

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA,
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES



Self-Help Report

Presented by Presiding Judge Eric C. Taylor and Executive Officer/Clerk of Court Sherri R. Carter

**A Report on the Services Offered to Self-Represented
Litigants Before and After the Pandemic**

JUNE 2022

ERIC C. TAYLOR
PRESIDING JUDGE



SHERRI R. CARTER
EXECUTIVE OFFICER/
CLERK OF COURT

June 2, 2022

A Message from the Presiding Judge and Executive Officer/Clerk of Court:

We are pleased to present a comprehensive report on the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles (Court) self-help and remote self-service options available to self-represented litigants (SRLs) and court users in the nation's largest trial court. This report provides a wide-ranging account on the Court's self-help programs, self-help centers and self-service options and how the Court transitioned to new and innovative remote options due to the challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the help of Los Angeles County and legal aid partners, the Court provides vital self-help resources for SRLs. In its 2019 California Justice Gap Study, the State Bar of California found that 55% of Californians at all income levels experienced at least one civil legal problem in their household each year, yet nearly 70% of them received no legal assistance.¹

Much of the data presented in the report spans a critical period in Court history: March 2019 – February 2021, just prior to and the first year of the pandemic. The report also highlights the Court's remote self-service options, many of which the Court developed and launched as a result of the pandemic to convert traditional in-person services to remote alternatives. Guided website tools and virtual appointments have become mainstays of the Court's service model, providing safe, convenient options for litigants without needing to miss work, pay for childcare or commute to the courthouse.

These services – whether virtual or in person – inform SRLs about court procedures and processes, help with completion of court forms and relay legal aid referral information. Assistance is provided in many languages and for multiple case types, including dissolution of marriage (divorce), restraining orders, name change, unlawful detainer (eviction) and more.

While the pandemic required the Court to find new ways to serve the public, the innovative remote services will endure and continue to expand access to justice in meaningful ways to the residents of Los Angeles County.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Eric C. Taylor in blue ink.

Eric C. Taylor
Presiding Judge

Handwritten signature of Sherri R. Carter in blue ink.

Sherri R. Carter
Executive Officer/Clerk of Court

¹ The State Bar of California, "California Justice Gap Study," <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Access-to-Justice/Initiatives/California-Justice-Gap-Study>.

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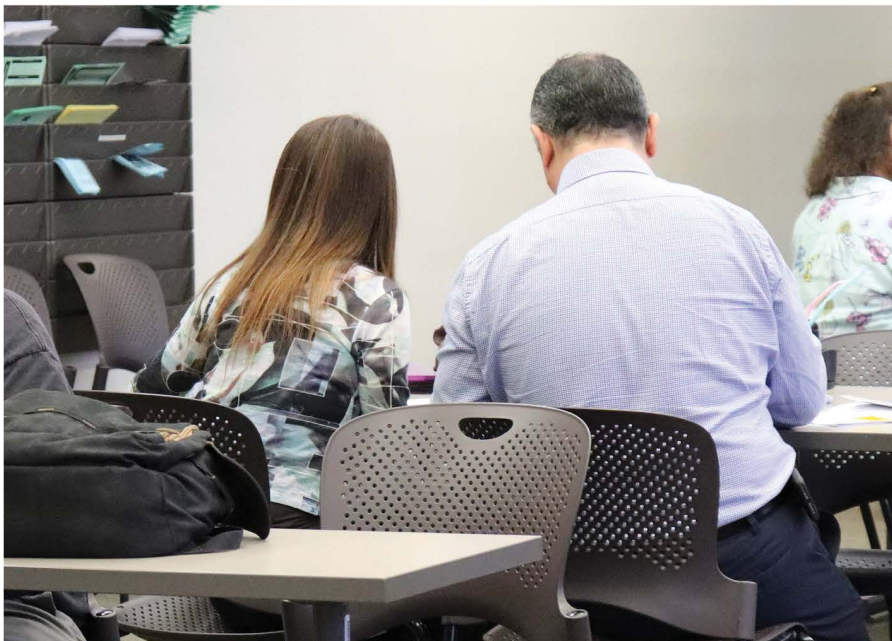
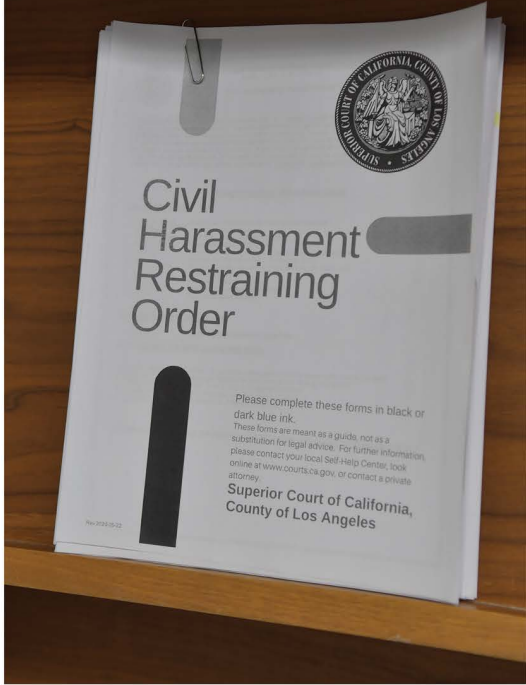
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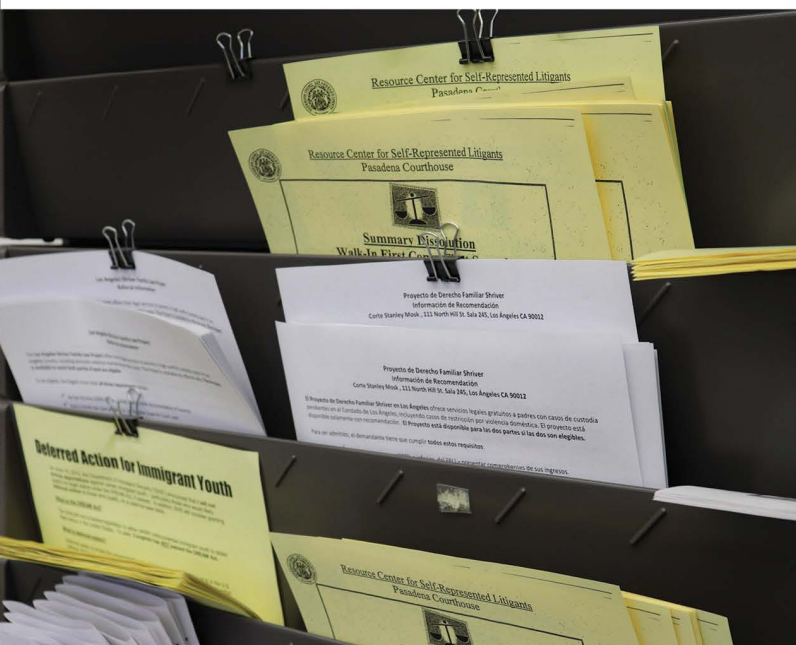
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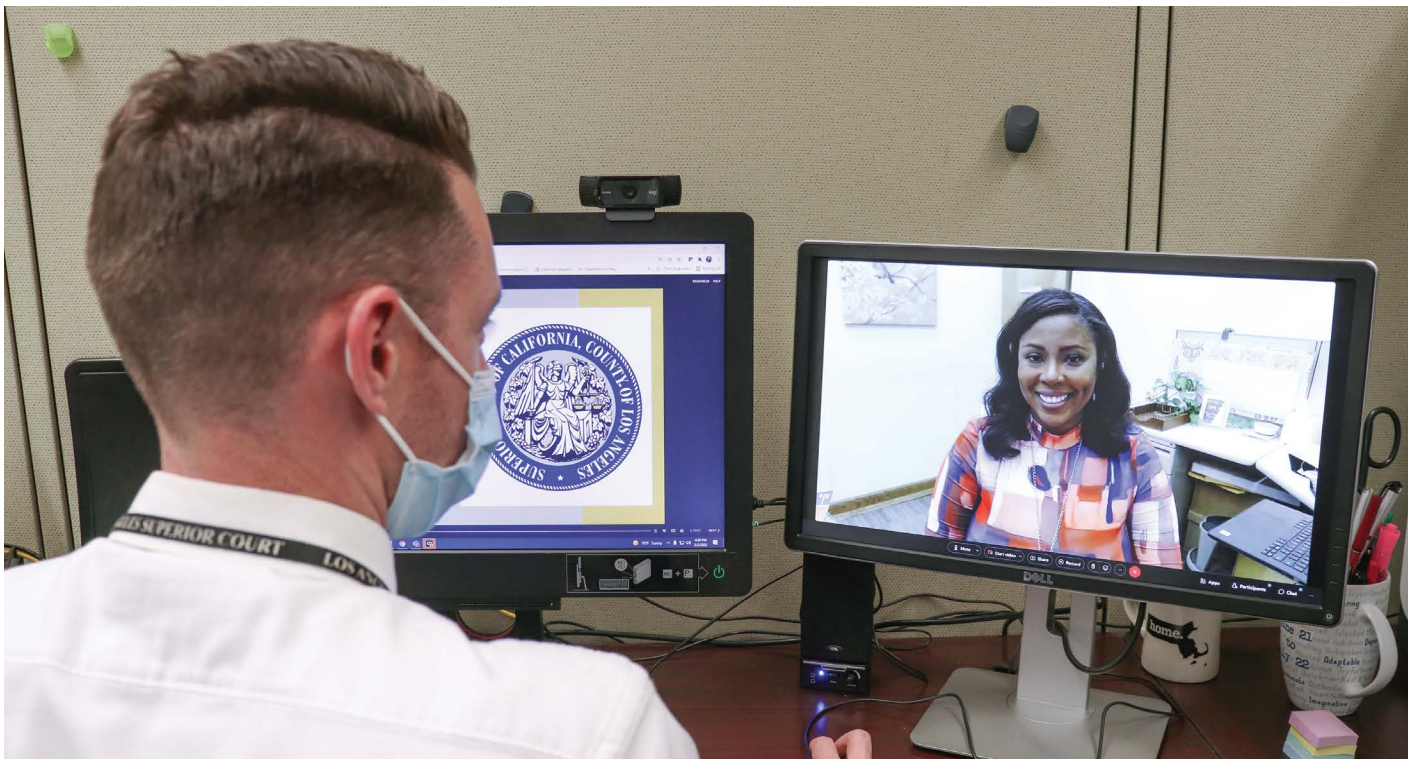


INTRODUCTION

This report highlights the array of self-help services provided by the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles (Court) in person, over the phone and online for certain civil, family law and probate cases. The COVID-19 pandemic required an overhaul of traditional in-person services provided inside the four courthouse walls to a remote model that not only addressed the public health threat – but led to a significant expansion in access to justice. Across Los Angeles County (LA County), with the expanded use of remote technology due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of people seek court assistance daily from behind a computer screen or by telephone. In achieving its mission to provide equal access to justice through the fair, timely and efficient resolution of all cases, the Court offers free assistance at one of 13 Self-Help Centers (SHCs) located in courthouses across LA County, where trained staff assist Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs) to resolve their disputes.

More and more Californians find themselves proceeding without attorneys. SRLs often find it difficult to navigate the legal system as they lack the legal education to understand complex procedure and processes associated with their case. This not only results in frustrated litigants but can also cause backlogs and other inefficiencies in courts as SRLs may not be fully prepared to handle their cases.

The Court cannot provide legal advice as a neutral arbiter of legal controversies and provides self-help assistance for parties on both sides of a case. Court-based self-help programs focus on giving procedural information to litigants so they can make informed decisions for themselves. The Court's self-help service model focuses on educating people about the law and its associated processes to



Court staff provide remote self-help assistance to a SRL via Webex.



Many SHC workshop rooms are outfitted with desktop computers to assist SRLs.

guide them through the justice system effectively. Once people understand the available options, they can make educated choices as they fill out their own documents and represent themselves.

The Court's self-help model offers assistance remotely – online, over the phone and through webinar workshops – as well as in-person appointments, to help those without attorneys. Both options – in-person and remote – have expanded access to justice more than ever before.

Self-help programs and the Court's self-service options leverage technology to help litigants more easily navigate the judicial process. Many of the Court's technology-based services described in this report provide a method for SRLs to complete their documents and file or resolve their cases themselves.

The statistics highlighted in this report span a critical period in Court history: March 2019 through July 2021. Time spans for specific data sets vary depending on when certain services and platforms were launched and when data was first tracked and became available. Data highlighted in this report is mostly sourced from the Judicial Council of California's (JCC) Self-Help Tracking and Reporting Survey (STARS) and the Court's internal systems.

The approach to this data demonstrates a dynamic and innovative self-help and self-service model that responded effectively to the pandemic's challenges and improved access to justice by reaching litigants where they are: at home, on the go or in the courthouse.

