



**Blue Ridge**  
LEGAL SERVICES



**2021**

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**ANNUAL REPORT**

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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# FINANCIALS

January 2021 - December 2021



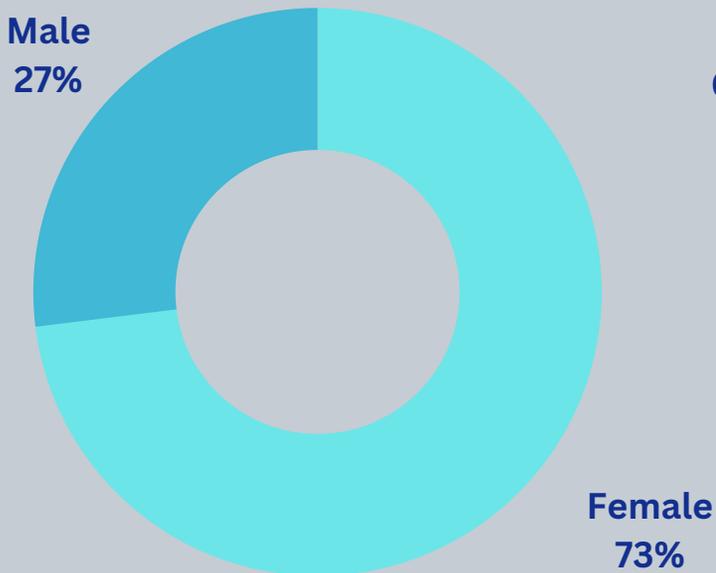
**Total Revenue: \$3,318,392**



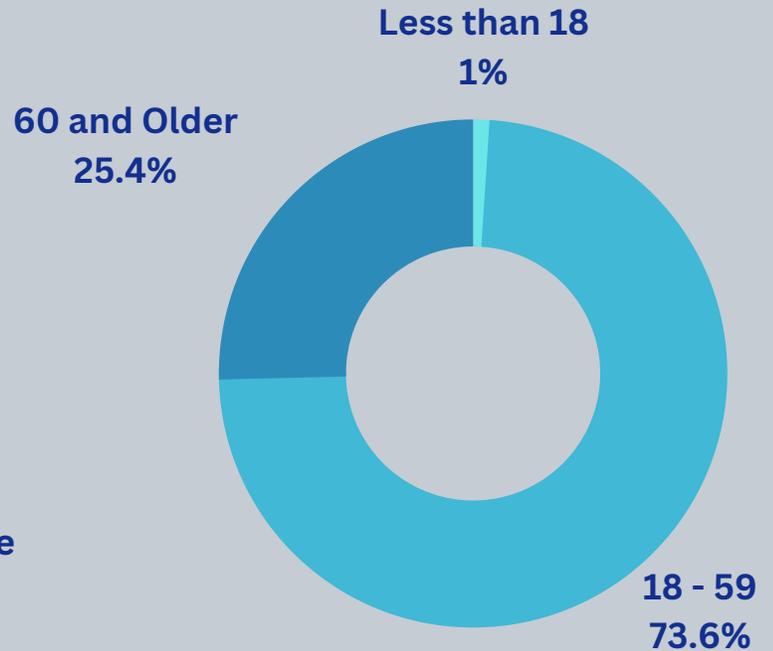
# WHO ARE OUR CLIENTS?

