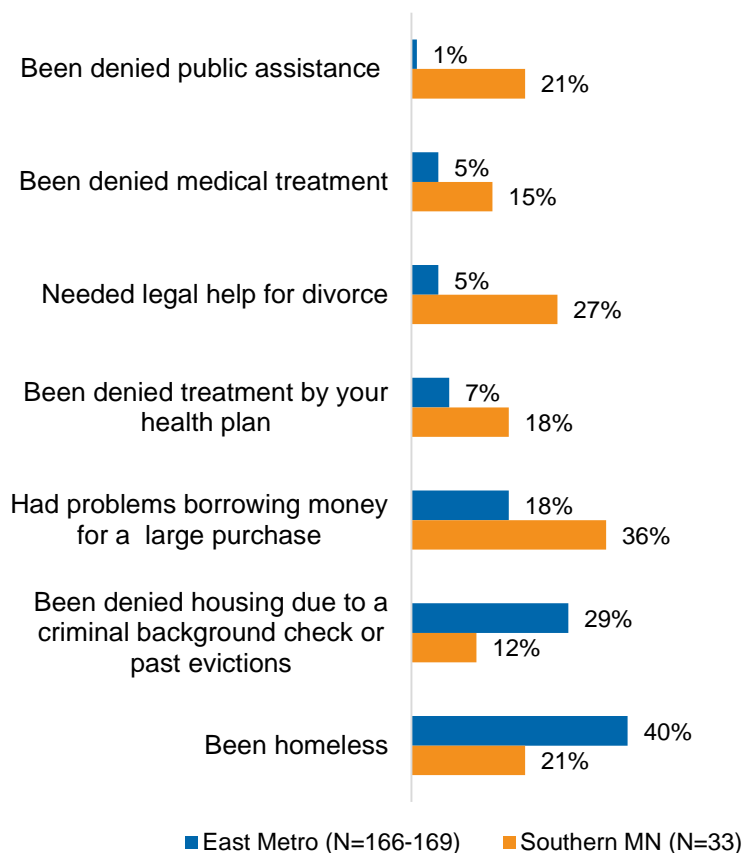
- Language barriers were a particular challenge for immigrant and refugee populations when dealing with legal issues. In particular, language was noted as a particular issue impacting housing, employment, health, and education issues.
- Immigrant communities also noted workplace and employment challenges, including employment discrimination, unfair hiring practices, and employee mistreatment.
- Housing-related legal issues were noted by immigrant groups, with the exception of Hmong participants who did not indicate that housing was a main issue in their community.
- The Hispanic community has a unique challenge of not having legal status, or being undocumented, that impacts most other issues such as ability to get public benefits, employment, housing, and education.
- While educational discrimination and unfair treatment were noted across most groups (with the exception of the Southeast Asian communities), bullying was a particular problem discussed by Hispanic and Hmong focus group participants.
- Taxes were noted as a legal problem for many communities, but particularly seniors.

Regional differences

There were very few differences by regions, both among those who took the client paper survey and the stakeholder web survey. Clients in southern Minnesota seemed to experience more problems being denied services, including public assistance, medical treatment, and borrowing money (Figure 9).⁵ However, clients in the east Metro were more likely to have experience housing-related legal issues in the last year, such as being denied housing and experiencing homelessness. These differences may be due to differences in the race/ethnicity of respondents, as respondents in the east Metro were primarily people-of-color (61%), whereas respondents from southern Minnesota mostly identified as white (71%).

⁵ There were too few respondents in southeast and southwest Minnesota, so those two categories were combined. The items noted in this chart are those for which there was a statistically significant difference.

9. Client legal needs ratings, by region



In comparison, stakeholders in the Twin Cities tended to rank items higher priority with those in southern Minnesota ranked them lower.

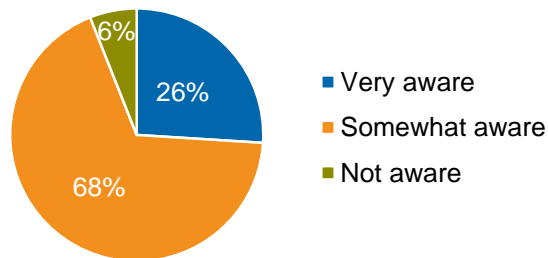
- With the exception of domestic violence, which ranked highly in all areas, family issues (e.g., child custody, and divorce) were ranked of higher priority in southern Minnesota than the Twin Cities east metro.
- While eviction was an issue ranked highly in all regions, housing discrimination and bank/creditor issues were ranked lower priority by stakeholders in southern Minnesota. Health-related legal issues (e.g., paying for or denial of medical care) were also ranked slightly higher in the Twin Cities.