SECTION 1: SERVING THE LARGEST COUNTY IN THE NATION

The Court is the trial court system for the nation's most populous county, an area which spans over 4,700 square miles, encompasses 88 cities and 140 unincorporated areas, with a population of more than 10 million people. LA County's size and diversity present unique challenges in providing litigants with accessible self-help services to meet their needs. Without adequate legal support, SRLs often do not understand the process, which may lead to less desirable outcomes in their cases.

Statistics for LA County

Population of LA County:

10+ million

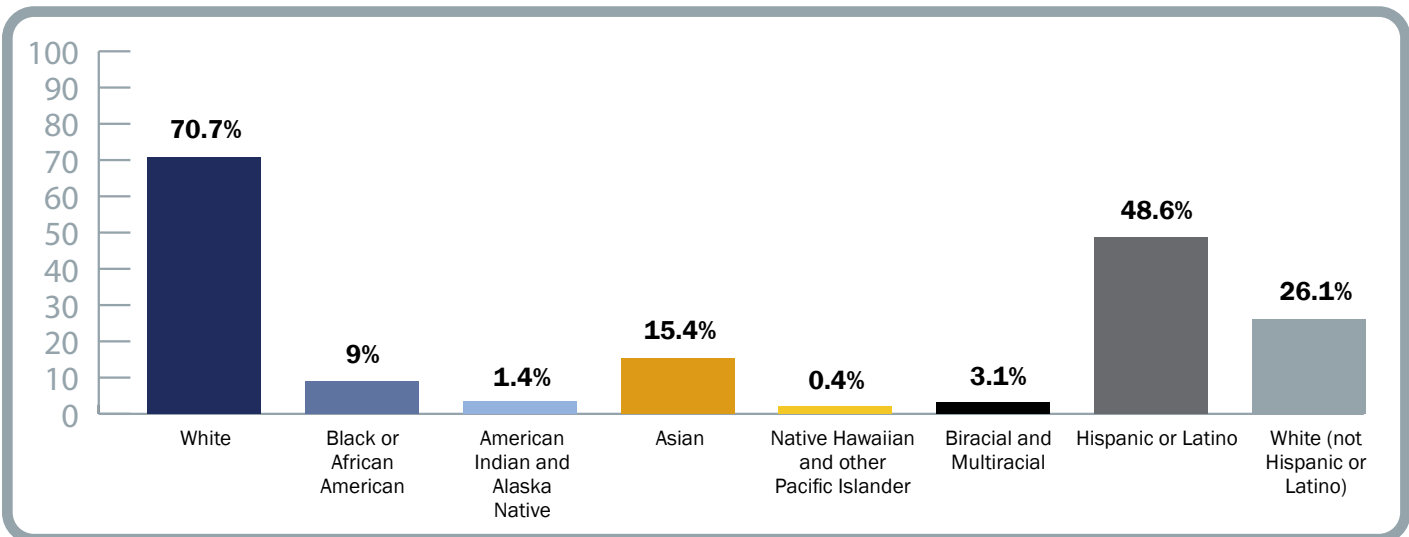


Largest Trial Court in the U.S.:

- 37 Courthouses
- 12 Judicial Districts
- 580 Judicial Officers
- 1.7 Million Annual Filings
- 4,600 Employees

Ethnic/Racial Diversity:



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 Estimates*



*The U.S. Census Bureau collects race data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and these data are based on self-identification. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as "American Indian" and "White." People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race. OMB requires that race data be collected for a minimum of five groups: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. OMB permits the Census Bureau to also use a sixth category - Some Other Race. Respondents may report more than one race.

Geographic Size:
4,752 Square Miles



-  Courthouse Locations
-  Courthouses with Self-Help Centers

CENTRAL DISTRICT

- 1 Central Arraignment Courthouse
- 2 Edmund D. Edelman Children's Courthouse
- 3 Stanley Mosk Courthouse
- 4 Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center
- 5 East Los Angeles Courthouse
- 6 Eastlake Juvenile Courthouse
- 7 Hollywood Courthouse
- 8 Spring Street Courthouse
- 9 Metropolitan Courthouse

EAST DISTRICT

- 10 El Monte Courthouse
- 11 Pomona Courthouse
- 12 West Covina Courthouse

NORTH DISTRICT

- 13 Alfred J. McCourtney Juvenile Justice Center Courthouse
- 14 Michael D. Antonovich Antelope Valley Courthouse

NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

- 15 Burbank Courthouse
- 16 Glendale Courthouse

NORTH VALLEY DISTRICT

- 17 Chatsworth Courthouse
- 18 Santa Clarita Courthouse
- 19 San Fernando Courthouse
- 20 Sylmar Juvenile Courthouse

NORTHEAST DISTRICT

- 21 Alhambra Courthouse
- 22 Pasadena Courthouse

NORTHWEST DISTRICT

- 23 Van Nuys East Courthouse
- 24 Van Nuys West Courthouse

SOUTH DISTRICT

- 25 Catalina Courthouse
- 26 Governor George Deukmejian Courthouse

SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

- 27 Compton Courthouse

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

- 28 Downey Courthouse
- 29 Bellflower Courthouse
- 30 Norwalk Courthouse
- 31 Whittier Courthouse

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

- 32 Inglewood Courthouse
- 33 Inglewood Juvenile Courthouse
- 34 Torrance Courthouse

WEST DISTRICT

- 35 Airport Courthouse*
- 36 Beverly Hills Courthouse
- 37 Santa Monica Courthouse

* Geographically located in the Southwest District

Socioeconomic Diversity (Income and Poverty):

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 Estimates

Median Household Income, 2015-2019:

\$68,044

Per Capita Income in past 12 months, 2015-2019:

\$34,156

Percentage of Persons in Poverty:

13.4%

Education:

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 Estimates

High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2015-2019



Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2015-2019



Language Diversity:

Spoken Languages

220+

Most requested languages other than English:

- Spanish
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Eastern Armenian
- Vietnamese
- Cantonese



SECTION 2: SELF-HELP IN LA COUNTY



Self-help staff stand ready to assist SRLs.

The Court SHC programs operated by the Court and/or legal aid partners provide neutral assistance to SRLs in a variety of formats. Most SRLs need education about court procedures, relevant legal concepts, the legal options available in their cases and the differing requirements for each option. Basic self-help assistance is tailored to these needs, but more resources are available for those litigants who require additional help with their legal issues.

The Court's SHCs employ 71 court attorneys, paralegals and support staff, along with 32 full-time JusticeCorps graduate fellow volunteers and 70-150 part-time student JusticeCorps member volunteers from colleges and universities, mostly in LA County (more on JusticeCorps on page 41). The Court prioritizes self-help services that most impact families and children. The Court's SHC programs offer assistance in the following case types and issues:

- Family law, including divorce and parentage;
- Probate, including elder abuse restraining orders, guardianship and conservatorship;
- Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO);
- Civil harassment restraining orders;
- UD/evictions;
- Name change; and
- Consumer debt, including claims of exemption.

SHC Locations

There are 13 SHCs located in courthouses in each of the Court's 12 Judicial Districts. The locations are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Chatsworth Courthouse | 8. Pomona Courthouse |
| 2. Compton Courthouse | 9. Santa Monica Courthouse* |
| 3. Governor George Deukmejian Courthouse (Long Beach) | 10. Stanley Mosk Courthouse (Downtown LA) |
| 4. Inglewood Courthouse* | 11. Torrance Courthouse |
| 5. Michael D. Antonovich Antelope Valley Courthouse | 12. Van Nuys East Courthouse |
| 6. Norwalk Courthouse** | 13. Whittier Courthouse |
| 7. Pasadena Courthouse | |

* Staffed solely by legal aid partners.

** Staffed part time by legal aid partners for scheduled workshops assisting with UD/eviction and consumer debt cases.

For most of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Court's self-help services were provided remotely or in person by appointment only, with limited hours.

After several pandemic-related periodic closures, SHC hours for most locations are now 8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.; 1 – 4:30 p.m., Monday – Thursday and 8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., Friday. The Santa Monica SHC is open 8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.; 1 – 4:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday and the Inglewood SHC is open 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.; 1 – 4 p.m. Monday – Thursday. The Court also expanded in-person, walk-in service options for people without appointments for triage and assistance with restraining order and UD/eviction answers.

Self-Help Legal Access Centers – LA County

Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC) programs operated by legal aid staff augment the network of SHCs across LA County. SHLACs share space with Court SHCs and Family Law Facilitator staff and provide remote and in-person services in the courthouses where the centers are located. The LA County Board of Supervisors (LA County BOS) funds the SHLACs which are administered by the LA County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA) and operated by Neighborhood Legal Services Los Angeles (NLSLA), Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) and Community Legal Aid SoCal (CLASoCal). (More information on these centers can be found on page 44).

Litigants Served

The pandemic dramatically increased the need for the Court's SHC programs. Family violence and economic hardship were among the causes of this increased demand for self-help services compared with 2019 before the pandemic.

Instances of Self-Help Services Provided by Court-Operated SHC Programs:

March 2019 – February 2020

85,432

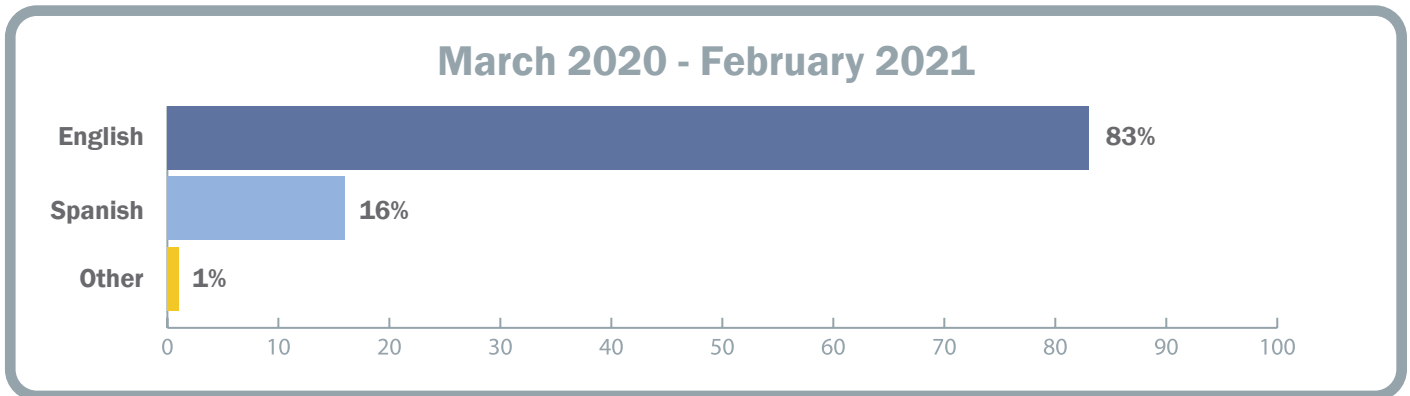
March 2020 – February 2021

145,696

When people sought help from Court-operated SHC programs, intake questions yield valuable demographic information about the SRLs of LA County served during the COVID-19 pandemic.

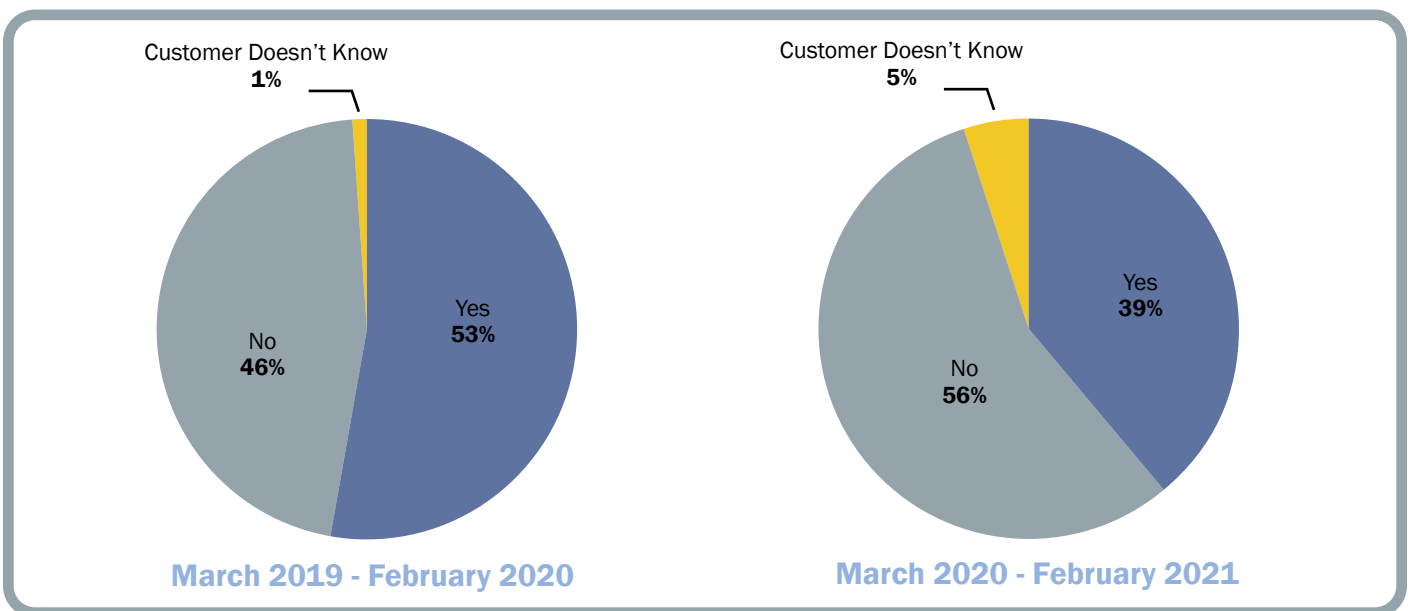
For court customers who do not speak English, the Court offers a Language Line to serve them in over 200 languages.

