

BLUE RIDGE LEGAL SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 2019 - DECEMBER 2019



THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY SERVING THE SHENANDOAH AND
ROANOKE VALLEYS OF VIRGINIA



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR


Dear friends:

When we reflect on the most fundamental and inspiring ideals of our nation, we recall the promise of "Equal Justice for All" and its guarantee that all Americans be treated equally in the eyes of our judicial system. Yet, for the millions of Americans every year who are faced with a civil legal issue but cannot afford an attorney, this promise is not their reality.

As the legal aid society serving the Shenandoah and Roanoke Valleys, thousands of low-income residents turn to us each year when confronting critical civil legal problems that could turn their lives upside down if not resolved. Evictions, foreclosures, domestic violence, predatory lending, bankruptcy, nursing home problems, financial exploitation - the litany of legal problems faced by the less fortunate in our community is extensive and can often lead to crippling results.

Having worked here at legal aid for 40 years, I've come to realize that unaddressed civil legal problems can create difficult barriers to ever escaping poverty. Consequently, the work we do here is more than just providing our clients with a level playing field in court; our work gives them hope for a better life, and for their share of the American Dream.

While you read this report, we hope you will reflect upon the importance of legal aid and the difference it makes in the lives of our low-income neighbors. We hope you are inspired by the dedication of our staff and volunteer attorneys, as they work tirelessly to protect the rights and lives of their clients. And above all, we hope you are proud to be part of the community of supporters who have joined us in the fight for meaningful access to justice for the poor.