## BRLS' 2021 Client Population

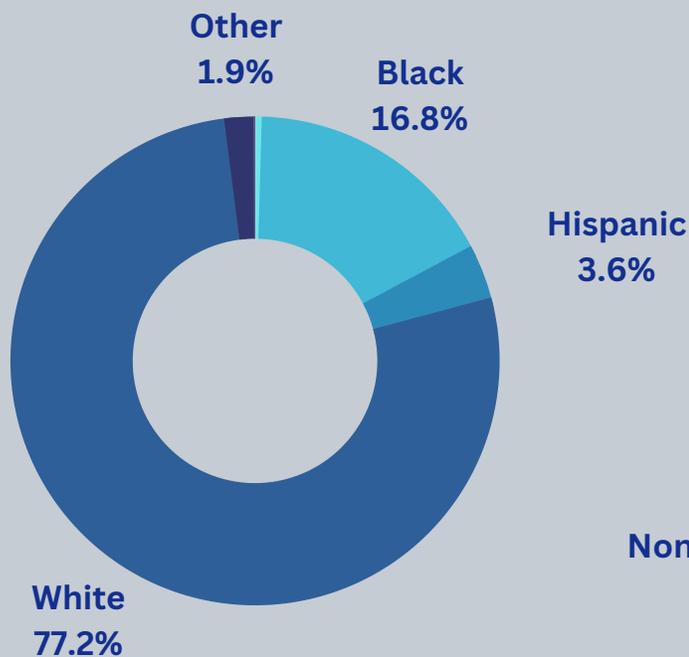
### GENDER



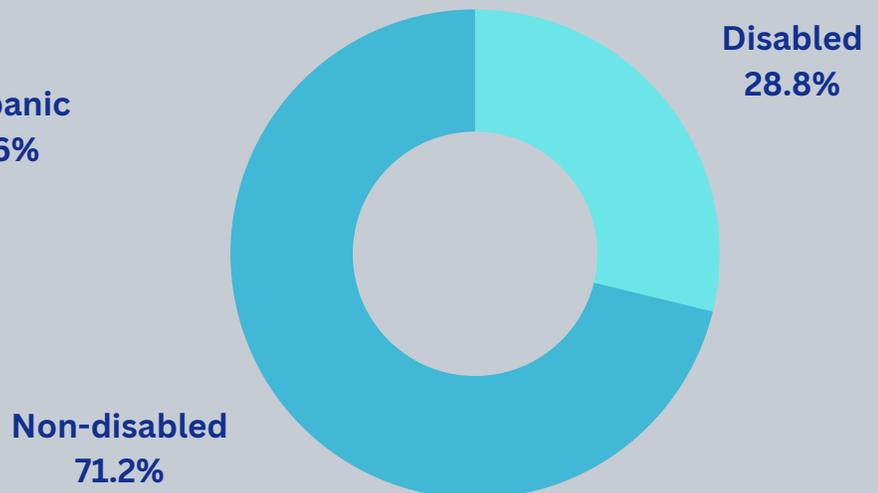
### AGE



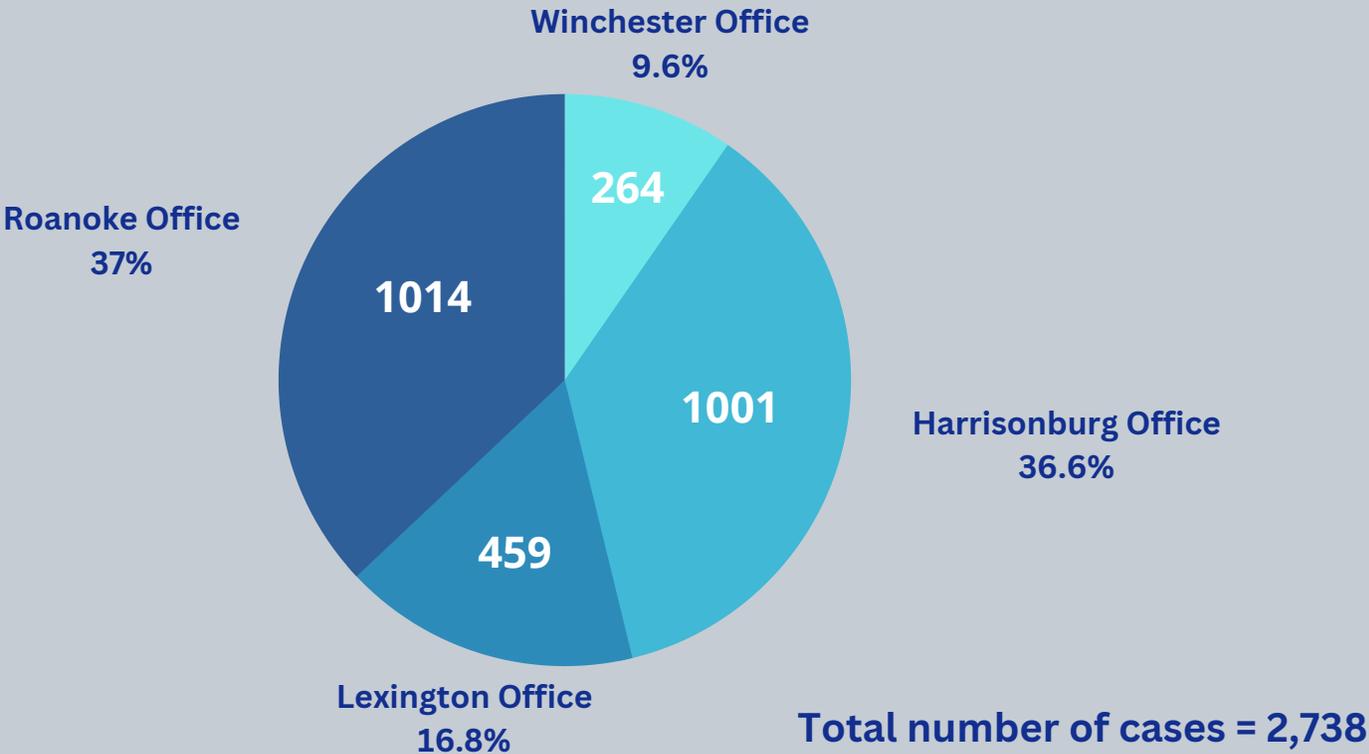
