

# Annual Report 2022



**Blue Ridge**  
LEGAL SERVICES

*The Valley's Legal Aid Society*



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

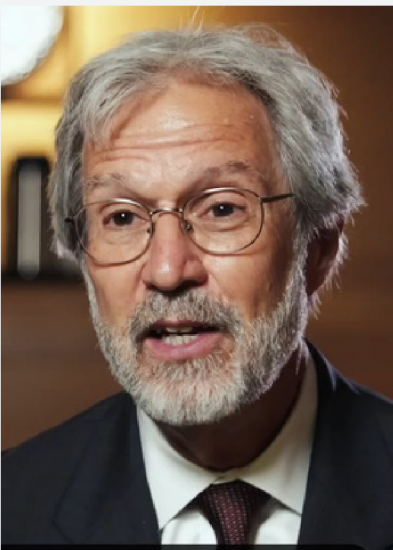
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# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

*“Equal justice under law is not merely a caption on the facade of the Supreme Court building, it is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society. It is one of the ends for which our entire legal system exists...it is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status.”*  
– Lewis Powell, Jr., U.S. Supreme Court Justice



JOHN WHITFIELD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Greetings!

**Blue Ridge Legal Services had a strong year in 2022. Our staff pivoted to respond to changing legal needs of our clients as we emerged from the pandemic. By year’s end, we had closed the second highest number of cases in the last decade, while providing high quality legal services and achieving strong outcomes for our clients.**

**In 2023 we look forward to continuing to serve the residents of the Shenandoah Valley who could not otherwise afford an attorney, providing equal justice to those who are most vulnerable.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John E. Whitfield". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

## MISSION

Blue Ridge Legal Services, Inc. (BRLS) is a nonprofit charitable civil legal aid program providing free legal assistance in civil matters of critical importance to low-income residents of the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke Valley.