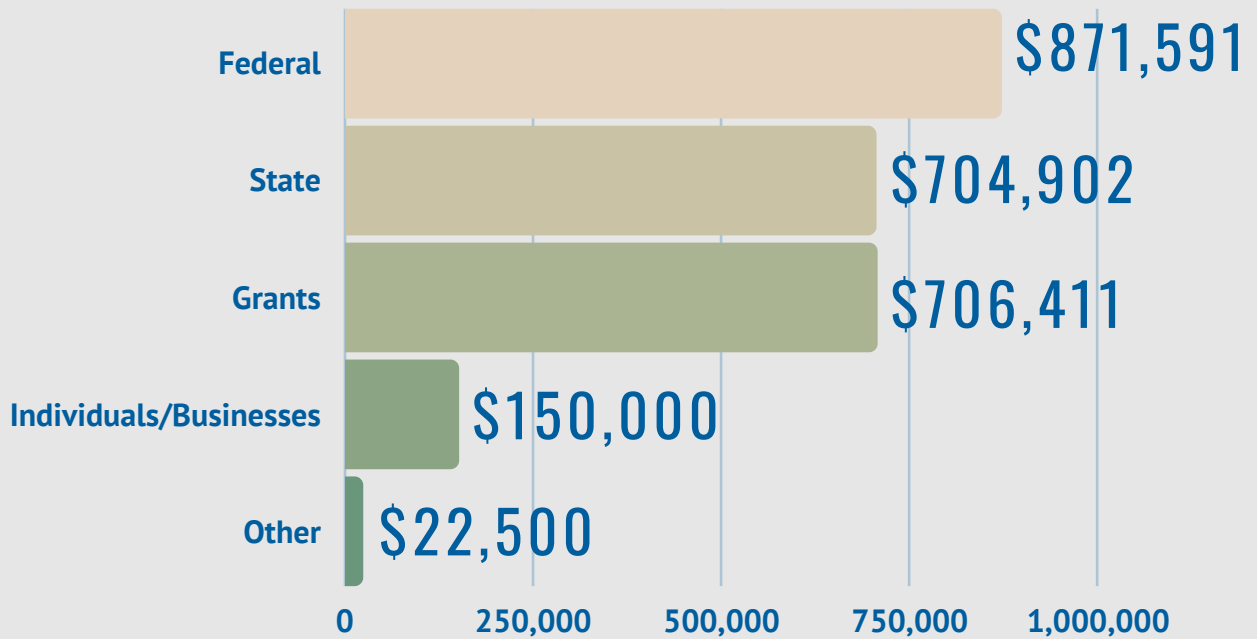
JOHN E. WHITFIELD

Executive Director | General Counsel

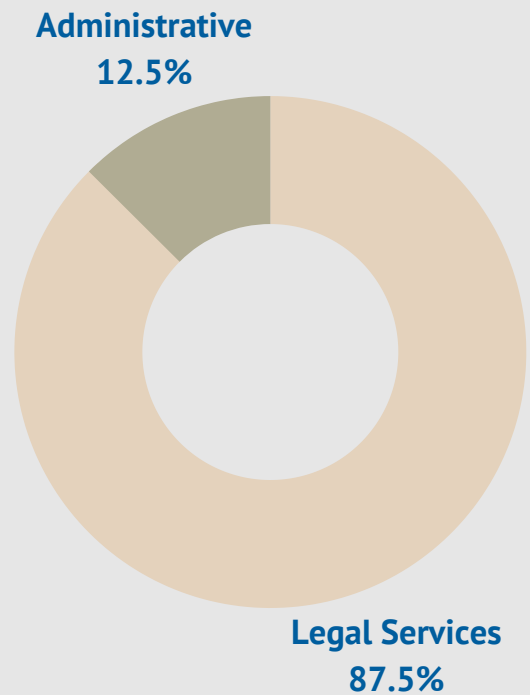
FINANCIALS

JANUARY 1, 2019 - DECEMBER 31, 2020