### RACE / ETHNICITY



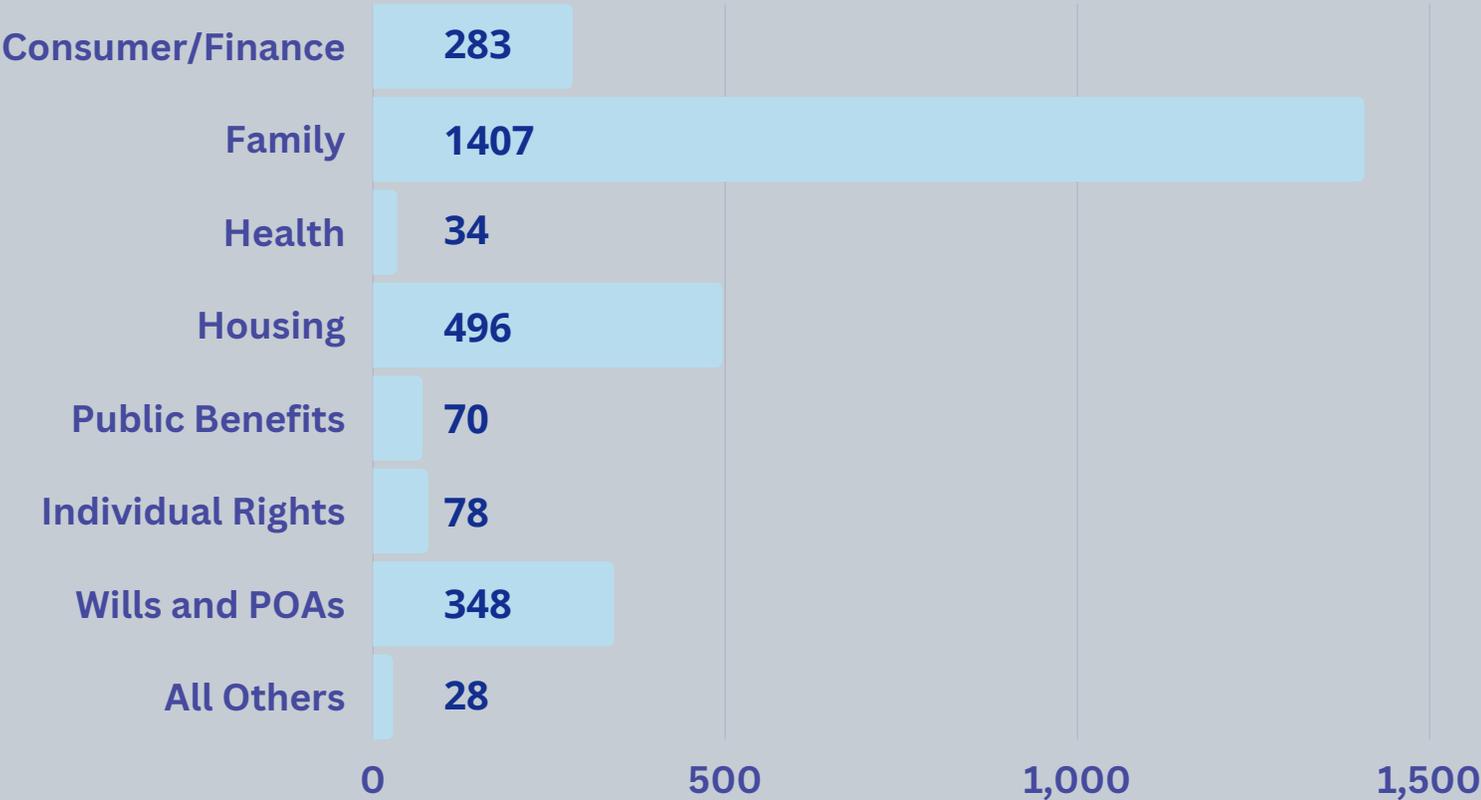
### DISABILITY STATUS



# CASES CLOSED IN 2021



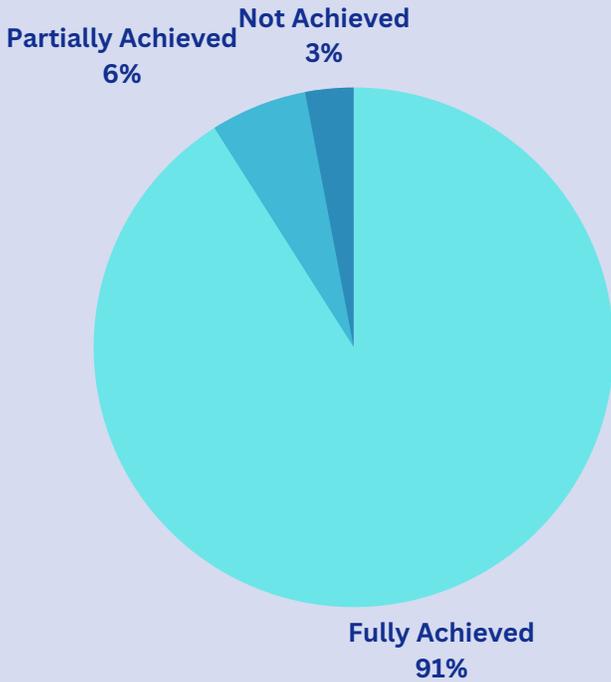
## CASES CLOSED BY LEGAL ISSUE



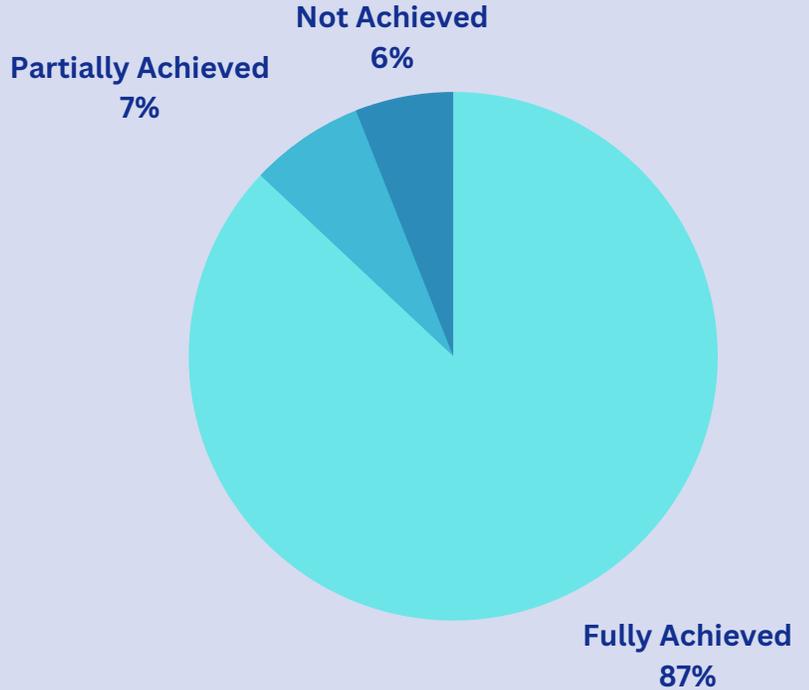
# CASE OUTCOMES

In the **852** cases involving on-going representation, we fully achieved our clients' goals in **89%** of the cases, and partially achieved them in another **7%**.