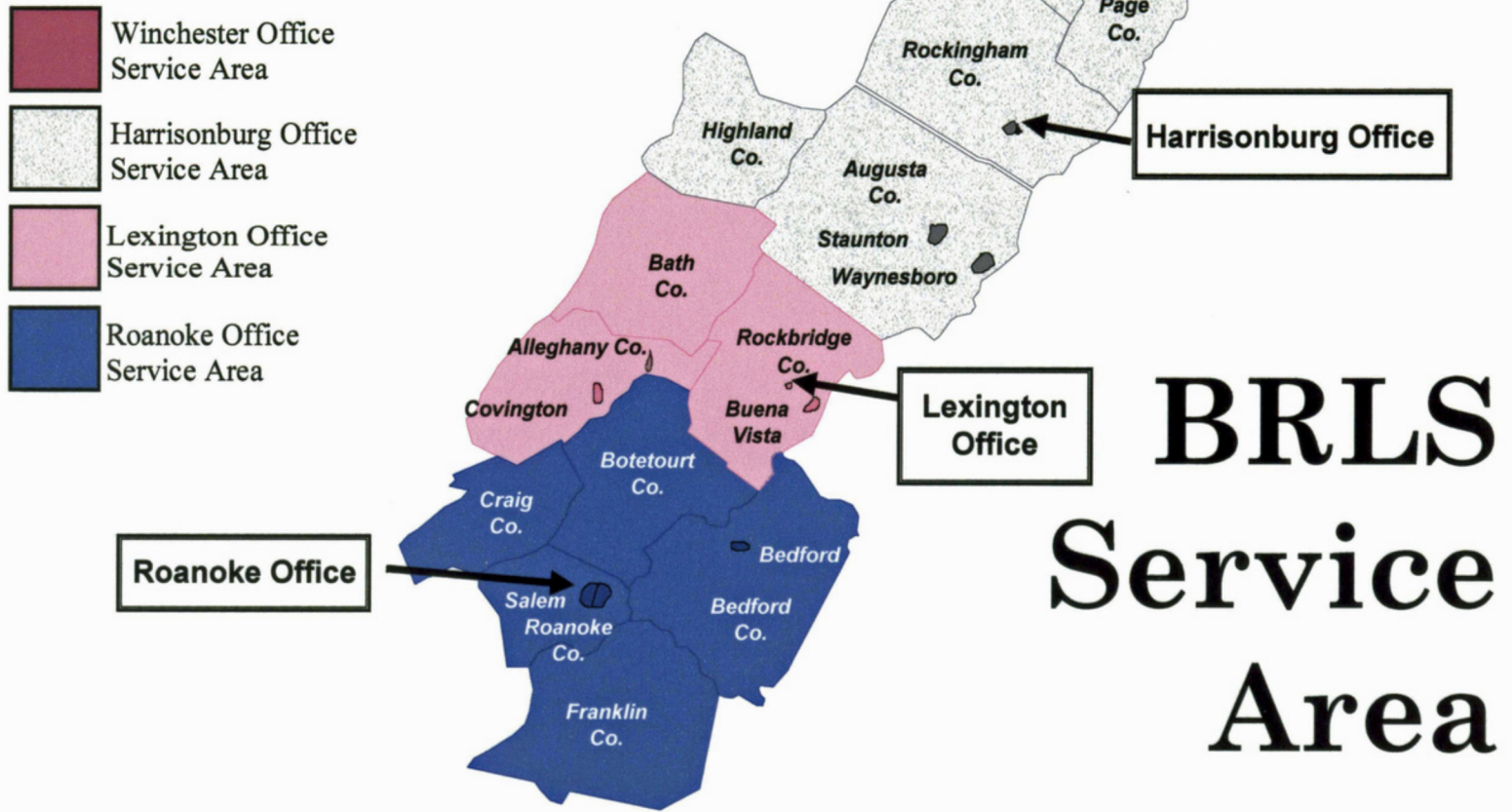
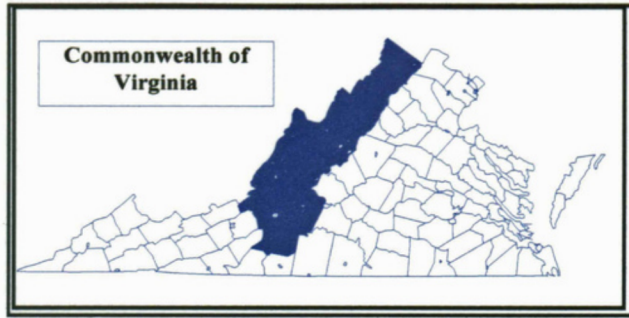
BRLS is committed to eliminating poverty-based inequities in the civil justice system by providing high-quality legal advice and representation to low-income residents of our service area, folks who would otherwise be unable to obtain legal help due to their poverty.

Our mission is premised on the recognition that the American ideal of “Equal Justice for All” can be achieved only if we provide the poor meaningful access to our judicial system.