REVENUE: \$2,455,404

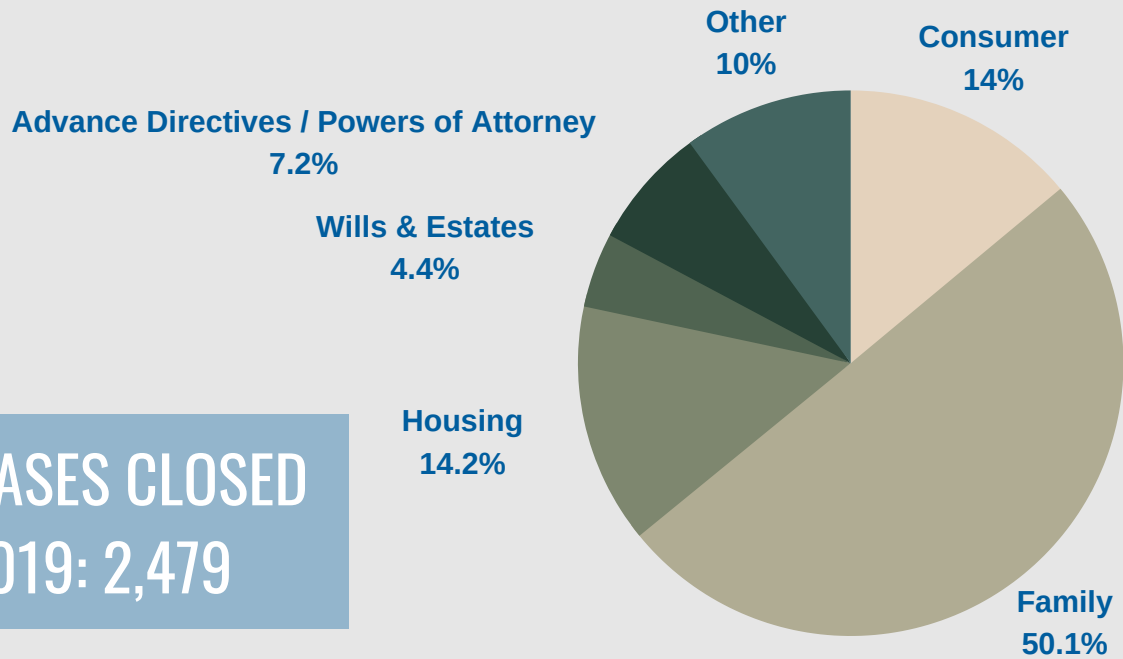


EXPENSES: \$2,584,972



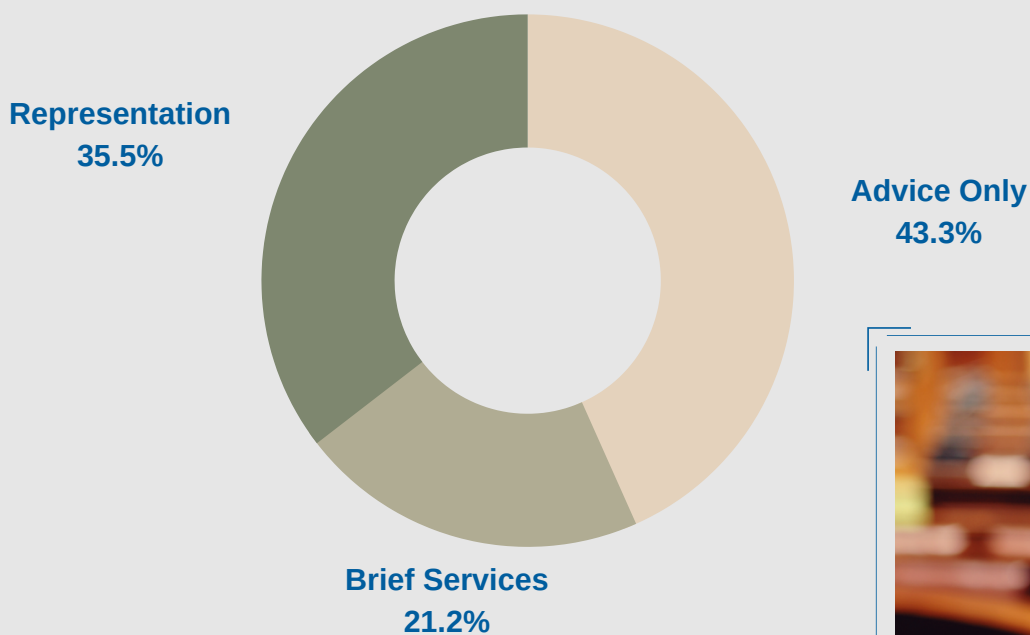
BRLS BY THE NUMBERS

CASES CLOSED BY LEGAL PROBELM