Requested Language at SHCs:



Court SHC's served significantly more first-time users during the pandemic than the year prior to the pandemic.

Has the Customer Visited The SHC Before?



How Service is Provided: Remote v. In Person

Remote service became a critical lifeline when high infection rates required significant access restrictions to prioritize public safety. After the Court restricted in-person access to courthouses, including SHCs and the

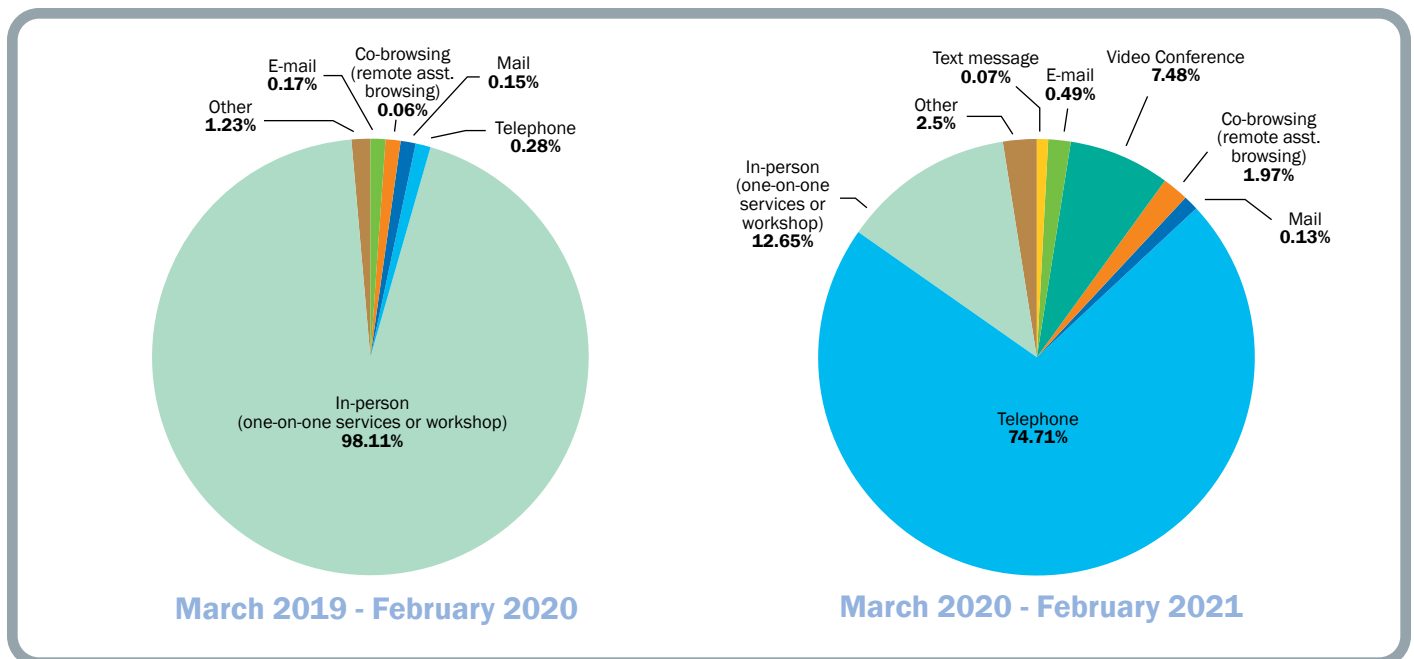
Clerk’s Office, to adhere to social distancing public health protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Court shifted its service model to remotely serve the needs of SRLs.



Court Self-help staff assist SRLs during a remote workshop.

As detailed below, prior to the pandemic, Court-operated SHCs provided 98% of assistance in person. Since the pandemic began, only 12% of service was provided in person, while 74% of service was provided over the phone and 7.5% via video conference.

How Service is Provided:



SECTION 3: SERVICES OFFERED AT SHC & IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

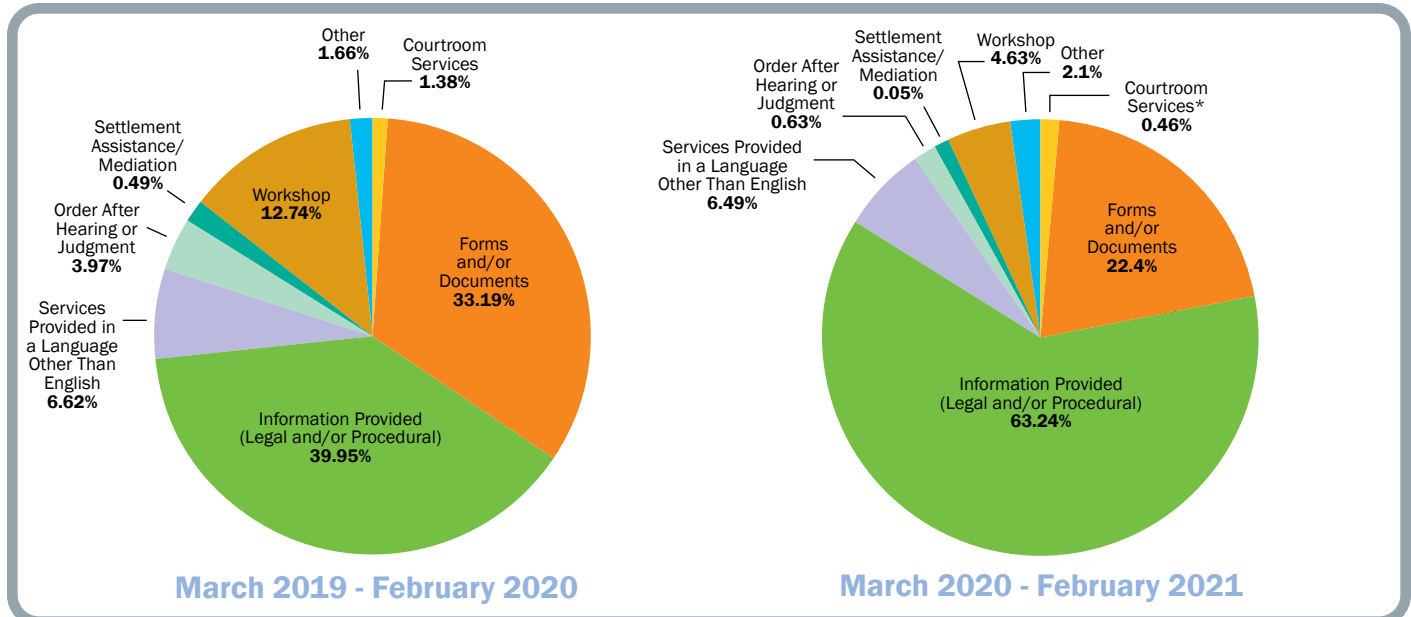
Court SHC programs offer a variety of services to SRLs seeking assistance, including providing general information, assistance with form completion, educational workshops on specific topics and more. The Court tracks the types of services provided using these general categories:

Category	Description
Courtroom Services	For Family Centered Case Resolution (FCCR) status conferences, litigants who have not filed their proof of service of summons by 90 days after filing their petition in their family law case receive a notice to appear at a FCCR status conference. In these instances, SHC staff meet with litigants in a “virtual courtroom” to discuss their case, connect them with services and help them move their case forward.
Forms and/or Documents	Helps litigants with completion of their documents or providing the correct forms packets with instructions for litigants to complete on their own.
Information Provided (Legal or Procedural)	Any education or information provided to litigants about the law/legal requirements or court processes.
Services Provided in Language Other than English	SHC staff, JusticeCorps members, or the Court’s Language Line provide services to the SRLs in their requested language.
Order After Hearing or Judgment	Preparation of these specific forms.
Settlement Assistance/ Mediation	Helps to mediate a point of contention between parties, such as a child support agreement.
Workshop	Educates SRLs on a specific topic in a group workshop setting (online or in person) rather than a one-on-one appointment.

In March 2020, due to the pandemic, the Court honed its services, reducing a broad menu of self-help options to provide priority services to support the Court’s essential functions – assistance with domestic violence, civil harassment and elder abuse restraining orders, and modification of child support orders related to loss or decrease in income due to the pandemic. Over time, the Court phased in divorce, parentage and child support assistance through webinar workshops.

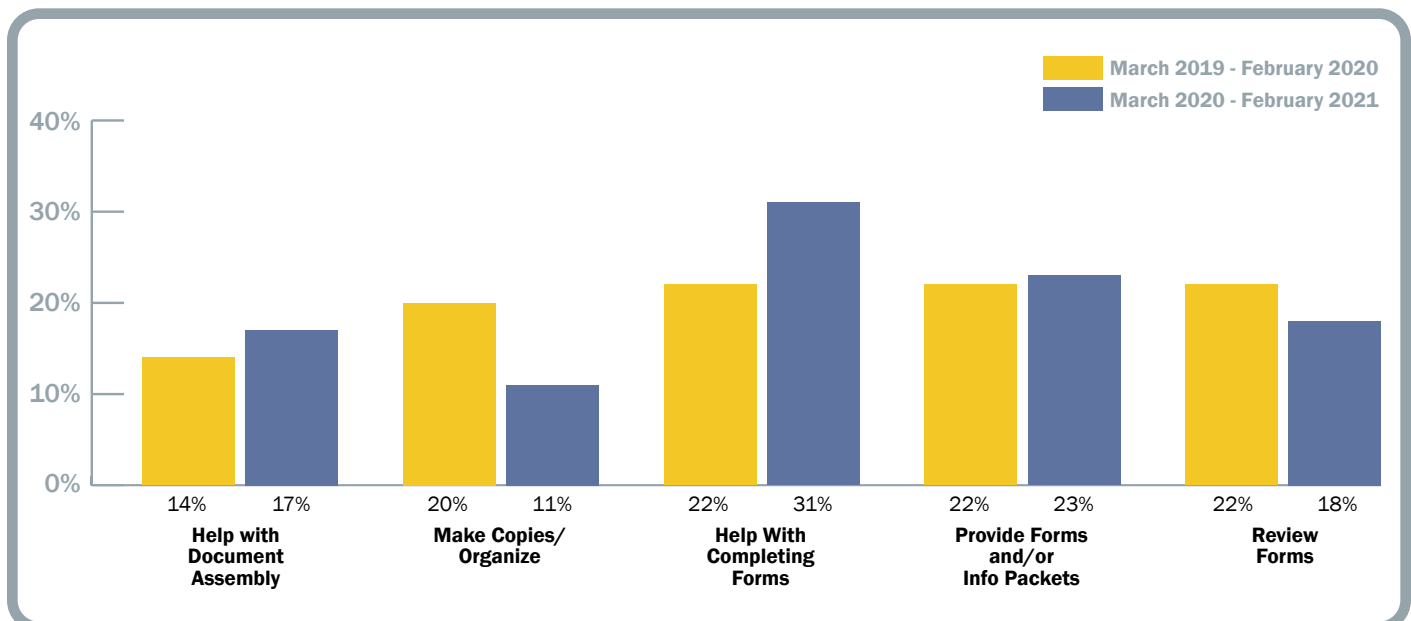
Types of Services Provided

SHC Services Provided:



*Courtroom Services: FCCR Status Conferences were suspended from March 2020 through May 2021, resulting in a drop in the Courtroom Services total.