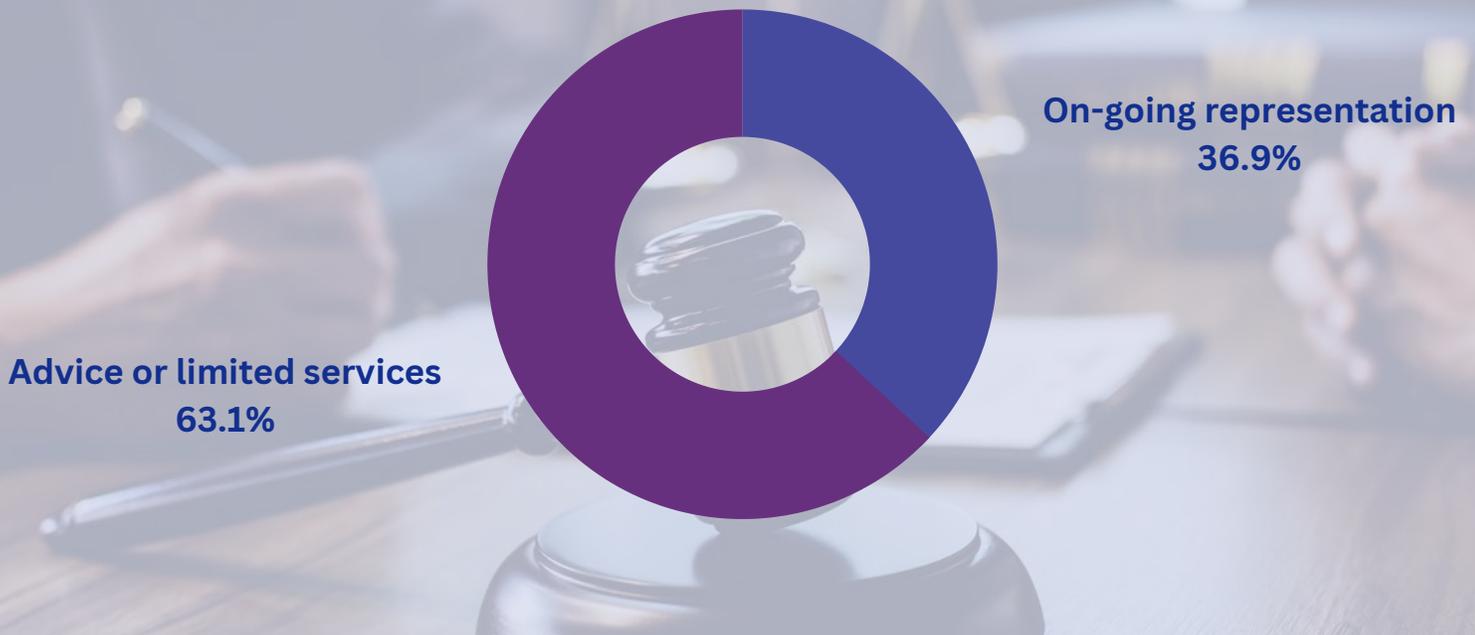
**Volunteer Attorneys**  
Total cases = 116



**BRLS Staff Attorneys**  
Total cases = 757



## TYPE OF LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDED



# OUTCOMES SUMMARY

In 2021, our staff and volunteer attorneys achieved 3,123 outcomes that benefitted 7,298 low-income people, including affirmative lump sum recoveries of \$863,882; affirmative monthly recoveries of \$60,087; avoidance of \$1,958,034 in lump sum debts or damages; and avoidance of \$8,673 in monthly obligations.