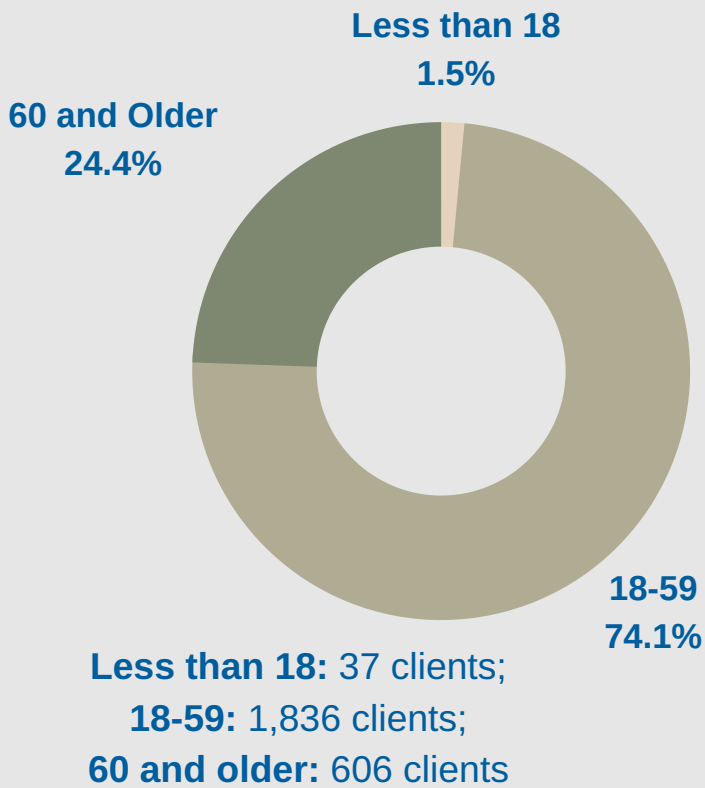
TOTAL CASES CLOSED
IN 2019: 2,479

TYPE OF LEGAL SERVICE RENDERED

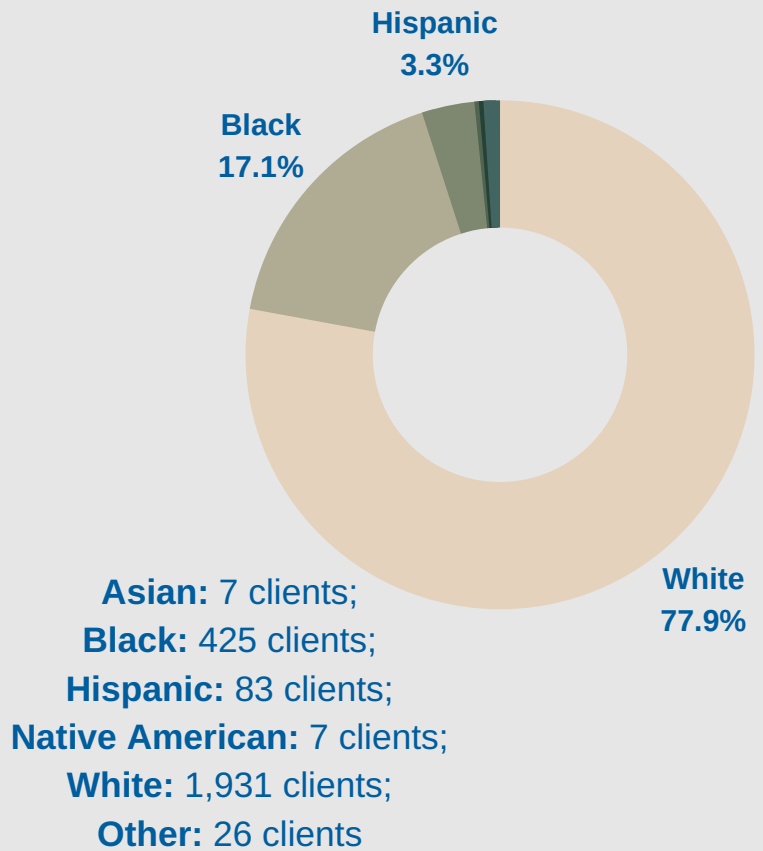


WHO ARE OUR CLIENTS?