Types of Form Completion Services Provided:



Types of Cases Where Assistance is Provided – Pandemic Impact

Family Law



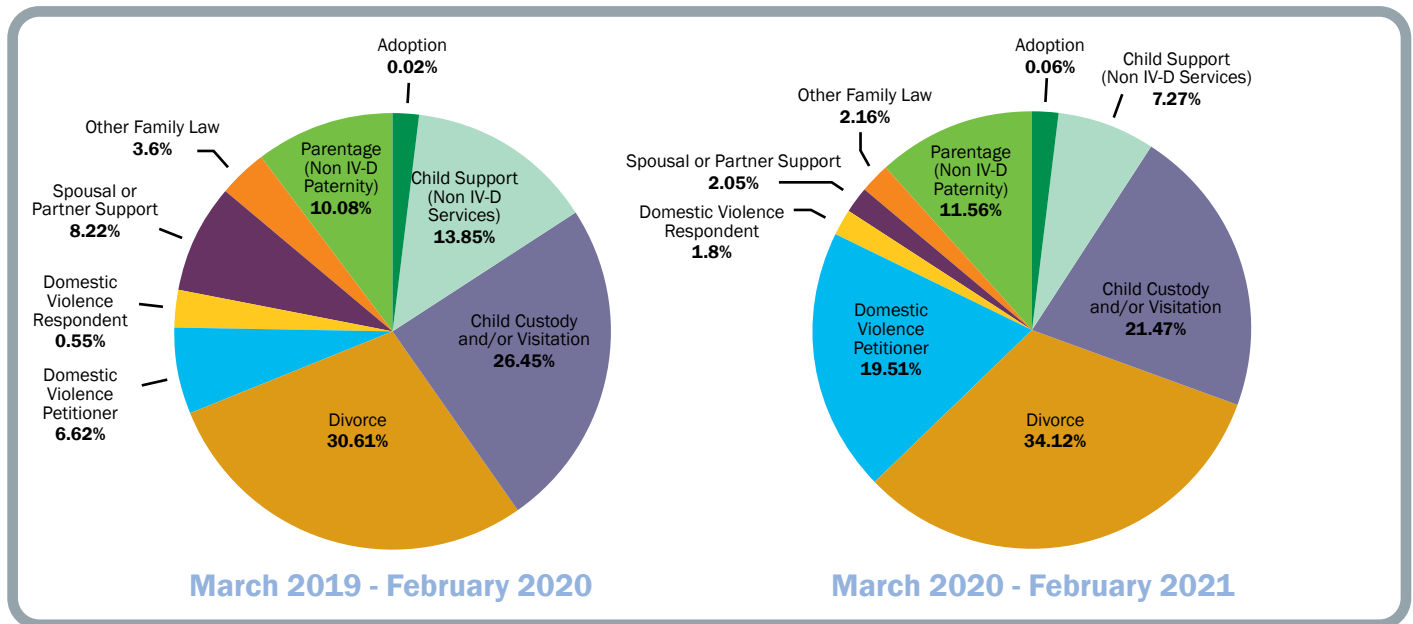
Family law cases include sensitive, family-based issues including divorce, child custody and visitation, domestic violence and parentage. These cases are often fraught with emotion.

“...requests for assistance from petitioners in domestic violence cases increased significantly during the pandemic.”

At the same time litigants face upheaval in their family lives, if they are without an attorney, they must independently navigate a complex process involving multiple forms, procedures and processes to usher their case toward resolution. Self-help in these cases provides valuable assistance to SRLs. Self-help assistance is provided for parties on both sides of a case, including for parties defending against a request for a restraining order against them, as well as for parties requesting issuance of restraining orders to protect them.

The pandemic required a change in the types of family law services the Court offered, and the types of services litigants sought during the public health crisis. Specifically, requests for assistance from petitioners and respondents in domestic violence cases increased significantly during the pandemic.

Types of Family Law Self-Help Services Provided:



March 2019 - February 2020

March 2020 - February 2021

Requests for Assistance with DVROs Increased:

33%

From Petitioners



50%

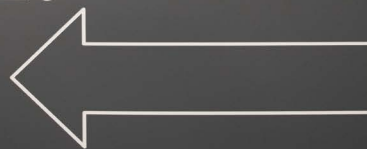
From Respondents

Between March 2019 - February 2020 and March 2020 - February 2021

Office of the Family Law Facilitator (Child Support):

Child support cases, sometimes referred to as IV-D cases after Title IV-D of the Social Security Act of 1975, which provides federal grants for aid and services to families with children in need, comprise a sizeable portion of all self-help assistance. These cases involve parents who are seeking, contesting or modifying child support, or seeking court orders to confirm parentage.

Self Help Center and Office of the Family Law Facilitator
Room 426

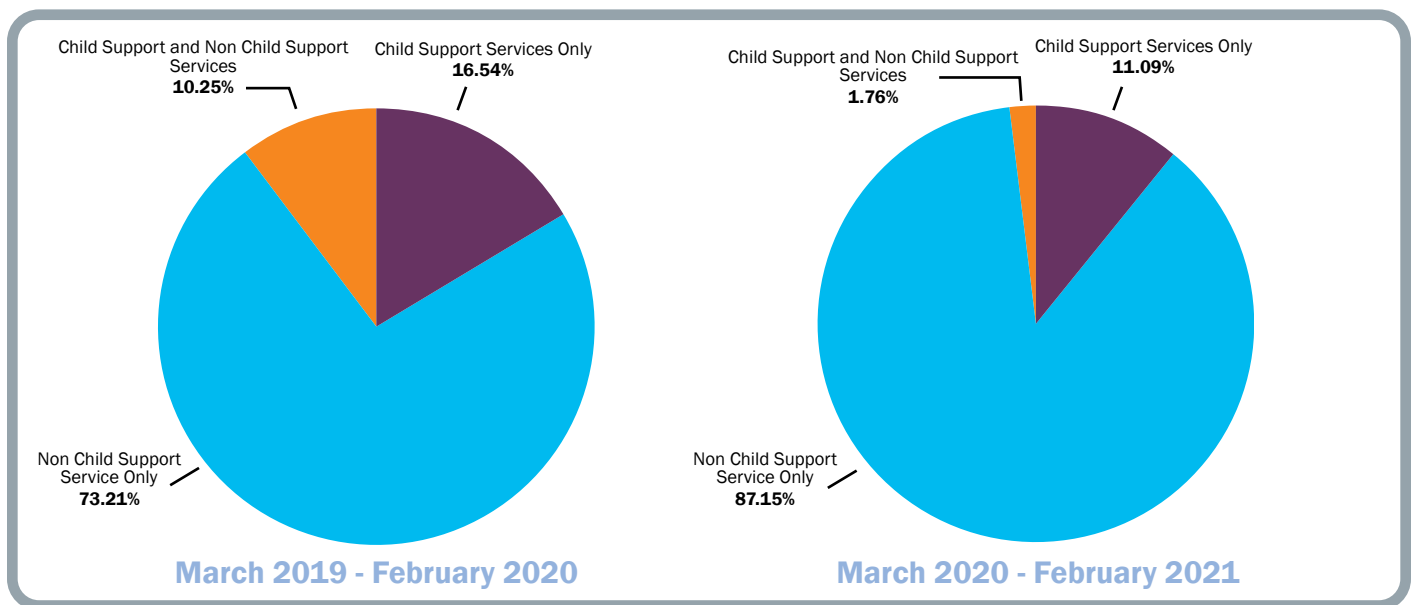


The Office of the Family Law Facilitator provides assistance to litigants with child support issues. Much of the assistance provided involves requests to modify child support.

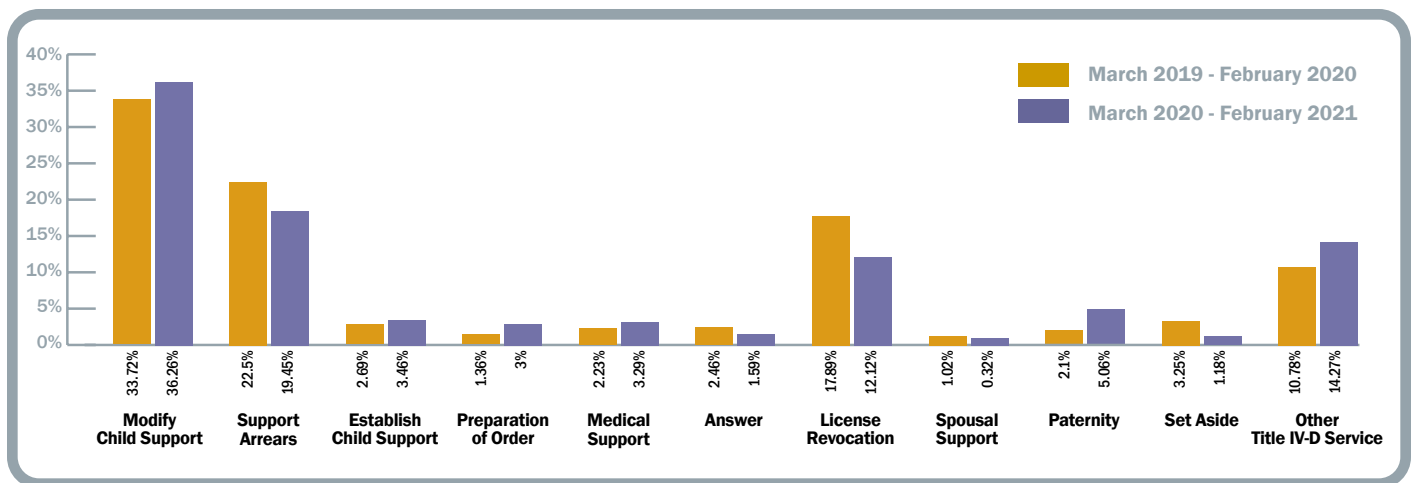
The Office of the Family Law Facilitator currently offers these services in child support cases filed by the LA County Child Support Services Department (CSSD), or in cases when CSSD is actively enforcing family law orders for child support, spousal support or health insurance for a minor child:

- Answers in cases filed by CSSD
- Child support modifications
- Determination of arrears and payment plans
- Responsive declarations
- Request for telephonic hearing
- FL-150 income & expense declarations
- Motions to set aside voluntary declaration of parentage
- Motions to set aside judgment

Child Support v. Non-Child Support Assistance Offered in Self-Help:



Types of Child Support Self-Help Service Provided:



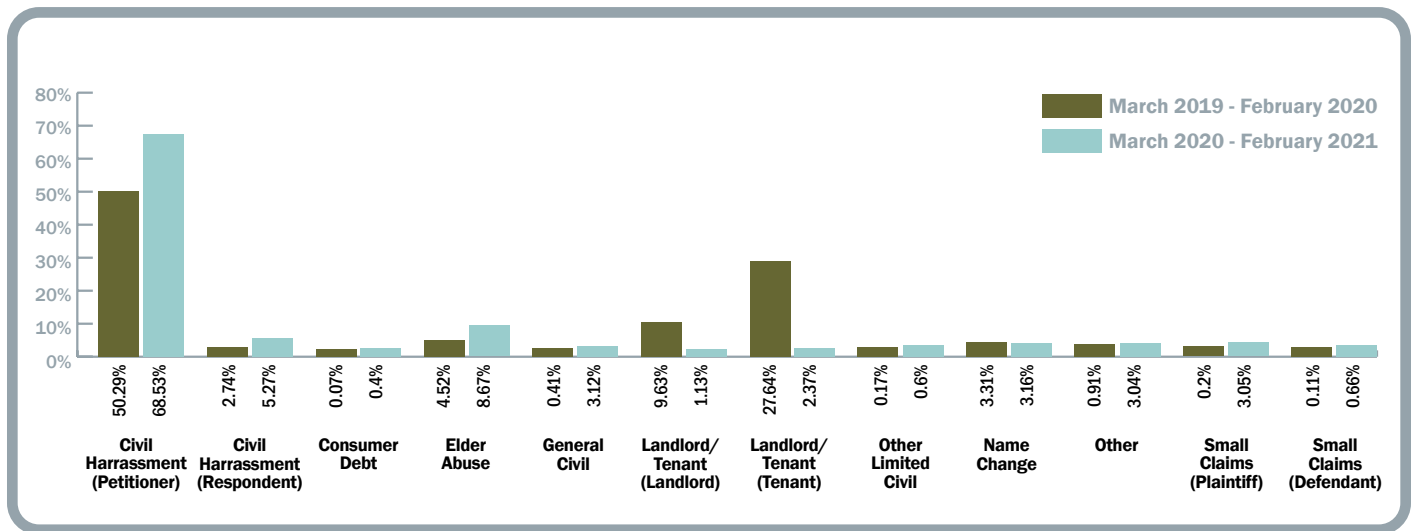
Civil:



Self-help assistance is offered in many civil cases including civil harassment, consumer debt, elder abuse, name change and UD/eviction. Self-help assistance is provided for parties on both sides of a case. For UD/eviction, assistance is offered to tenants and landlords.

The pandemic caused some variation in assistance sought for civil case types. Notably, assistance provided in UD/eviction cases decreased significantly after the pandemic's onset due to legislative and local eviction moratoriums. Elder abuse and civil harassment cases, which were deemed an essential service, resulted in a slight increase in the need for assistance in these case types.