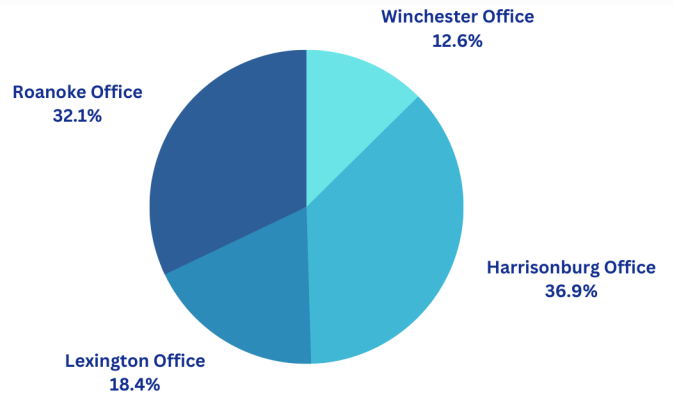


# ABOUT US

## BRLS Service Area



## CASEWORK PER OFFICE

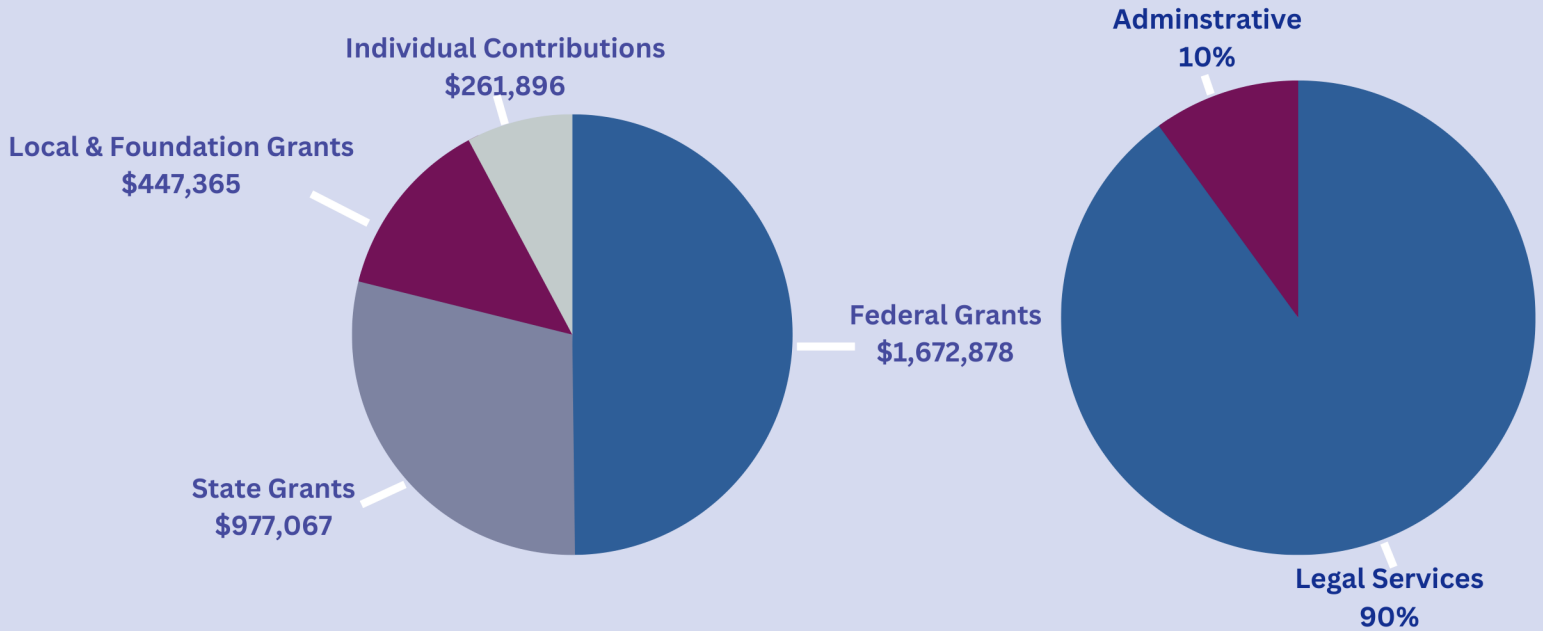




# FINANCIALS

Total Revenue: \$4,049,555

Total Expenses: \$3,918,715



# FUNDING



# CLIENTS BY THE NUMBERS

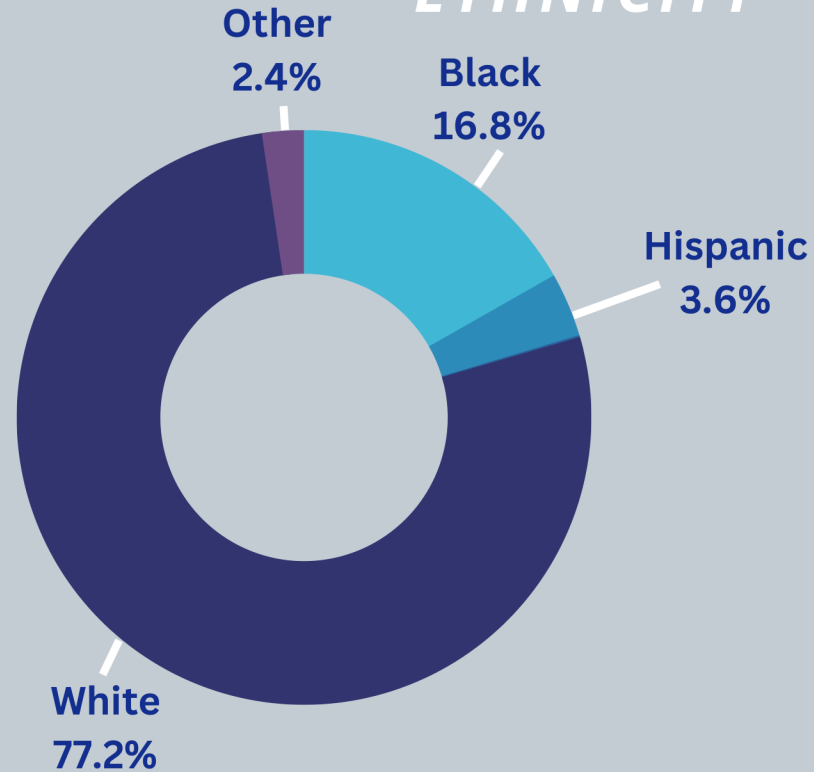
## BRLS 2022 Client Population



Female