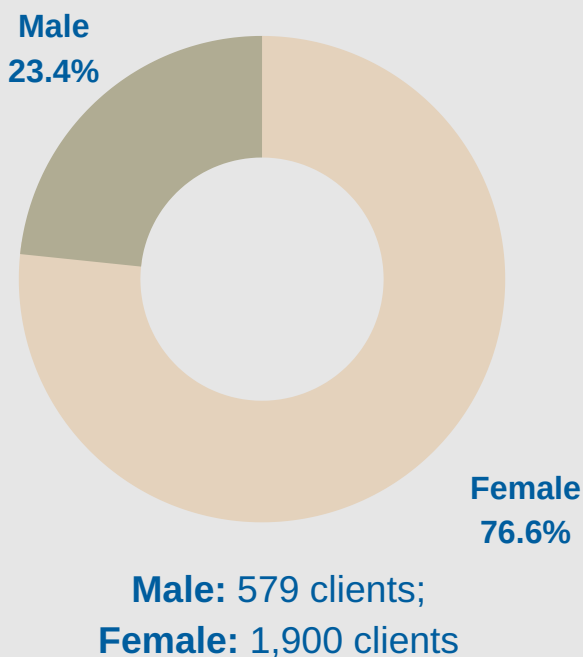
AGE



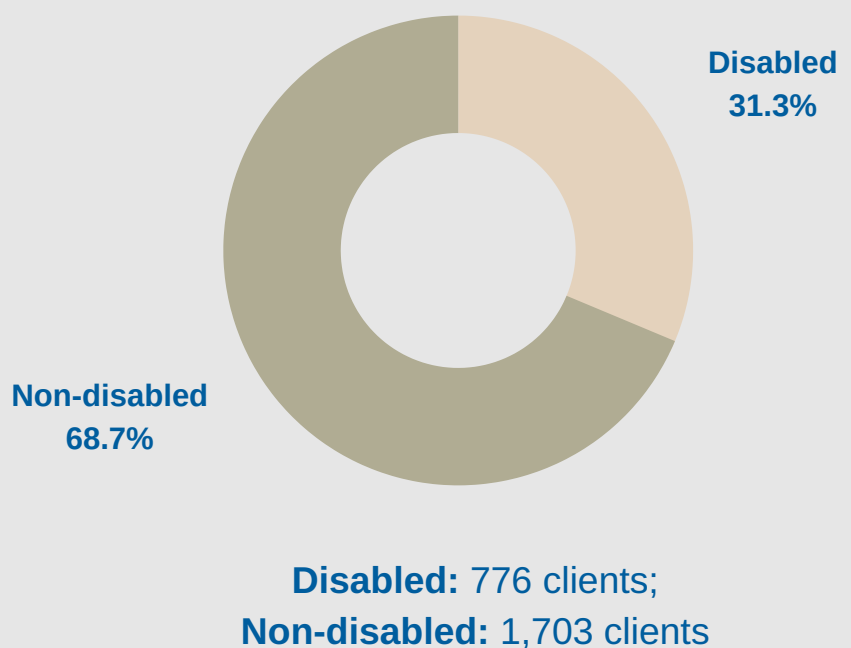
RACE



GENDER



DISABILITY STATUS

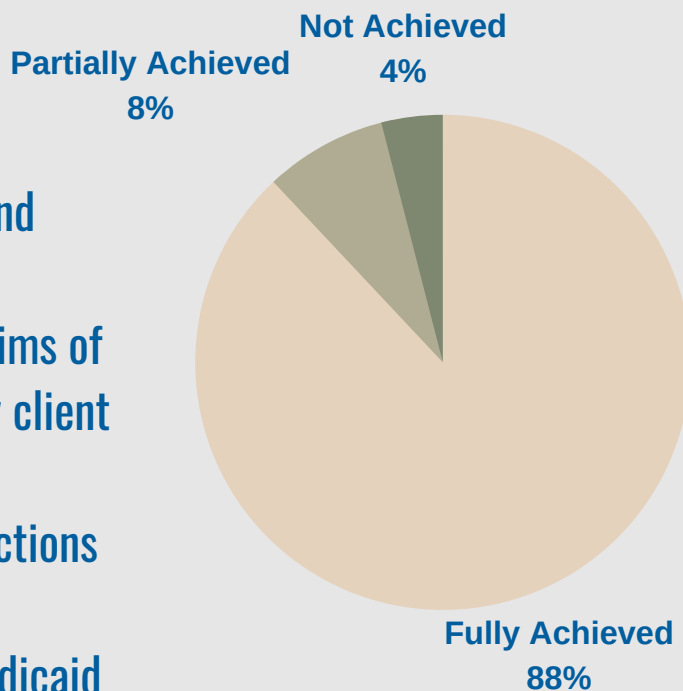


RESULTS

IN 769 CASES INVOLVING ONGOING REPRESENTATION, WE ACHIEVED OUR CLIENTS' GOALS IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

IN 2019, BRLS

- Prevented evictions for 48 families and avoided foreclosures for 6 clients
- Obtained court protection for 56 victims of domestic violence, including 1 elderly client
- Obtained 26 bankruptcy discharges
- Stopped or reduced debt collection actions against 37 clients
- Obtained, preserved, or increased Medicaid benefits for 22 clients
- Obtained protection from adult financial exploitation for 4 clients



OUTCOMES SUMMARY

Overall, we achieved **2,906 outcomes** for **2,479 clients** that benefited **6,405 low-income people**, including affirmative lump sum recoveries of **\$616,894**, affirmative monthly recoveries of **\$29,077**, avoidance of **\$1,577,407** in lump sum debts or damages, and avoidance of **\$34,111** in monthly charges.

2019 DEVELOPMENTS

A SUMMARY OF THIS YEAR'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We launched our online application.

1,165 applicants applied for our services via online applications in 2019, resulting in 20% of our intakes for the year.



We received funding from the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia (LSCV) to support eviction defense work.

In August, we hired a staff attorney in the Harrisonburg office to exclusively handle eviction defense and housing cases.

Innovations in technology and new methods of service delivery help us strengthen our practice. Because of these developments, we were able to reach even more low-income people facing critical legal issues.

We're updating our Standards of Practice.

A committee of BRLS attorneys began updating our Standards of Practice to expand oversight and support of new attorneys and implement greater use of technology to support our legal work.



2019 DEVELOPMENTS



We saw significant increases in the number of clients served by our Pro Bono Referral Programs and Hotline.

585 cases were closed through our Pro Bono Hotline and Pro Bono Referral Programs during 2019, compared to 407 cases closed the previous year.

We closed 332 more cases this year than we did in 2018.

By hiring two additional staff attorneys, and with the help of a pro bono emeritus attorney in Roanoke, we closed 15.5% more cases this year than the last.

We participated in the statewide launch of JusticeServer, an online resource that connects volunteer attorneys with legal aid clients to provide them with pro bono legal services.