*Here's a look at some of the specific outcomes BRLS staff and pro bono attorneys achieved for our clients in 2021:*



Prevented evictions for 130 families and delayed evictions for another 71 families



Obtained court protection for 60 victims of domestic violence



Obtained divorces or annulments for 406 clients and provided advice and counsel to 751 clients on family-related issues



Assisted 52 homeless persons in obtaining their birth certificates



Obtained child custody orders for 65 clients and preserved child visitation rights for 21 clients



Assisted 23 households overwhelmed by debt in obtaining bankruptcy discharges, providing them with a fresh financial start while discharging \$1,281,196 in bad debts



Drafted 199 living wills, powers of attorney, or health care proxy documents

# 2021 DEVELOPMENTS

## BIRTH CERTIFICATE PROJECT

BRLS is always looking for new ways to conduct outreach and connect more of our low-income neighbors with free legal services. In 2021, BRLS was awarded a grant of \$5,000 from the Legal Services Corporation's Rural Summer Legal Corps (RSLC) program to conduct an outreach project to homeless individuals throughout the Shenandoah Valley. Lacking vital records is a significant barrier to escaping the cycle of homelessness for many individuals. Without an address, these individuals cannot request documents like a birth certificate or driver's license to be mailed to them. Such documents are often required when applying for employment or renting an apartment. To address this issue in the Valley, BRLS offered a RSLC internship to a law school student to conduct outreach to homeless individuals facing this issue across the Valley. Prior to this grant program, BRLS' Roanoke office had been successful in a similar project by coordinating with homeless shelters in the Roanoke Valley.



Throughout the summer, law student Elena Pruett-Fiederlein contacted agencies serving the homeless population in communities from Winchester to Lexington, establishing relationships and designing a system to accept referrals and work with clients. By the end of the summer-long project, Elena had assisted 33 homeless individuals in obtaining their birth certificates, from states all over the country. Not only was the initial project successful, but Elena also created a step-by-step guide listing the materials needed for applying for a birth certificate in each state, which will help future BRLS clients in obtaining their birth certificates. These reference materials have had a tremendous impact on our birth certificate work at BRLS, as attorneys are now able to assist clients in these matters much more effectively. With the help of the RSLC program and our hardworking legal intern, we were able to achieve positive outcomes for many more homeless individuals with this issue in 2021 than in previous years.

## RENT RELIEF PROGRAM

In 2021, we were still seeing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our client population, particularly those facing eviction and other housing issues. As one of Virginia's legal aid programs, in 2021 BRLS was awarded a grant by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to hire new staff to help tenants and their landlords complete rent relief applications. Under the project, tenants who had suffered a loss of income due to COVID-19 were eligible for rental assistance from the state. In the summer of 2021, BRLS hired three new "rental assistance navigators" and assigned one to each of our offices in Winchester, Harrisonburg, and Lexington. BRLS' rental assistance navigators helped hundreds of clients obtain rental assistance that allowed them to pay backed-owed rent and avoid eviction.



Over the year-long program, BRLS was able to obtain \$858,784.75 in RRP assistance for 314 tenants, effectively avoiding eviction due to nonpayment of rent for hundreds of low-income people across the Valley. Of those served, BRLS provided free legal assistance (such as advice or representation in eviction hearings) to 57 clients. The other 257 tenants served through this project learned of our assistance with the rental relief program through outreach conducted by the rental assistance navigators and through referrals.

## PRO BONO WORK AND THE LEWIS F. POWELL JR. AWARD

Here at BRLS, we celebrate the contributions of our volunteer attorneys and recognize that without their contributions, our work would not be possible. In 2021, there were 630 cases closed by our Pro Bono Hotline and Pro Bono Referral Programs. Much of this work can be attributed to pro bono emeritus attorney Charlie Phillips in our Roanoke office, who personally closed 417 of these cases. In August 2021, Mr. Phillips was honored with the Virginia State Bar's Lewis F. Powell Jr. Pro Bono Award. Each year, the Virginia State Bar recognizes attorneys who have made outstanding pro bono contributions with this award. BRLS has been fortunate to have Mr. Phillips' contributions over the years. In addition to Mr. Phillips' work in Roanoke last year, the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Family Law Hotline advised 115 clients on various family law issues with the help of volunteer attorneys. In total, we received approximately \$675,000 in donated legal services from volunteer private attorneys in 2021.