73%

### ETHNICITY

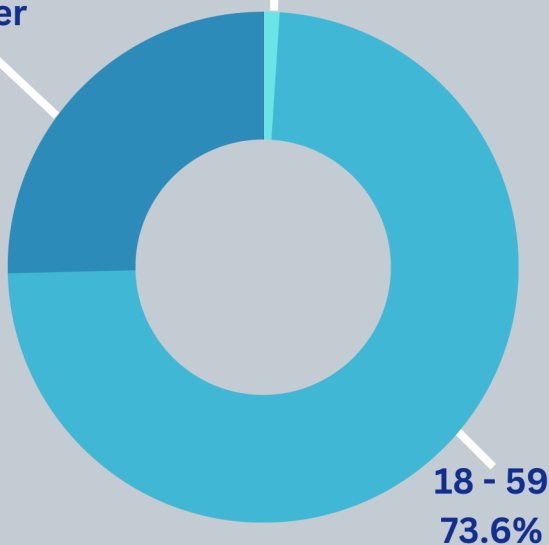


Less than 18

1%

60 and Older  
25.4%

### AGE



29%

Disabled

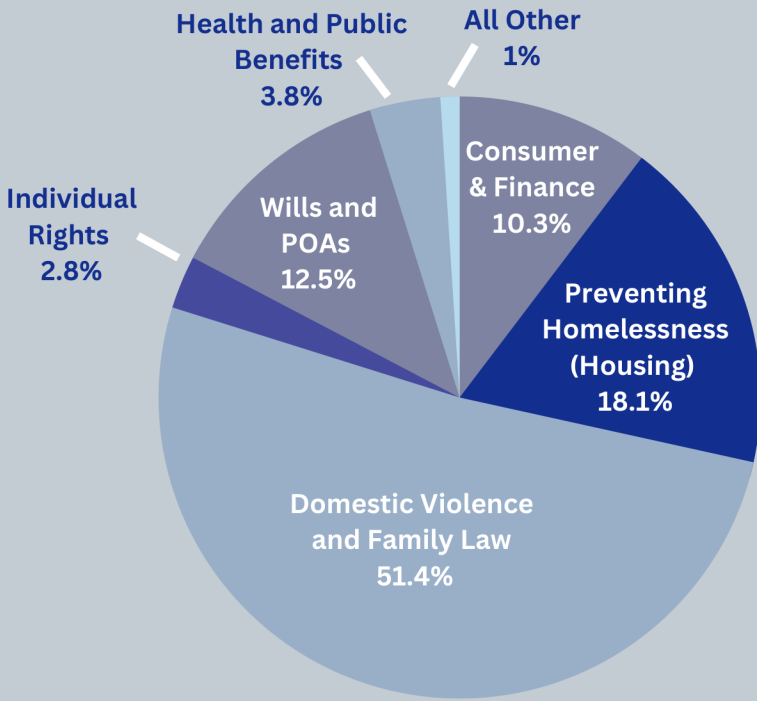


*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."*

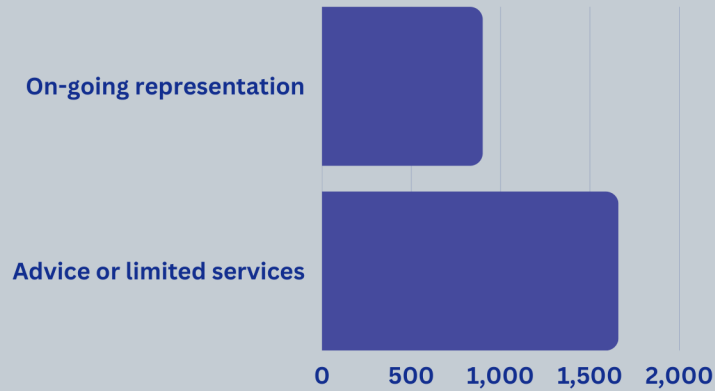
*— Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