Since Spring 2019, we have had several of our pro bono cases picked up by volunteer attorneys off of JusticeServer, including a wills and estates case and a few no-fault divorces picked up by attorneys in the Richmond area.



CLIENT IMPACT: CASE STORIES

Read the stories below to understand how accessing justice has transformed the lives of our clients.

Mia, a single mother of three young children, was in danger of being evicted. Mia had previously been the victim of a domestic violence incident that damaged her apartment. Though her landlord moved her to a new apartment for safety reasons, they charged Mia for the damages. When Mia was unable to pay these charges, the landlord began the eviction process against her. After missing the first hearing due to one of her children being in the hospital, Mia had a judgment entered against her that she didn't have the money to appeal.

The Millers came to BRLS for help with a garnishment issue so severe, it could have put their family of seven out on the streets. Mr. and Mrs. Miller had each racked up tens of thousands of dollars in medical bills before they were able to obtain Medicaid, which Mr. Miller had long been wrongfully denied due to the incorrect listing of his social security number. The BRLS attorney worked with the clients for months to file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Our attorney obtained a full discharge of the debt for the family which totaled more than \$81,000. Now that their finances are in better shape, the Millers are saving up to become homeowners in the next couple of years.

BRLS represented Mia and was able to stop the lockout process and proved that the lease didn't allow the landlord to evict Mia on account of unpaid damages to a prior apartment. Our attorney got the unlawful detainer dismissed so Mia and her children could remain in their home.

"IT'S HARD TO PUT INTO WORDS HOW MONUMENTAL THIS WAS FOR ME."

-Client, Roanoke

"[BRLS] TRULY HELPED PROVIDE STABILITY FOR MY FAMILY AND MY FUTURE."

-Client, Stuarts Draft

"IT GAVE ME A DEBT FREE START, SO I COULD SURVIVE."

-Client, Rockingham County

Linda is a 62-year-old client who contacted BRLS for assistance with getting her \$2,200 security deposit back. When Linda moved out, her landlord refused to return the security deposit even though the move-out inspection and numerous photographs clearly showed no damage had been done. After Linda filed legal action seeking return of the deposit, the landlord responded with a counterclaim alleging \$10,000 in bogus damages. This put Linda in a precarious situation - if she was found responsible, she would lose her housing voucher and become homeless. Our attorney represented Linda at her hearing and the court dismissed the landlord's counterclaim and granted Linda a judgment for the full amount of the deposit. Within a few days of the judgment being granted, Linda received her \$2,200 security deposit and was able to maintain her voucher.

Dolores is an 82-year-old woman who had been financially exploited and emotionally abused by family members. The abusers, the client's granddaughter and granddaughter's fiance, took money and property from the client, along with imprisoning and abusing an elderly man in the client's own basement. Adult Protective Services contacted BRLS after the abusers had been arrested on felony charges. Though the abusers were incarcerated, while out on bail they returned to our client's home and intimidated her. Our attorney intervened by assisting the client with getting no trespassing signs, revoking her power of attorney, and hiring a private investigator to serve the abusers. BRLS helped the client with safety planning and referrals and worked with social services for a medical alert bracelet for the client if the abusers ever returned.

At 19 years old, Ms. Perez was forced by her family into an arranged marriage to a man she didn't know. She was seeking help from a domestic violence shelter when she was referred to BRLS for assistance with immigration and divorce. Ms. Perez suffered years of abuse from her husband, the father of her four children. Ms. Perez had no legal immigration status in the U.S. which made her unable to obtain a work-permit, social security card, or driver's license. The BRLS attorney assisted Ms. Perez and her eldest daughter in applying for lawful permanent residence. They have since received work-permits, social security cards, and driver's licenses based on their immigration petitions and we anticipate that they will soon be granted lawful permanent residence. Additionally, BRLS helped Ms. Perez obtain a protective order and divorce from her husband. Ms. Perez reports she is now in a loving and safe relationship.

BRLS OFFICE LOCATIONS

Harrisonburg

204 N. High Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22802
(540)-433-1830

Winchester

303 S. Loudoun Street, Suite D
Winchester, VA 22601
(540)-662-5021

Lexington

215 South Main Street
Lexington, VA 24450
(540)-463-7334

Roanoke

132 Campbell Avenue SW, Suite 300
Roanoke, VA 24011
(540)-344-2080