Types of Civil Self-Help Services Provided:



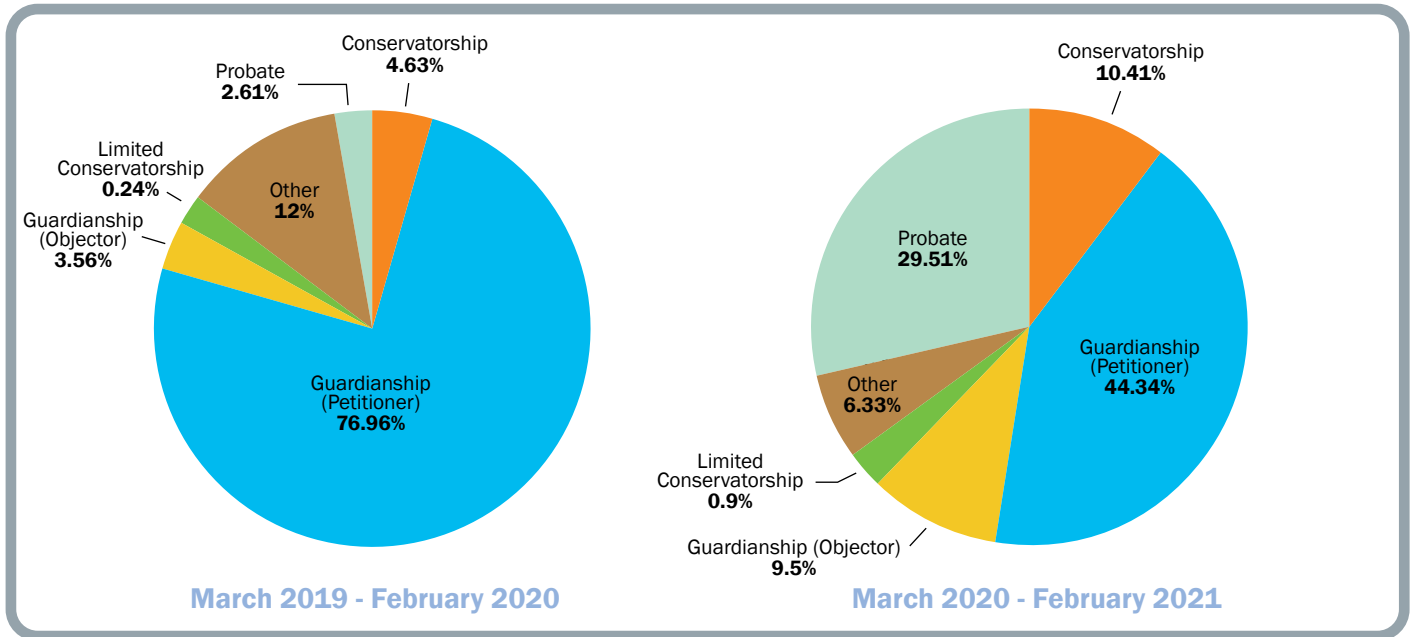
Probate:

Self-help is offered in probate cases, mostly for guardianships and conservatorships. These cases often involve especially vulnerable people including the elderly and people with disabilities along with family members who care for them. In California, a guardianship is a probate case in which custody of minor children is given to someone other than the parents, whereas conservatorships are cases in which persons are appointed to manage the financial and/or personal affairs of adults deemed unable to care for themselves.

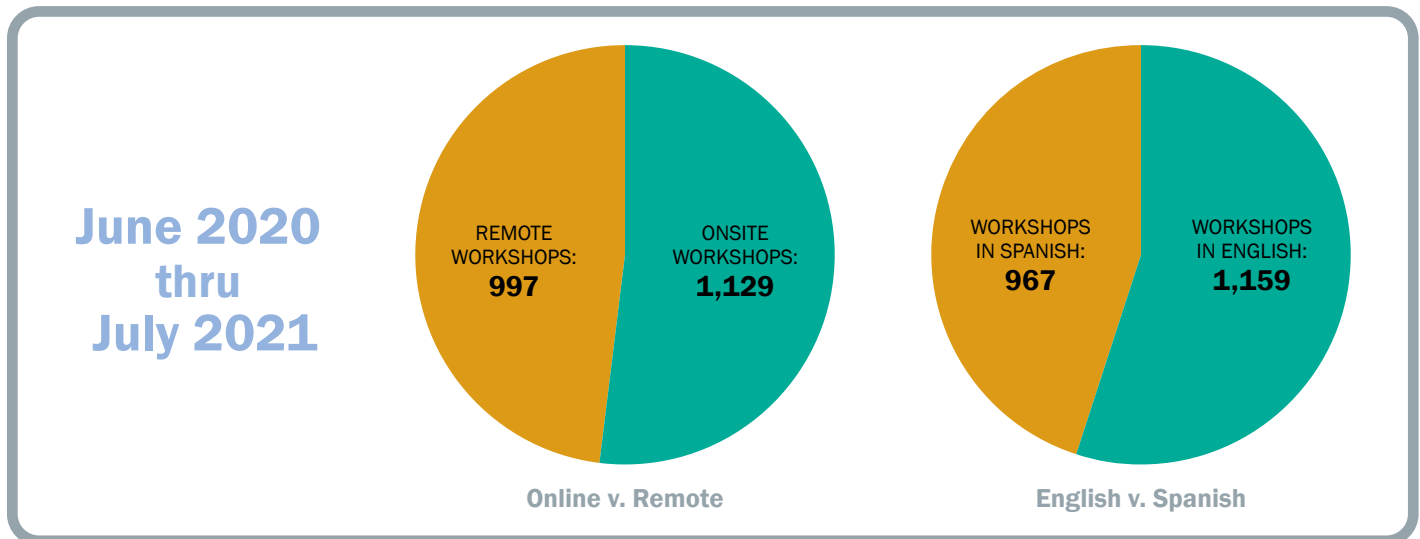
Public Counsel provides self-help for guardianship matters and Bet Tzedek provides self-help for conservatorship cases through an Equal Access Fund Partnership Grant.

The need for self-help in these areas is projected to increase as the older population in LA County is expected to **grow by 50% over the next two decades**.¹

Types of Probate Self-Help Services Provided:



SHC Workshops:



¹ Los Angeles Alliance for Community Health and Aging, "Los Angeles Commits to 'Age-Friendly' Future to Better Service Growing Older Adult Population," <https://www.purposefulagingla.com/blog/los-angeles-commits-age-friendly-future-better-service-growing-older-adult-population>.



Self-help staff lead a group workshop in a workshop room at a SHC.

Attorneys, paralegals and JusticeCorps fellows lead workshops to assist SRLs in initiating, navigating and resolving their cases in the SHCs. Workshops are offered for divorce cases as well as parentage cases. As of Nov. 8, 2021, the Court offers tenant assistance with UD/eviction answers in a centralized remote clinic, operated collaboratively with legal aid self-help attorneys, and plans to offer a remote clinic to landlords in the future.

SHCs offered a total of 2,126 workshops from June 2020 when internal reporting began,

through July 2021. At the height of the pandemic when social distancing required courthouse access restrictions, SHCs offered small in-person socially distanced viewings of online workshops on flatscreens in SHCs by appointment at the Pasadena, Whittier, Stanley Mosk (downtown Los Angeles), Chatsworth and Governor George Deukmejian (Long Beach) courthouses for individuals without access to the internet.

Divorce Workshops:

Workshops on divorce cases are offered in three parts:

Divorce Workshops	Description
<p>First Workshop</p>	<p>Litigants learn about the different ways to end a marriage or domestic partnership, the requirements for each and information about the court process. Litigants receive a homework packet to gather information in advance of the second workshop.</p>
<p>Second Workshop</p>	<p>Litigants receive step-by-step assistance with filling out court forms to begin or respond to a divorce or legal separation case.</p>
<p>Third Workshop</p>	<p>Petitioners receive assistance with filling out their default judgment forms to complete their divorce or legal separation in cases if the respondent has not filed a response.</p>

Parentage Workshops:

Workshops on parentage cases also are offered in three parts to help SRLs complete their case:

Parentage Workshops	Description
First Workshop	Unmarried parents learn the court process for establishing parentage and obtaining custody, visitation and child support orders. Litigants receive a homework packet to complete prior to the second workshop.
Second Workshop	Unmarried parents receive step-by-step assistance with filling out court forms to begin or respond to a parentage case.
Third Workshop	Petitioners will receive assistance with filling out their default judgment forms to complete their parentage case if the respondent has not filed a response.

Workshop Name	English	Spanish	TOTAL
Divorce: First Workshop	331	349	680
Divorce: Second Workshop	195	138	333
Divorce: Third Workshop	71	45	116
Parentage: First Workshop	342	339	681
Parentage: Second Workshop	174	66	240
Parentage: Third Workshop	46	30	76
TOTAL	1,159	967	2,126

SECTION 4: SELF-SERVICE & REMOTE OPTIONS: RESPONDING TO COVID-19



Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Court focused on implementing innovative and creative solutions to increase access to justice for SRLs using a variety of approaches outside the four walls of the SHCs. Self-help at the Court has never been confined to physical centers, a particular service or to specific case types. The role of self-help is to assist court customers in navigating the complex legal system, regardless of their income, educational level, zip code or technological capabilities, using remote services to make it easier for litigants to access help conveniently from home or another location.

As the pandemic escalated in LA County in 2020, the Court prioritized essential matters and reduced access to in-person courthouse services, including SHCs. The Court's holistic approach to self-help provided a strong foundation to offer self-help services beyond the traditional SHC and fully embrace innovative remote services to assist LA County residents.

This section provides a broad overview of the many services the Court launched prior to and during the pandemic to increase access to justice for SRLs, all of which are now mainstays of the Court's service model moving forward.



LACourtConnect

LACourtConnect (LACC) is the Court's remote courtroom appearance solution which allows case participants (litigants, attorneys, witnesses and judicial officers) to engage via video or audio in court proceedings from any location using an internet or audio connection. LACC preserves and promotes timely access to justice for LA County's large and diverse population. Its remote

access capabilities have proven critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling many thousands of court hearings to move forward safely without delay.

Prior to the pandemic, remote appearance capabilities at the Court were almost entirely telephonic. In 2016, the court recognized the need for a more integrated and robust remote hearing system and began work on an in-house platform that could adapt to changing internal and external business needs. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the rapid adoption of video conferencing across the country, required the Court to expedite LACC's implementation.

LACC is available for civil (including small claims and UD/evictions), family law, probate and traffic cases in more than 250 courtrooms. Since June 22, 2020, when the Court launched LACC, more than 1 million people have participated in remote hearings, and LACC continues to operate as a key court service for 2,500 to 2,800 remote participants daily.

As of September 7, 2021, LACC is free for all users – thanks to one-time state budget funding for trial court backlogs. The success of LACC will inspire ongoing investment and development of future court technology programs that build on the Court's mission to provide timely and equal access to justice for all.

LACC is available for civil (including small claims and UD/evictions), family law, probate and traffic cases in more than 250 courtrooms.

Call Centers

To remotely meet the needs of SRLs, the Court transitioned from providing in-person service in the Clerk's Office and SHCs to a Call Center model. Not only did the Call Centers provide safe, convenient access to justice for litigants at a time when in-person service was significantly limited, they also enabled the Court to promote social distancing by providing remote work options for Call Center staff.



Clerk's Office Call Center staff provide service over the phone.

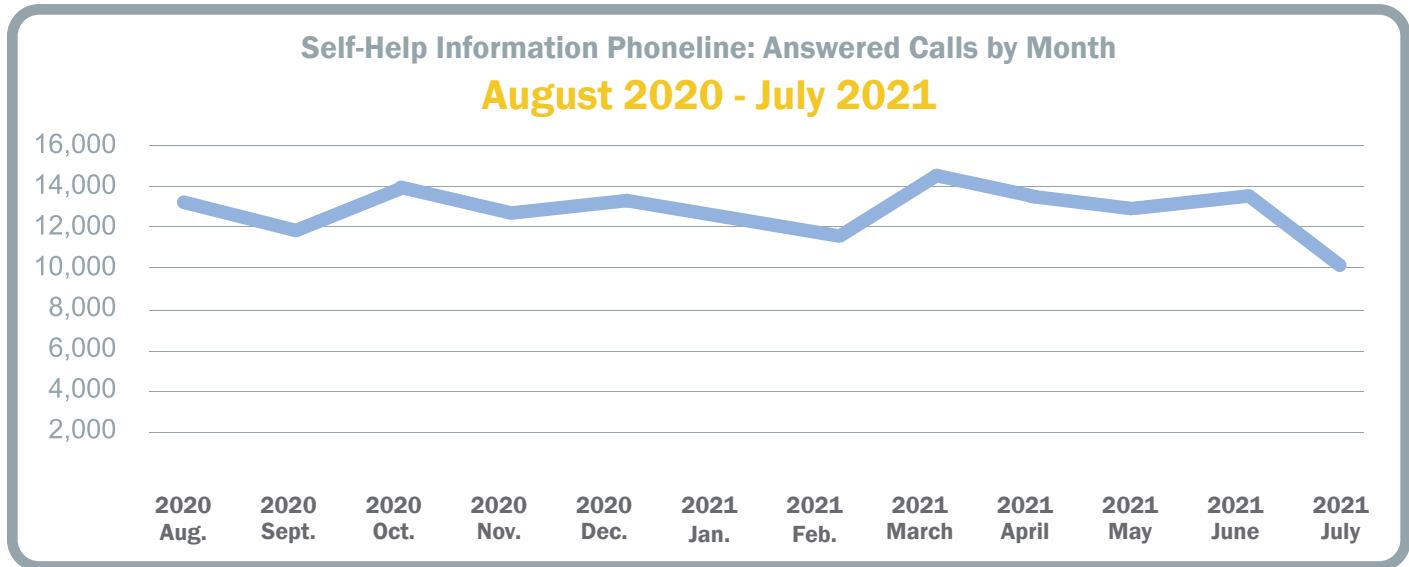
Clerk's Office Phone Lines

Clerk's Office phone lines were set up in each of the 37 courthouses throughout LA County. Staff handle calls and questions outside the realm of traditional self-help services.