# 2022 CASE STATISTICS

## Cases By Area and Service Level

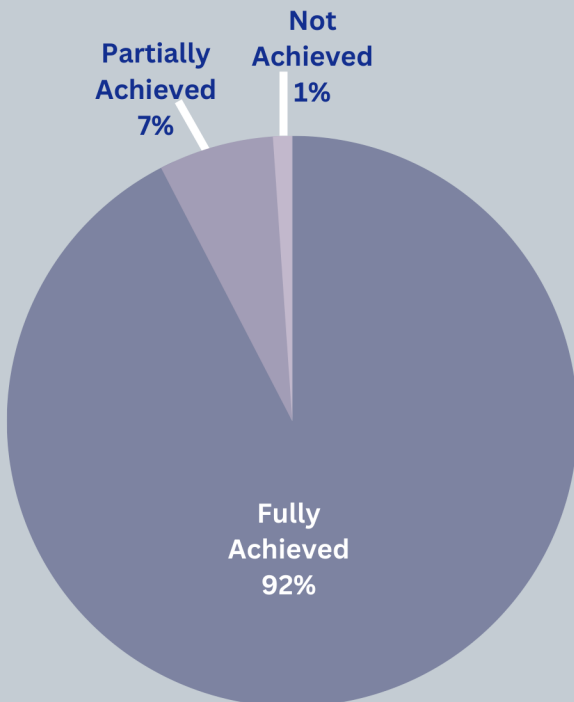


**2,556**  
Total Cases Closed

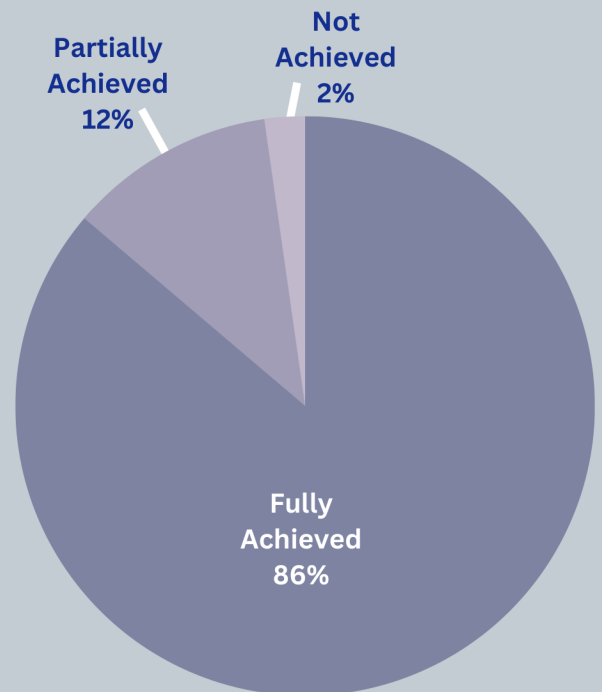


In the **898** cases involving on-going representation, we fully achieved our clients' goals in **87%** of the cases, and partially achieved them in another **11%**.