Since these differences were not reflected among clients, it may be that stakeholders in the metro area tend to see a wider variety of concerns and are more vocal about their impacts on families.

Strategies for reaching the target population

Almost all stakeholders (94%) felt the population is aware of SMRLS, with a quarter (26%) indicating they are very aware (Figure 10). Focus group participants were asked about their pre-existing knowledge of SMRLS and their services, as well as for suggestions to improve outreach efforts. Most participants had already known about SMRLS and had positive opinions of them.

10. Extent population is aware of SMRLS, stakeholder ratings



Stakeholders that participated in the online survey and clients that participated in the focus groups recommended the following actions below for SMRLS to consider in order to improve their legal services and assistance to targeted communities:

- **Increase staffing and/or open more offices.** Stakeholders and clients noted the need to increase staff and attorneys to serve more clients, offer more legal clinics, and take on more cases. Clients also suggested opening more offices, specifically offices in Austin and/or Faribault to deal with immigration issues.
- **Expand language services.** Though SMRLS has multi-lingual staff, stakeholders and clients noted the need to offer more language-specific staff, as well as staff that are culturally competent, specifically regarding non-traditional families.
- **Offer quick self-help or open office hours.** Some respondents suggested SMRLS offer “self-help days at courthouses,” or open walk-in hours to assist clients or answer quick questions.
- **Expand outreach and advertisement.** Specific ideas respondents had for increasing outreach included attending community activities on weekends (such as resource fairs), engaging in social media, improving its web page to be easier to navigate, developing

brochures and pamphlets in multiple languages that are posted at courthouses and offices, and advertising on culturally specific media (e.g., Hmong radio).

- **Partner with other community- and faith-based organizations.** Stakeholders and clients also suggested partnering with community- and faith-based organizations to provide free clinics, information about its services, and targeted public education on issues specific to certain communities (e.g., issues facing people who are homeless or immigrant communities).
- **Educate attorneys and court personnel to increase referrals.** In order to help people understand what SMRLS offers, provide information and educate attorneys and court personnel about what types of cases SMRLS can assist with, eligibility criteria, and how to refer clients.

Appendix A: Data collection methods

Paper survey of clients

Wilder Research developed a survey for clients in collaboration with SMRLS staff. The survey was designed to gather information on the types of civil legal problems respondents had experienced in the past year, in eight specific categories. Paper surveys were mailed to 800 former and rejected clients with a stamped return envelope. Surveys were also left in the waiting areas in the downtown St. Paul, Winona, Rochester, Migrant South, and RIMS offices. The surveys were in the field from July-September 2015. Surveys were confidential and anonymous. A total of 255 surveys were useable – 85 were returned via mail, and an additional 170 surveys were gathered in person at waiting rooms.

The majority of respondents were black or African American (42%) or white (42%). Nine percent of respondents said they were born outside of the United States. Most respondents had a total combined household income of less than \$15,000 per year and just two percent had a household income of \$40,000 or more. Most respondents (75%) live in the Twin Cities metro area and ranged in age from 17 to 99, with the average being 45 years old. Household size ranged from one to ten members, with the average household size being three (Figure A1).

A1. Description of respondents to Client survey

	Percent
Race/ethnicity	N=224
Black or African American	42%
White	42%
Asian	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
Other (mixed race or unidentified)	4%
Hispanic or Latino	3%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1%
Foreign-born (N=243)	9%
Total combined household income before taxes in 2014	N=235
Under \$15,000	69%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	17%
\$25,000 - \$39,999	12%
\$40,000 or more	2%

A1. Description of respondents to Client survey, continued

Zip code	N=178		
Metro			75%
Southwest			8%
Southeast			10%
Other (not in SMRLS region)			7%
	Range	Mean	Median
Number of people in household (N=240)	1 to 10	3	2
Age (N=243)	17 to 99	45	43

Focus groups with community members

SMRLS serves a broad geographic area with multiple cultural communities represented. To explore the legal needs of those particular communities, Wilder Research developed a focus group protocol and trained SMRLS staff on how to conduct focus groups. The questions in the protocol asked about specific legal problems people in the community may have experienced, as well as community knowledge of SMRLS services, and what SMRLS could do to improve their services. SMRLS staff volunteered to be trained on conducting focus groups and taking notes, and then signed up to recruit for, and conduct, groups in their area. SMRLS staff worked in pairs to co-facilitate each group. A total of 12 focus groups were conducted in the fall of 2015 at the following locations. Groups ranged from 4 to 20 participants.