From June 2020, when the Clerk's Office phone lines were first rolled out, through July 2021, staff took roughly 2 million calls.

Self-Help Information Phone Line

The centralized Self-Help Information Phone Line was established in March 2020 to assist SRLs during the pandemic. From August 2020, when data was first collected, through July 2021, SHC staff across the Court answered 152,600 calls.



Traffic Call Center

Traffic tickets are the most common way LA County residents interact with the Court, with nearly 1 million traffic citations filed annually. As the pandemic unfolded, the Court recognized the need to create a specific Traffic Call Center (TCC) to answer traffic-related questions from litigants with citations issued anywhere in LA County.

The TCC has more than 60 employees who answer calls to set court dates or schedule in-person appointments, provide information on requesting a trial by written declaration and help with license hold removals, all without the need to come to the courthouse. This model allowed the Court to reduce in-person attendance at courthouses during the pandemic, a solution which proved especially helpful when social distancing requirements were in effect during periods of high infection rates.

The TCC answered nearly 100,000 calls from July through September 2021.

Appointments for In-Person Service

The Clerk's Office

If customer issues cannot be resolved over the telephone, the Court offers a scheduling system to book in-person appointments in the Clerk's Office. Litigants can select a convenient appointment time, thereby reducing wait times at the courthouse. Launched on June 15, 2020, when the Clerk's Office resumed in-person services by appointment only while social distancing restrictions were in effect, the system also helped to greatly reduce

courthouse foot traffic and queuing lines. Since the Court rescinded social distancing restrictions on June 28, 2021, after a change in county public health guidance, appointments remain a convenient option for litigants.



Clerk's Office staff assist a litigant with paperwork.



Self-Help Center Appointments

The same appointment system is available for the SHCs. Since June 2020 when the Court introduced the appointment system, people have scheduled more than 25,000 appointments through July 2021 for in-person service in the SHCs.

Currently, appointments for assistance regarding restraining orders (domestic violence, civil harassment and elder abuse) make up a significant portion of appointments in SHCs, many of which were remote except for follow-up appointments to sign documents.

Self-Help Appointments By Service	English	Spanish	Total
Restraining Orders (Domestic Violence, Civil Harrassment, Elder Abuse)	8,170	3,579	11,749
General Family Law	3,266	1,974	5,240
Follow-Up Signing Appointment	2,488	1,889	4,377
CSSD Cases	2,495	801	3,296
Responses to Restraining Orders	517	231	748
Total	16,936	8,474	25,410

Remote Solutions for Litigants

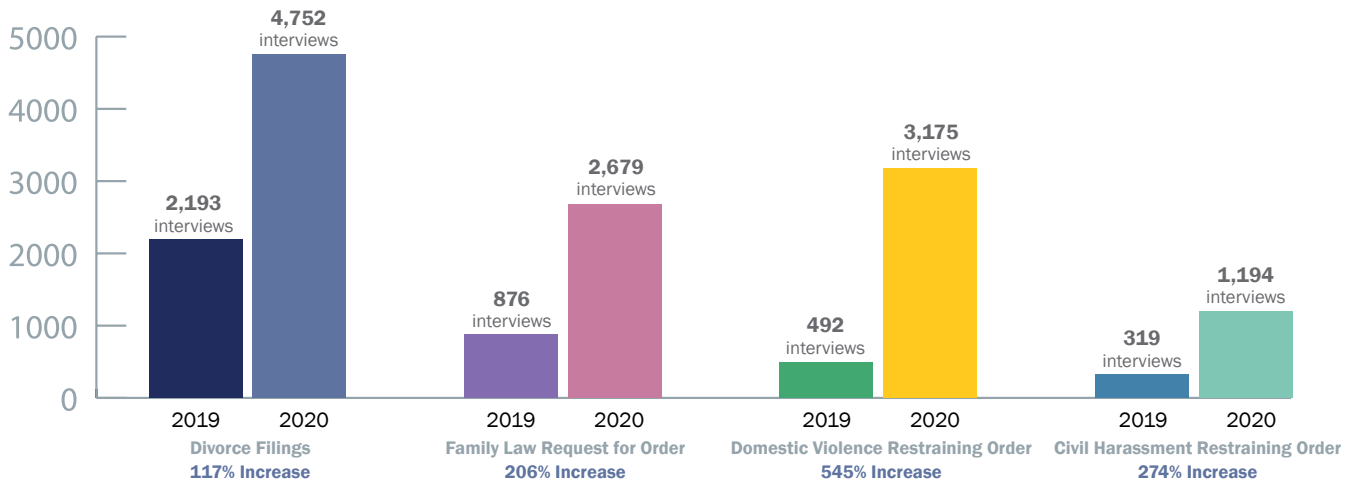
Guide & File

Guide & File (G&F), created by Tyler Technologies, helps SRLs to complete the paperwork they need to file a divorce, get a restraining order, request a name change, petition for guardianship of a child and more. The online tool virtually escorts litigants through the detailed process of filling out court forms through plain-language questions and answers, or “interviews,” and then uses that information to complete the forms for the litigant’s case.

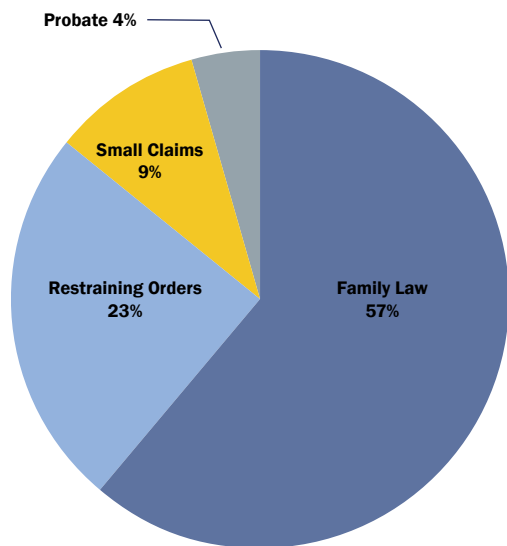
Statewide Statistics on G&F Usage:



G&F usage of all case types increased in number of interviews except for UD/evictions, which saw decreased filings due to eviction moratoriums. The biggest increases were seen in civil harassment and domestic violence cases:



Most Popular Areas of Litigation



38% of people access G&F website via smartphone or tablet



LA County Statistics on G&F Usage:

Over 4,100 G&F interviews were completed by LA County litigants in 2020.

Most Popular Interviews in LA County in 2020-2021:	
Interview Type	Total
Divorce, Separation or Nullity — Initial Request	979
Domestic Violence Restraining Order Request	860
Request For Order	684
Petition to Establish Parentage or Custody and Support	439
Civil Harassment Restraining Order Request	428

LawHelp Interactive

LawHelp Interactive (LHI) is another remote tool the Court offers to assist SRLs with form completion. Like G&F, after litigants answer a set of simple interview questions, the system compiles the answers and generates completed forms for specified cases. In LA County, litigants use this service for name change petitions, UD/eviction complaints and answers and requests for order.

The program is administered by Pro Bono Net, a nonprofit organization that provides access to LHI HotDocs (document assembly). The JCC developed and continues to maintain the program.

LA County LHI Interviews in 2020:	
Interview Type	Total
Petition for Name Change	1,415
UD/Eviction Complaint	1,408
UD/Eviction Answer	984
Request for Order	9,071

Fillable Forms Packets



The Court recently added fillable forms packets to its website to assist SRLs with completion of the judgment forms in divorce and parentage cases. Using a simple fillable forms packet provided by the Riverside Superior Court Self-Help Program, the Court customized the template for use in LA County. The fillable forms currently are offered for family law judgment packets to meet the demand for help to complete the judgment forms after trial without dedicating staff time.

Judgment Assistance Programs



In 2021, the Court launched the Judgment Assistance Day Program to assist SRLs in resolving divorce and parentage cases delayed at the last stage of the process – the final judgment. The Court identifies divorce and parentage cases ready for judgment and electronically sends

them to pro bono groups which then disperse them to volunteer attorneys from the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA) and the Beverly Hills Bar Association. The cases are returned to the relevant department for court signature on “Judgment Assistance Day,” which takes place on the fourth Friday of every month.

Prior to the pandemic, SHCs offered same-day judgment form completion assistance through the Expedited Judgment Assistance Program for SRLs who had reached full resolution and had their settlement in writing.

On-Demand Workshops

The Court recently launched an “on-demand” prerecorded workshop developed with interactive e-learning software. Instead of scheduling advanced appointments to participate in a staff-led workshop, SRLs can now complete an on-demand workshop online. The first is a Divorce Overview divided into seven lessons that can be viewed all at once or broken up into sessions so litigants can go at their own pace to cover the information they need to start or respond to a divorce case. A Spanish version will be added as well. The Court also is editing a statewide version to share with other California trial courts. (California trial courts routinely share self-help tools that can be easily customized for other counties.)

Online Dispute Resolution

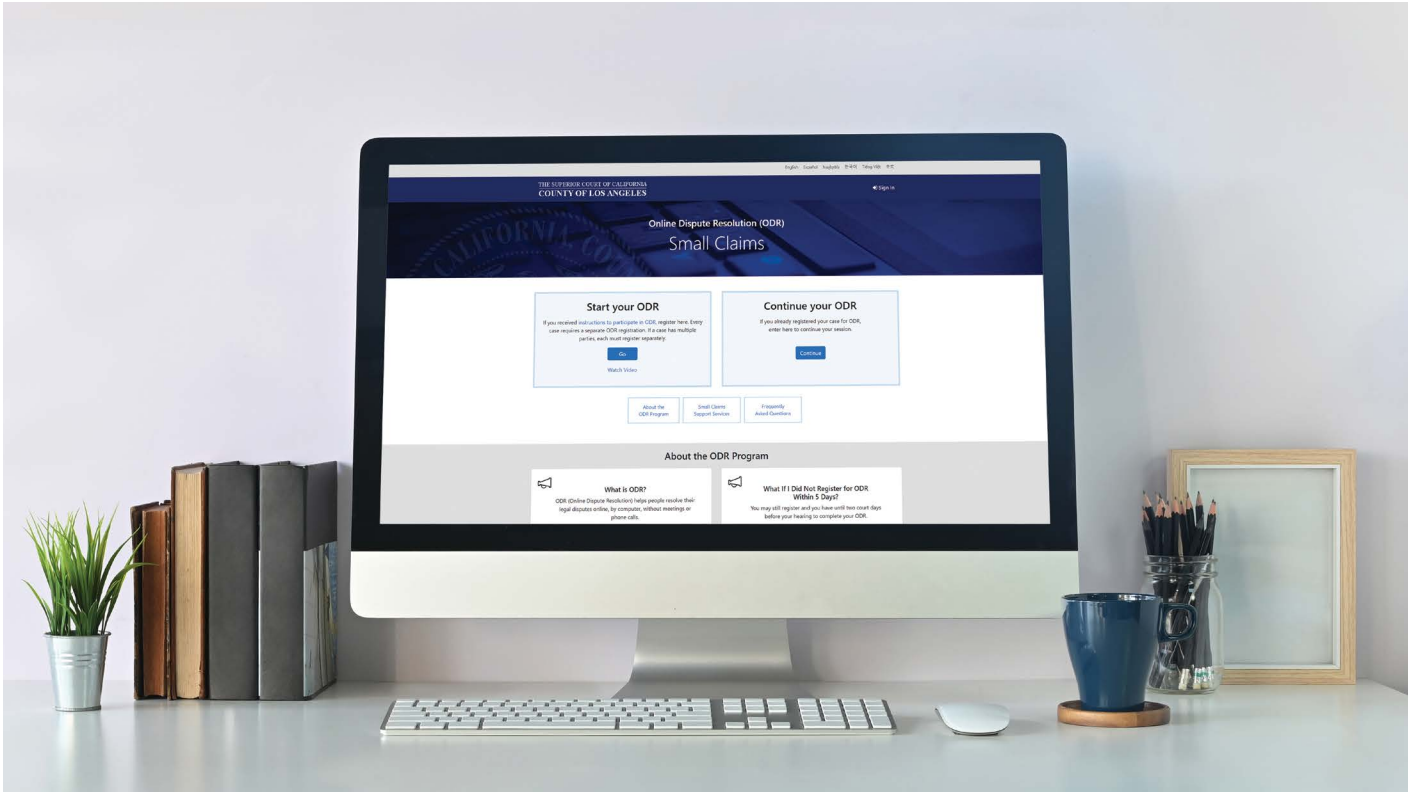
The Court launched Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) technology to provide SRLs an opportunity to remotely resolve disputes in small claims and UD/eviction cases, and for parenting plans for free without coming to court.