# CLIENT IMPACT: CASE STORIES

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

**"Marie", a young mother of two small children, reached out to our Lexington office** for help with a collections issue. Marie was already struggling financially, which only became worse when her wages started being garnished at her job as a CNA. Marie had never received any notice of the lawsuit prior to the garnishment, which was due to a debt she jointly owed with her ex-husband. A BRLS attorney obtained a copy of the underlying Warrant in Debt and was able to prove to the creditor's attorney that proper notice of the lawsuit had not been given to our client. The BRLS attorney warned that if the creditor did not return the previously garnished funds from Marie's paychecks, she would file a "Motion to Set Aside" to overturn the court's judgment on the lawsuit. In response, the creditor agreed to return all garnished funds, which totaled \$1,871 from the current garnishment and \$2,511 from the prior garnishment and to set aside the judgment against Marie and her ex-husband. BRLS was able to recover thousands of dollars for Marie, which helped alleviate some of her financial burden.

**"Mr. Brown" reached out to our Harrisonburg office** when he had been scammed by a roofing company. Mr. Brown contracted with a roofing company to replace his old roof. He was told in April by the roofing company that they were behind, so it would be mid to late summer before they were able to replace his roof. When he started calling in August for a status update, he learned that the original company he contracted with had actually sold his contract to another roofing company without his knowledge, and was then sold back. By that time, Mr. Brown's roof was leaking badly and water was running through the ceiling. Despite many calls to the roofer about these issues, they never came to replace the roof. Ultimately, Mr. Brown hired someone else to replace the roof who charged him substantially less. Mr. Brown then obtained a quote of \$3,390 to repair the interior damages caused by the leaking roof. With the help of a BRLS attorney, Mr. Brown filed a suit against the roofing company for the \$3,390 quote. With the help of the BRLS attorney, he obtained a favorable settlement without having to go to trial.

"We were in need of help. The legal services you provided delivered us from an overwhelming situation and personal pressure. Thanks so much for your help. It has made a big difference in our lives."

*- BRLS client, Winchester*

# CASE STORIES AND CLIENT QUOTES

"Lisa", a single mom with two young children, was living in Warren County when she reached out to the Winchester office for help with a housing issue. Lisa had lived in her Section-8-housing apartment complex for over five years. She recently received a notice informing her that her tenancy was being terminated due to alleged lease violations. Shortly after moving into the complex, Lisa's then boyfriend assaulted her. After the incident, the boyfriend was served with a "No Trespass" notice, barring him from the premises. Unfortunately, Lisa was finding it difficult to fully separate from him, especially since they had a child in common. The apartment complex alleged that Lisa allowed her ex-boyfriend on the premises on multiple occasions, in violation of her lease. Though they issued several lease violation notices to Lisa in the past, they elected to enter a new lease with her anyway. When Lisa contacted BRLS for help, the BRLS attorney argued that when the complex agreed to enter a new lease, it effectively waived its right to rely on the alleged lease violations as cause to evict Lisa. The court agreed with the BRLS attorney's argument and the eviction case against Lisa was dismissed. Due to the help of the BRLS attorney, Lisa and her children were able to remain in their home and avoid eviction.

**Ms. "Hughes," an 84-year-old woman living in Rockingham County,** contacted BRLS for help with a predatory lending issue. Since she had previously been the victim of financial exploitation by family members, she needed help from someone she could trust. Ms. Hughes had taken out a loan from a cash advance company to give money to her granddaughter. Contrary to Virginia law, the company repeatedly refinanced her loan, resulting in fees and costs that totaled over \$1,500. When she fell behind on the payments, the cash advance company's attorney threatened to file a creditor's bill in equity to sell Ms. Hughes' house out from under her during the height of the pandemic. Two attorneys from a private law office in Harrisonburg accepted this referral from BRLS and represented Ms. Hughes. They filed a lawsuit against the cash advance company and won a judgment of \$7,403 for the client. The work of the two volunteer private attorneys in this case stopped a predatory lending practice against a very vulnerable client and recovered the money she was rightfully owed.

"The respect, courtesy, and professionalism was above and beyond what I expected. I felt like my attorney really cared about my issues."

*- BRLS client, Roanoke*

# BRLS OFFICE LOCATIONS

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## **Winchester**

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

## **Harrisonburg**

204 N. High Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22803  
(540)-433-1830

## **Lexington**

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

## **Roanoke**

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

**Visit our website:** [www.brls.org](http://www.brls.org)

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