A2. Description of focus groups

Location	Population of focus	Number of attendees
Austin, MN	Hispanic	5
Brooten, MN	Hispanic/farm workers	8
Faribault, MN	Somali	11
Larimore, ND	Hispanic/farm workers	20
Mankato, MN	Somali women	10
Rochester, MN	Somali	8
St. James, MN	Hispanic	3
St. Paul, MN	Hmong	8
St. Paul, MN	Youth/LGBT	4
St. Paul, MN	Seniors	10
St. Paul, MN	Karen	8
Worthington, MN	Culturally diverse youth	2
Total		97

Online survey of legal professionals and other stakeholders

Wilder Research developed a confidential survey for legal professionals in collaboration with SMRLS staff. This survey was designed to take 15 minutes or less to complete to encourage a greater response rate from busy professionals. The survey was designed to assess the perspectives of legal professionals who have worked with SMRLS at some point in the past. Questions asked about the most important legal needs of low-income people in their communities and how SMRLS could improve their outreach in southern Minnesota. The survey was emailed to 317 judges, attorneys, and legal staff at community service agencies in the SMRLS service area. A total of 143 surveys were completed in fall of 2015 for a response rate of 45 percent.

A3. Description of respondents to stakeholder web survey

Professional position / role	Percent
	N=134
Staff at community-based organization	54%
Private attorney	19%
Judge	11%
Other judicial staff/court administrators	5%
County / public attorney	4%
Other (retired, government, funder)	6%
Regions	
Twin Cities – east side	37%
Southeast	33%
Southwest	27%
Farm workers	3%

Appendix B: Data tables

Client survey

B1. Client ratings of legal needs, highest ranking issues (20% or more experienced in the last year)

Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes," N=231-236
Needed help finding affordable housing	53%
Been evicted or been threatened with eviction	43%
Been homeless	40%
Been targeted by harassing bill collection practices	32%
Had your utilities shut off or been threatened with a shutoff	31%
Been denied housing due to a criminal background check or past evictions	28%
Been denied or terminated from cash assistance or food support	26%
Needed help because your landlord is making repairs	23%
Had problems borrowing money for making a large purchase (e.g. house, mobile home, or vehicle)	22%
Needed assistance when Medicare, Medical Assistance, or Minnesota Care did not pay your full medical bills	21%
Had difficulty applying for public benefits for any reason	20%

B2. Client ratings of legal needs, middle ranking issues (5-19% experienced in last year)

Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes," N=231-236
Been threatened with losing subsidized or Section 8 housing	18%
Been denied employment because of a criminal background	16%
Been abused and needed help protecting yourself and/or your children	15%
Needed help making sure that a child with a disability, emotional problems or learning difficulties got the right education program (such as special education or 504 plan)	15%
Been denied or terminated from health insurance such as Medicare, Medical Assistance (Medicaid), MinnSure, or Minnesota Care	14%
Needed help filing for bankruptcy	13%

B2. Client ratings of legal needs, middle ranking issues (5-19% experienced in last year) continued

Had state or federal tax problems	13%
Been a victim of identity theft or fraud	13%
Been denied the right to see your child	11%
Needed help collecting child support	11%
Lost or been threatened with the loss of physical custody of a child	10%
Been told by the state or federal government that you need to repay benefits	10%
Needed help on your child's complaint of being bullied or harassed or discriminated in school	10%
Been denied treatment by your health plan	10%
Had your wages or bank account garnished	10%
Tried to get a child care subsidy	9%
Had creditors threatening to take away important items, for example repossessing a car or mobile home	9%
Needed legal help for a divorce	8%
Been denied access to housing or housing programs because of your race, disability or because you have children	8%
Lost your house due to a mortgage foreclosure or the cancellation of a contract for deed	8%
Been denied medical treatment because you don't have insurance, or because of your national origin, gender, disability, or race.	8%
Been unfairly expelled or suspended from school	8%
Needed help keeping your children in their school and getting school transportation when experiencing homelessness	8%
Needed help with business contracts or legal help starting a business	7%
Not been able to afford child support you are required to pay	7%
Needed help getting school services for English Language Learners	6%
Needed help with paperwork after a parent or relative passed away	6%
Been fired from your job because of your national origin, age, gender, disability, or race	6%
Been denied leave to care for yourself or family members with health problems	6%

B3. Client ratings of legal needs, Lowest ranking issues (<5% experienced in last year)

Someone in their household experienced the following in the year prior to taking the survey.	Percent responding "yes," N=231-236
Been denied public assistance because of your race, national origin, gender or disability	4%
Needed help applying for U.S. citizenship	4%
Faced very high nursing home costs	3%
Worked in dangerous or unsafe conditions (e.g., been exposed to pesticides)	3%
Had a health care or day care license threatened or taken away due to a background check	3%
Needed help getting unpaid wages from your employer	3%
Had unfair or illegal deductions from pay	3%
Been given false employment or wage information by employer or recruiter	3%
Needed help applying for permanent residence (green card)	3%
Needed help replacing lost, stolen, or expired immigration documents	3%
Needed help to bring a spouse or child to the U.S.	3%
Been a victim of abuse or a violent crime and needed help applying for immigration status	2%
Been placed in deportation (removal) proceedings	<1%
Had problems with employer not accepting your immigration documents to prove you are legally able to work in the U.S.	<1%

Stakeholder web survey

B4. Stakeholder priority ratings, in order of ranking

Importance of legal needs of people living with low-incomes, N=134-139	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority
Protecting themselves or a child from domestic violence	77%	21%	2%
Eviction	72%	24%	4%
Maintaining custody of a child	60%	33%	7%
Denial of public benefits	57%	37%	7%
Child support	57%	32%	11%
Housing discrimination	55%	34%	12%
Paying for medical care	45%	43%	12%
Obtaining immigration documents for self or family	56%	32%	13%
Employment issues	39%	47%	14%
Bank or creditor issues	34%	50%	16%
Denial of medical care	56%	26%	18%
Divorce	36%	42%	22%
Accessing public education services, such as ELL, special education, transportation, or other	34%	42%	24%
Repayment of public benefits	21%	55%	25%
Tax issues	16%	49%	35%

B5. The top three legal needs according to stakeholders (responses to: what do you think are the three most important legal problems or pressing legal issues facing low income communities)

Legal need	Percent
Housing law	
General – unspecified	21%
Eviction / unlawful detainers	21%
Affordable housing	10%
Housing denial / discrimination / fair housing	10%
Tenant/landlord issue / renter's rights / slum landlords	8%
Inadequate / safe housing	5%
Paying utilities / having utilities shut off	2%
Section 8 / housing assistance	2%
Long-term housing	<1%

B5. The top three legal needs according to stakeholders (responses to: what do you think are the three most important legal problems or pressing legal issues facing low income communities), continued

Legal need	Percent
Family law	
General – unspecified	10%
Child custody / support	27%
Domestic violence / assault	24%
Divorce / marriage dissolution	17%
Child visitation / parenting time	5%
Child protection	4%
Human trafficking	2%
Guardianship	<1%
Child rearing	<1%
Public benefits issues	
General – unspecified	11%
Accessing benefits / Benefits advocacy	6%
Denial of benefits	5%
Adhering to benefits' rules	<1%
Severe delays in benefits	<1%
Immigration status and documentation	
	15%
Access to legal services / equal access to legal system / fair representation	
General – unspecified	10%
Understanding legal system, legal rights, terminology	2%
Legal representation that is vested in outcome	<1%
Lack of experts in legal cases	<1%
Resources to address issues outside of court	<1%
Criminal issues	
General – unspecified	<1%
Expungement	6%
Criminal charges	3%
Criminal history preventing housing or employment	4%

B5. The top three legal needs according to stakeholders (responses to: what do you think are the three most important legal problems or pressing legal issues facing low income communities), continued

Legal need	Percent
Employment	
General – unspecified	5%
Employment discrimination	3%
Lack of available education or training	2%
Stable employment	2%
Wage theft	<1%
Medical	
General – unspecified	3%
Paying for medical care	3%
Accessing medical care	4%
Dental care	<1%
Credit / consumer issues	2%
General concerns	
Criminalization of homelessness	4%
Lack of internet access	4%
Substance use	4%
Parents having children they can't afford	3%
Safety concerns (unspecified)	2%
School education issues	2%
Transportation costs	2%
Racism and discrimination	2%
Generally disenfranchised populations	<1%