ODR for Parenting Plans

ODR for Parenting Plans first launched in 2019. The Court recognized the benefit of providing litigants the ability to negotiate custody and visitation agreements remotely for their children instead of attending in-person mediation. By providing parents with the opportunity to be directly involved in negotiating parenting agreements through ODR at no cost, the Court aims to increase satisfaction and compliance with parenting plan agreements, reducing contested hearings. This service also is offered to relieve the burden of requiring working parents to take time off to attend in-person mediation at a courthouse, requiring travel time, finding parking, and childcare, if needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Family Court Services mediators also have provided mediations remotely for parenting plans.

By utilizing ODR, parents or their attorneys can negotiate the terms of their parenting plan without having to meet face-to-face. Once the parents agree on a plan, the ODR tool will generate a parenting plan agreement, which the parents may file with the Court and, if accepted, it becomes a court order. In cases where both parties agree to participate in negotiation through ODR, the settlement rate is over 50%.



Small Claims ODR

Launched in February 2021, Small Claims ODR is a free program that guides litigants through simple, step-by-step written questions regarding their dispute. Litigants confidentially share documents, propose a resolution and come to written settlement agreements without a court hearing. If all parties reach a resolution, the platform generates the forms for a settlement agreement, and once finalized, the agreement is automatically efiled with the Court at no cost. It is mobile-friendly, enabling litigants to use the platform on their smartphones.

Small Claims ODR was developed in conjunction with DCBA and the Center for Conflict Resolution, which provide free mediation upon request.

As of November 2021, litigants in over 1,000 small claims cases for negotiated in ODR, many with the help of professional mediators. The platform helped resolve over 450 cases, saving both the litigants and the Court the need for a court hearing.

UD ODR

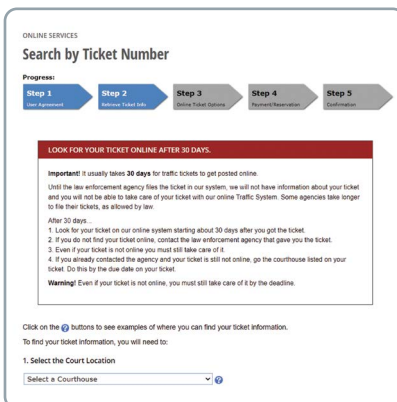
Given the success of the ODR platforms in small claims and parenting plans, the Court launched an ODR platform for UD/eviction cases on December 6, 2021. The program offers users access to free mediation and provides information on other resources, such as housing counselors and rental assistance programs. In the program's first week, 44 litigants registered and three cases were in active negotiation, one with a requested mediator.

Traffic Self-Service



Payment Plans

The Court has offered online payment plans to traffic litigants since 2015. Traffic litigants sign an agreement to pay their fines according to an installment schedule agreed upon by the litigant.



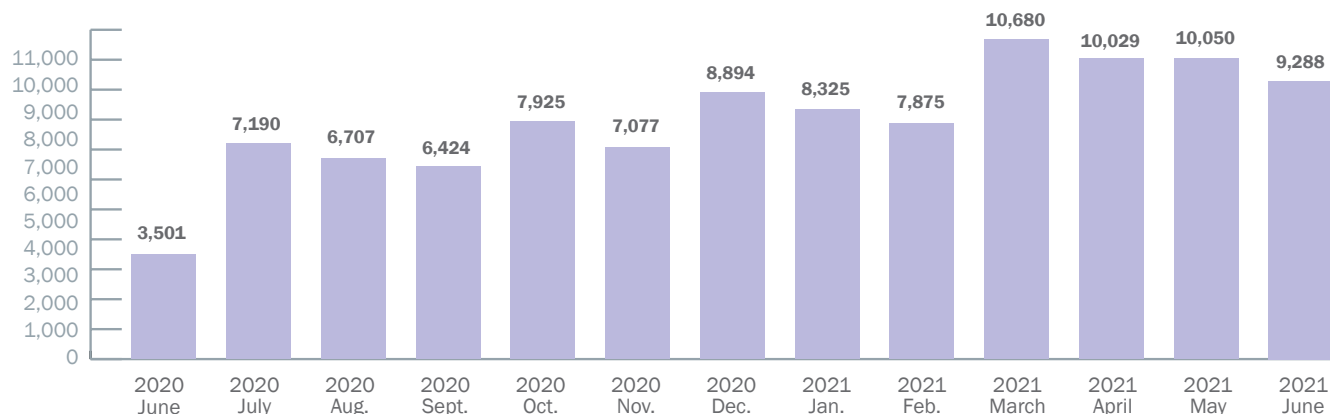
Since the Court began offering online payment plans, an average of **2,140** traffic litigants have enrolled in a payment plan each month.

Traffic Court Date Reservations

Since June 2020, traffic litigants can reserve court dates for traffic cases through the Clerk’s Office and TCC.

An average of over 8,000 court dates are reserved per month through the system.

June 2020 - June 2021



Gina the Traffic Avatar

Gina is the Court’s virtual clerk for traffic-related issues. Gina greets users on the Court’s traffic webpage and offers them assistance via a chat feature in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin), Armenian, Korean and Vietnamese. Gina can help users locate a citation, find information on payment plans, payment options and more.

Since its inception in 2016, Gina has aided 872,603 traffic litigants.

When the pandemic started, the Court offered immediate, temporary relief for many traffic and non-traffic infractions in the form of extensions on due dates associated with the case (payment date, appear-by date and traffic school or community service completion date) which created a significant reduction in the number of monthly users requesting help via Gina’s chat feature. Between March and November 2020, Gina usage dropped by 43%, likely due in part to the relief the Court offered to help during the public health crisis.



Gina, the Court’s traffic avatar, provides assistance on the Court’s traffic webpage.

Chatbots

Traffic Chatbot

The Traffic Chatbot launched in February 2021 and provides general traffic information in a controlled “chat” interface, where the user is asked a series of questions and given a specific set of answers to choose from, with the goal of ultimately leading the user to the resource that will help with a traffic question.

Traffic Chatbot User Activity Report:					
CLICK COUNT	February 2021	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021
Total Clicks (Unique Events)	9,747	13,515	11,125	9,645	9,627
Chatbot Visits (Page Views)	3,545	4,768	4,114	3,546	3,578
Users	2,400	3,215	2,832	2,515	2,471
New Users	2,377	3,162	2,774	2,444	2,390

Chatbots for Family Law, Probate and Mental Health Case Types

In October 2021, the Court launched chatbots on its family law, mental health, probate and self-help webpages. These chatbots answer basic questions for litigants in these areas, such as questions regarding Clerk’s Office hours, contact information, general filing information and more. Chatbots also refer users to the SHC programs for further assistance, if necessary.

LA COURT Hello, welcome to the Family Law Chatbot

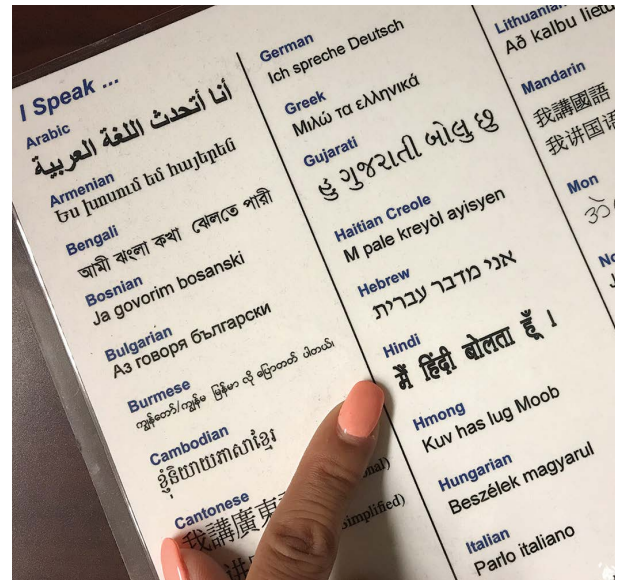
Which of these apply?

- General Information (service hours, contacts, forms, case status, and appointments)
- Family Law Information
- Family Court Services Information (Mediation)
- None of these apply

SECTION 5: LANGUAGE SERVICES

The Court employs 301 certified interpreters and contracts with 271 additional interpreters to provide interpreter services to litigants in 200 languages. The Court also provides remote telephonic interpreter assistance in 200 languages at all public counters, in SHCs and over the phone through its Call Centers and phone lines. Litigants identify their spoken language on 'I Speak' cards and the clerk connects them to an interpreter from an outside language provider who interprets live through the phone.

The Court also employs more than 300 certified bilingual, clerical staff. The majority of the Court's certified bilingual staff speak Spanish, but some are certified in eight other languages: Armenian, Cantonese, Eastern Armenian, Mandarin, Persian/Farsi, Russian, Vietnamese and Western Armenian. The Court assigns certified bilingual employees to areas of high public contact, including public counters. In addition, the Court actively recruits and hires bilingual employees to work in SHCs across the county.



'I Speak' cards are used at SHCs to assist litigants identify their language of choice.

The Court seeks to facilitate communication with Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals by providing them linguistically appropriate services such as:

- Staffing SHCs throughout the county with bilingual employees, interns and volunteers who assist LEP persons in various languages. The centers also use audio remote telephonic language services to assist LEP court users to triage litigants and quickly ascertain what services they need.
- Conducting workshops to educate and assist court users regarding divorce, responses to DVROs and family law judgments in Spanish and Armenian.
- Assigning bilingual employees to mediate custody and visitation matters in family law cases.
- Having SHC staff conduct joint workshops with community service providers serving LEP populations.
- Providing online automated assistance to traffic litigants using state-of-the-art text-to-speech technology in the top five languages in which the Court receives requests for interpreters.
- Linking the Court's website to key JCC self-help information and forms in Spanish, Korean, Armenian (Eastern), Chinese, Vietnamese and other languages.
- Having a Traffic Interactive Payment System telephone line in Spanish.
- Language access webpage on www.lacourt.org translated in the top five languages.
- Gina, the Court's traffic avatar, provides virtual assistance in five languages other than English: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Armenian.

Additionally, to facilitate communication with LEP court users, the Court posts signs at building entrances in Spanish, Korean, Armenian (Eastern), Chinese and Vietnamese, informing LEP court users about the availability of free interpreter services and translates most all other posted general information into Spanish.

SECTION 6: FUNDING

The SHCs and associated programming are supported by funding from the State of California and various grants.

State Funding



State support for SHCs has increased substantially in the past decade. Prior to Fiscal Year (FY) 2018/2019, the State of California appropriated \$11.2 million statewide annually to support court-operated SHCs. In 2018, due to renewed legislative interest in the importance of self-help services for SRLs, statewide funding was temporarily increased by 170%, or \$19.1 million, to \$30.3 million annually through FY 20/21.

In FY 21/22, the additional \$19.1 million in funding was renewed as ongoing funding. All funding

provided for court-operated SHCs in the annual state budget act is restricted funding, meaning it is statutorily designated only for that use.

Statewide funding is allocated to individual trial courts by the JCC using a population-based formula.

“In 2018, due to renewed legislative interest in the importance of self-help services for SRLs, statewide funding was temporarily increased by 170%.”

The state also provides funding via two grants, the Family Law Information Center (FLIC) Grant and Model Self-Help/Urban Collaboration (MSH) Grant. Both grant programs are pilot project grants from the JCC, funded to create and evaluate models of self-help. Three counties, Fresno, LA and Sutter, received FLIC grants to expand upon the work of the Family Law Facilitator and provide information in family law cases beyond child support matters. In addition to LA, four other counties – Butte, Contra Costa, Fresno and San Francisco – subsequently received MSH grants to develop Model Self-Help Pilot Projects.

SECTION 7: JUSTICECORPS



Since 2004, the JusticeCorps program has recruited college students and recent graduates for one year of AmeriCorps service to provide direct assistance to SRLs in SHCs as national service members.

JusticeCorps' full-time graduate fellows and part-time student members are assigned to most of the SHCs to collaboratively meet the needs of the public. JusticeCorps members answer questions, help litigants complete court paperwork, and assist in workshops that address the requirements of the various stages of family law, UD/eviction, probate and some civil cases – providing in-depth and individualized services to the litigants. JusticeCorps student members also are assigned to assist in the county's Small Claims Advisor counseling program. JusticeCorps also offers

outstanding opportunities for students to learn about the law and the judicial system while providing a much-needed service to their communities.