### Volunteer Attorneys Total cases = 93



### BRLS Staff Attorneys Total cases = 805





# OUTCOMES SUMMARY

In 2022, our staff and volunteer attorneys achieved 2,842 outcomes that benefitted 6,382 low-income people, including affirmative lump sum recoveries of \$1,028,306; affirmative monthly recoveries of \$42,705; avoidance of \$1,535,256 in lump sum debts or damages; and avoidance of \$33,644 in monthly obligations.

*Here's a look at some of the specific outcomes BRLS staff and pro bono attorneys achieved for our clients in 2022:*



Obtained birth certificates for 23 homeless persons



Obtained court protection for 37 victims of domestic violence



Obtained divorces or annulments for 282 clients and provided advice and counsel to 689 clients on family-related issues



Obtained adoption for 5 children, child custody orders for 55 clients, and preserved child visitation rights for 7 clients



Prevented evictions for 196 families and delayed evictions for another 79 families



Drafted 235 wills, living wills, powers of attorney, or health care proxy documents



Assisted 30 households overwhelmed by debt in obtaining bankruptcy or reduced debt collections, providing them with a fresh financial start while discharging \$474,875 in bad debts

# 2022 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN

### **A Happy Retirement: Anne See Finishes Forty-Four Years of Service**

2022 marked the last full year for Anne See, who dedicated 44 years to elderly services and public benefits at Blue Ridge Legal Services. Anne joined BRLS in 1979, starting as a Paralegal Caseworker for Valley Program for Aging Services. Her role grew over the years, aiding legal aid clients with public benefits, transcending titles and schedules. She offered help beyond the office—spending hours with a suicidal former client she met at a grocery store and aiding a crisis-stricken individual by ensuring medical treatment.



Anne is a graduate of JMU with degrees in social work and psychology. She combined education and empathy to handle thousands of cases. Her accomplishments included the first nursing home discharge appeal hearing in Virginia, founding a support group for Nursing Home Residents' Friends and Relatives, helping establish TRIAD programs, founding the Greater Augusta Coalition Against Adult Abuse, and influencing advocates across the nation. She testified before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Aging in 1995 to support the Nursing Home Reform Law.

Blue Ridge Legal Services honored her retirement on March 1, 2023 with colleagues from across the state acknowledging her service. State Senator Emmet Hanger and State Senator Mark Obenshain commended her dedication. Erica Wood, assistant director for the American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging, lauded Anne's ability to bring action and leadership to elder advocacy. Anne's presence has been a constant force in inspiring change. She has embodied BRLS' mission, constantly working towards eliminating poverty-based inequities in the civil justice system by providing high-quality legal advice and representation to low-income residents of the Shenandoah and Roanoke Valleys.

*“There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has.”*

*— Hugo Black, 1964,  
U.S. Supreme Court Justice*

# CLIENT IMPACT: CASE STORIES

## **A Family Protected: A Young Mother's Escape From Torture**

"Maria," a young mother from D.C., found herself entangled in a perilous relationship with "Hal," a member of a violent gang in the District of Columbia. Throughout their involvement, Hal abducted Maria and her child, relocating them to Atlanta, Georgia, where he concealed them in a hotel room. Inside this room, he subjected Maria and her child to daily torture. He burned them with cigarettes and strangled them to the point of unconsciousness using his hands or electrical cords. He repeatedly assaulted Maria and threatened to kill her child if she attempted to escape. During this harrowing period, Maria became pregnant with her second child.

Unable to continue confining them in the hotel room, Hal eventually sent Maria and her children to stay with his father and stepmother in Florida. Upon witnessing Maria and the children's condition, the father and stepmother offered them a train ticket to return to D.C. and be with Maria's family. Maria's family facilitated her relocation to the Shenandoah County area, where she commenced living with a cousin. Regrettably, Hal tracked down Maria and issued threats, even offering a \$20,000 reward for her murder via Facebook.

Facing this dire situation, Maria sought the assistance of BRLS to serve Hal with the requisite documents for a protective order, and just in time: Hal was released from jail on the very day of the protective order hearing. The BRLS attorney skillfully obtained a Protective Order on behalf of Maria and her two children. Collaborating with a local shelter, they secured safe housing for Maria and her children, erecting a legal barrier between them and Hal.



## **A Scam Uncovered: An Elderly Woman's Fight For Justice**

"Mary" was an elderly woman living on her social security retirement benefits as her sole source of income. Settled in her home and enjoying her retirement, she noticed that three very large trees were growing close to, and in some cases, onto her home. Out of concern for her safety, Mary cut her expenses to the bone for a year, saving \$3,000 to pay for the tree removal. She hired a tree removal contractor she was told was reputable and professional. However, once she sent advance payment, the arborist disappeared, cutting off her frequent attempts at communication.

Mary reached out to the Lexington office of BRLS and was assigned an attorney. The attorney sent a letter demanding a refund. When no response was received, a warrant in debt was filed with the court on Mary's behalf. The arborist contested the case, and a trial was held. The court awarded Mary a judgment against the scam artist for the full amount she paid to him.

In the end, Mary felt seen and justified. She is currently pursuing collection of the judgment.



# CASE STORIES AND CLIENT QUOTES

## A Home Saved: An Elderly Client's Battle Against Foreclosure

"Ken" was a 78-year-old living on a limited income. The home he built in the Shenandoah Valley held countless memories and a sense of security and he lived there for many years. In 2008, Ken took out a reverse mortgage to mend the roof and cover some other expenses. Almost 15 years later, in October of 2022, a notice arrived, bearing news that his home was slated for a foreclosure auction. Ken and his daughter attempted to unravel the mystery behind this sudden foreclosure threat but found nothing but a muddle of confusing and contradictory responses from different voices on the phone. They believed the issue was related to some minor cosmetic damage that happened in 2019. A tree had fallen, scratching the siding on the house, but the contractor they consulted said it was not worth making repairs and Ken never even cashed the insurance check.

Though Ken was entitled to reinstate his reverse mortgage, he could not find out how. Ken and his daughter turned to BRLS for help. The BRLS attorney uncovered a potential second cause for the foreclosure: the absence of a certification of occupancy. BRLS submitted the much-needed certification of occupancy and drafted a letter to the law firm representing the mortgage holder, demanding a reinstatement letter. But this was no ordinary law firm; it handled a substantial caseload of foreclosure matters, requiring multiple calls and emails to finally evoke a response. After persistent effort, BRLS managed to extract a clear pathway for Ken eventually reinstating his reverse mortgage. With BRLS' support, Ken successfully kept his home and continued to live independently.

*"Thank you so much for all your generous legal services. I highly appreciate the support during one of the most difficult times of my life."*

*"We won our case so it bought me more time to find somewhere to live. Best lawyer I've ever had in any case in court, no lie!"*

*"The service and courtesy I received was amazing. I was helped through the whole process of will writing and Medical Directive. I had so much help and was so grateful for the service. Blue Ridge Legal Services is a Godsend!"*

*"...I am eternally grateful. [My lawyer] knows his stuff, always treated me with respect and kept me informed. This was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life, and he made it much less so. A million thank-yous."*

*"I didn't just gain an attorney... I gained a friend."*

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# BRLS OFFICE LOCATIONS

## 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

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## VISIT US ONLINE



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[www.BRLS.org](http://www.BRLS.org)