Bilingual JusticeCorps members often are paired with SRLs who speak languages other than English to assist them in their native languages. JusticeCorps members provide services in Arabic, Armenian, American Sign Language, Farsi, French, German, Hindu, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

More than 2,000 alumni have graduated from the program since its inception in 2004, helping to prepare them for careers in the legal field while simultaneously providing critical self-help services to vulnerable litigants who need it most.



JusticeCorps members provide assistance to litigants at one of the Court's SHCs.

Partner Universities

JusticeCorps recruits its members from students enrolled at JusticeCorps' local partner campuses to serve during the academic year. Students meet JusticeCorps program staff at campus job fairs and volunteer recruitment efforts, and also learn about the program through their campus service-learning or career centers. JusticeCorps partner universities are:

- California State University, Dominguez Hills
- California State University, Long Beach
- California State University, Northridge
- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Southern California

Students from universities around the country apply to serve in Los Angeles JusticeCorps during the summer and as JusticeCorps graduate fellows.

Pandemic Impact



Virtual swearing-in ceremony of JusticeCorps graduate fellows in August 2020.

The pandemic greatly impacted the JusticeCorps program from both a recruitment and service delivery perspective. The temporary absence of the Court's legal aid partners allowed for fewer opportunities for service and supervision. The closure of college campuses delayed the recruitment process and left a more limited pool of applicants. The transition to remote assistance meant the implementation of an entirely new, remote training program and virtual service delivery model. The totality of these issues delayed the start of the Program Year (PY) in 2020 by two months.

Prior to the pandemic, in PY 18/19 (August 2018 – July 2019), the program operated with 35 full-time fellows and 150 undergraduate members. JusticeCorps members provided:

- 132,000+ instances of assistance;
- Help with 300,000+ court forms; and
- Language assistance to 23,000+ LEP SRLs in LA County.

By contrast, in the PY 20/21 (October 2020 - August 2021), the program operated with 35 fellows and 60 undergraduate members. Despite the challenges the pandemic posed, JusticeCorps members still provided:

- 34,422 instances of assistance;
- Help with completion of 43,950 forms; and
- Language assistance in Spanish to 3,481 people.

The Court launched the PY 21/22 with 32 fellows and 67 undergraduate student members.

Follow JusticeCorps on social media!

 **Instagram** [justicecorps_la](https://www.instagram.com/justicecorps_la)

LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/justicecorps-losangeles/about/>

facebook <https://www.facebook.com/JusticeCorpsLosAngeles/>

SECTION 8: SELF-HELP PARTNERS

The full spectrum of self-help services in LA County includes extensive participation of various legal aid agencies and LA County partners.

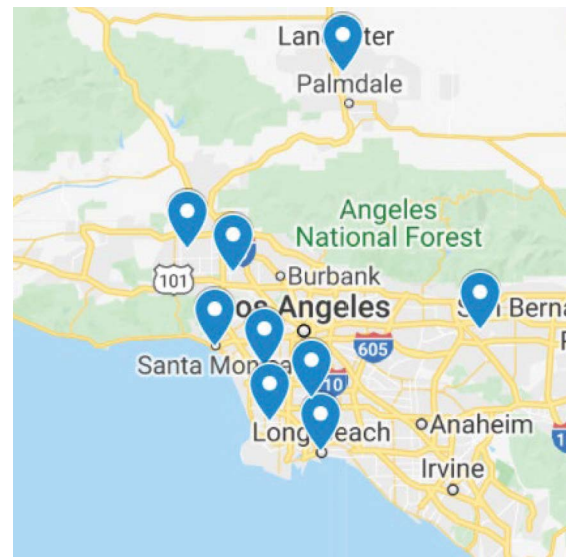
Self-Help Legal Access Centers – LA County



A prime example of this partnership is in **SHLACs**, which make up a significant part of the network of SHCs across the county. **SHLACs** are funded by the **LA County BOS**, are administered by **DCBA**, and operated by **NLSLA**, **LAFLA**, and **CLASoCal**.

The first SHLAC opened in Van Nuys in October 2000 as the first SHC in LA County. Since then, the county has funded eight additional facilities in the Pomona, Inglewood, Antelope Valley, Governor George Deukmejian (Long Beach), Santa Monica, Chatsworth (previously at San Fernando), Compton and Torrance courthouses.

All centers except Torrance, where adequate space has not yet been available, are now co-located with SHCs and Family Law Facilitator programs to collectively meet the demand for self-help services. SHLAC services cover the same case types as the Court's self-help programs, but with a greater emphasis on eviction defense. SHLAC staff also provide information about court procedures, provide required court forms with instructional "How-To Packets," provide trained legal professionals to review completed court forms, conduct workshops and provide one-on-one assistance. Trained attorneys, knowledgeable paralegals, triage intake screeners and volunteers staff the SHLAC programs.



SHLAC locations throughout LA County.

Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act Pilot Projects

The Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act provides state funding for two projects in LA County.

High Conflict Child Custody Pilot Project

The Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice utilizes a Shriver Grant to provide free legal representation to low-income parents in high-conflict custody disputes. The project prioritizes cases in which one side is represented by a lawyer and the other is unrepresented and cases involving domestic violence or

circumstances that make it hard for people to access court services. This project is a collaboration with the Levitt and Quinn Family Law Center and the Court.

Shriver Housing Pilot Project – Los Angeles

The **Shriver Housing Project - Los Angeles** provides free legal help to low-income landlords and tenants in UD/eviction cases. The project operated an Eviction Assistance Center, located in Room 115 at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse, until shifting in March 2020 to all remote services. If eligible, litigants are helped with answer and fee waiver applications and may be provided with legal representation at one of the Center's partner agencies. Plans to resume in-person services post-pandemic in the center at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse is particularly important given that more than 25% of the county's UD/eviction cases are filed in that courthouse each year.

The Shriver Housing Project – Los Angeles is a joint project of **NLSLA, Inner City Law Center, LAFLA and Public Counsel**.

Partner Programs Funded Through Equal Access Fund Partnership Grants

The Court collaborates and contracts with legal aid programs to create or supplement innovative self-help services for SRLs with funding to the legal aid partners from Equal Access Fund Partnership Grants, provided by the California State Budget Act to qualified legal aid agencies for joint projects with a California court to provide services at or near a courthouse.



Bet Tzedek

Bet Tzedek Legal Services operates both the Self-Help Conservatorship Clinic and the Elder Abuse Restraining Order Project. These clinic services shifted, at least temporarily, to remote assistance in March 2020.



Community Legal Aid SoCal

CLASoCal provides UD/eviction self-help workshops for landlords and tenants. Services for both became temporarily remote in March 2020. The program resumed onsite at the SHC at the Norwalk Courthouse in 2021.



Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

LAFLA provides support staff at the SHC in the Torrance Courthouse using Partnership Grant funding. Since March 2020, this support staff remotely has provided expanded services in family law and protective restraining order cases.



Los Angeles County Bar Association

LACBA provides expanded services both remotely and onsite in the Domestic Violence Clinic space at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse, collaborating to accept same-day appointment referrals from the Court's onsite self-help staff and from the Court's Self-Help Information Phone Line.



Neighborhood Legal Services Los Angeles

NLSLA provides an attorney who specializes in UD/evictions in the area served by the Pasadena Courthouse. NLSLA also is developing online consumer debt services and resources to supplement or replace live workshops provided in the consumer debt hubs.



Public Counsel

Public Counsel has used Partnership Grant funding to run its Guardianship Clinic at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse since 2001. In March 2020, the program shifted to a remote service model due to the pandemic. The program operates a hybrid model of remote and in-person services.

CONCLUSION

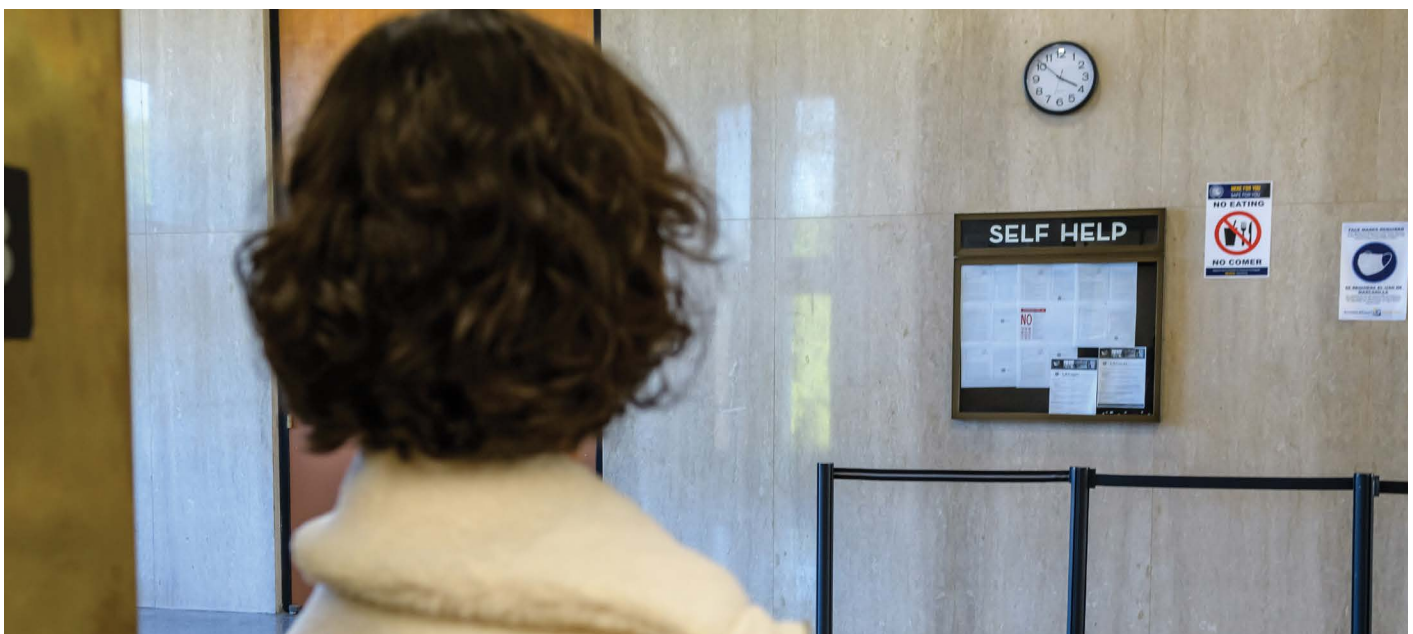
The Court's umbrella of self-help services provides options for litigants to address their legal issues without the assistance of counsel. These services are more accessible than ever — online, over the phone or in person.

The pandemic resulted in a colossal shift in the way the Court provides self-help services. However, the Court envisioned and partially implemented expanded options for service delivery long before COVID-19 ignited a public health crisis. The Court offered many of the remote options highlighted in this report prior to the pandemic, such as Gina the traffic avatar, ODR for parenting plans, G&F and LHI for document completion. These tools laid the foundation for the Court to rapidly implement additional convenient service options, such as remote workshops, call centers, ODR for small claims and UD/eviction cases, appointment scheduling systems and more, the combination of which provided LA County residents seamless access to assistance despite courthouse access restrictions during the pandemic.

The Court will continue to expand its hybrid self-help service model to help litigants realize the benefits of remote assistance, including convenience, not missing work and decreased transportation and childcare costs. Additional positive impacts include increased access for litigants with mobility issues, or those who have moved outside of LA County.

SRLs appreciate service options that meet them where they are: at home, on the go, or in person at a courthouse. Online tools enable SRLs to obtain assistance at any time and from anywhere. Litigants who prefer in-person assistance may elect to come to a SHC unless COVID conditions require a return to remote-only services.

Self-help in LA County continues to evolve to meet the Court's steadfast mission to provide equal access to justice through the fair, timely and efficient resolution of all cases. The suite of service options the Court continues to expand for SRLs, as outlined in this report, provide the bedrock from which equal access to justice is made possible and more robust.



Glossary of Terms

CLASoCal

Community Legal Aid SoCal

Court

Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

CSSD

Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department

DCBA

Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs

DVRO

Domestic Violence Restraining Order

Dissolution of Marriage

Divorce

FCCR

Family Centered Case Resolution

FLIC

Family Law Information Center

FY

Fiscal Year

G&F

Guide & File

JCC

Judicial Council of California

LACBA

Los Angeles County Bar Association

LACC

LACourtConnect

LAFLA

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

LEP

Limited English Proficiency

LHI

LawHelp Interactive

LA County

Los Angeles County

MSH

Model Self-Help/Urban Collaboration

NLSLA

Neighborhood Legal Services Los Angeles

ODR

Online Dispute Resolution

OMB

U.S. Office of Management and Budget

PY

Program Year

SHC

Self-Help Center

SHLAC

Self-Help Legal Access Center

SRL

Self-Represented Litigant

STARS

Self-Help Tracking and Reporting Survey

TCC

Traffic Call Center

UD/Evictions

Unlawful Detainer



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES