

FEBRUARY 2021

LEGAL AID NC



JUSTICEGUIDE

How to obtain **FREE** civil legal services & information

COVID-19 & YOUR RIGHTS

Take advantage of our free,
online resources **PAGES 4–5**

Unemployment

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SSDI/SSI & Food Stamps

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Eviction & Foreclosure

PAGE 10



LEGAL AID OF NC (LANC)

Our services are **FREE** to low-income people. To find out if you qualify, call our helpline or apply on the web.

LANC can help you with **civil legal issues related to**

GET LEGAL HELP



Toll-Free HELPLINE
1.866.219.LANC (5262)



APPLY ONLINE
legalaidnc.org/apply

Housing | Consumer | Employment | Public Benefits
Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

We do not handle criminal cases.

Facebook Live Streams
& Zoom Clinics

See pages 4 & 5 for more information
on our **FREE**, online legal clinics.
Some videos, materials, and online events are available in Spanish.

CONTACT

PO BOX 28741, RALEIGH, NC 27611
(P) 919.856.2138
(F) 919.856.2120
LEGALAIDNC.ORG

CONNECT

- FACEBOOK.COM/LEGALAIDNC
- TWITTER.COM/LEGALAIDNC
- YOUTUBE.COM/LEGALAIDNC
- INSTAGRAM.COM/LEGALAIDNC



VOLUNTEER

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GIVE

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Your gift allows us to provide essential legal services to our clients throughout the state. As an LSC-funded organization, all grants and contributions made to us are subject to the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C. 2996 et seq. and LSC's appropriations. These regulations have been followed by our program since 1976 and ensure that all our funding will be used to meet the most critical legal needs of the most vulnerable North Carolinians.

Please contact us for more information. See www.lsc.gov/restrictions.

Justice During COVID-19

The coronavirus has made existing inequities worse, and millions continue to struggle to meet their basic needs. Throughout this crisis, LANC staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to provide legal assistance and to empower our hardest-hit communities. At the start of the pandemic, we quickly expanded our technological capabilities and increased our impact by:

- Participating in remote court appearances.
- Growing our online education and community engagement efforts.
- Communicating with clients virtually to maintain privacy and help prevent the spread of the virus.
- Advocating for remote hearings and more provisions to protect families from housing insecurity and domestic violence.



If you need legal assistance in one of the following areas, LANC may be able to help:

- Eviction
- Utilities
- Food Stamps
- Unemployment Benefits
- Domestic Violence
- Mortgages and Foreclosure
- Health Insurance Enrollment

We offer three types of services to low-income people.

- 1 Information:** Facebook livestreams, Zoom clinics, and online self-help resources that include videos, information packets, and more. See pages 4 and 5 for details and visit www.legalaidnc.org/clinics to take advantage of our self-help clinic materials. Clinics offer general legal guidance only.
- 2 Brief service and advice:** You can talk to an attorney who will provide specific guidance about your legal issue and may provide brief services, like writing a letter on your behalf or helping you fill out legal forms.
- 3 Extended service:** Representation in court, for example.

You can visit legalaidnc.org/get-help or call 1.866.219.LANC (5262) to find out if you're eligible, whether your problem is related to COVID-19 or not.

Going Remote During the Pandemic

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Facebook Livestreams
& Zoom Clinics



Online Legal Clinics

Tuesdays/Thursdays from 2:30–4:00 PM

These free webinars are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm. Topics covered by Legal Aid and pro bono attorneys are: Child Custody and Visitation, Criminal Record Expunction, Employee Rights, Health Care Powers of Attorney and Living Wills, Simple Divorce, Social Security Disability, and Tenant Rights.



Free Forum Fridays

Fridays at 11:00 AM

Forums occur every Friday at 11:00 am. A legal expert presents on the hot legal issues of the week. Examples of topics addressed are: updates on unemployment benefits, domestic violence assistance, housing and tenant rights, remote notarization, and the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on people of color.



Housing on Monday Evenings (HOME)

Mondays at 4:00 PM

Offered each Monday at 4:00 pm, Legal Aid's free HOME events provide up-to-date information on topics such as evictions, applying for affordable housing, and the key implications for both renters and landlords of new laws passed in response to the wide-ranging effects of the pandemic.



Disaster Relief Info Session

Wednesdays at 4:00 PM

Every Wednesday at 4:00 pm, join us on our Facebook page for info on disaster relief. We're covering topics such as ReBuild NC applications and estate planning for disaster recovery.



Domestic Violence Awareness

Wednesdays at Noon

Wednesdays are also Domestic Violence Awareness Day at [Facebook.com/LegalAidNC](https://www.facebook.com/LegalAidNC). If you or someone you care about needs information on this topic, join us at noon.

What you need to know about our Online Legal Clinics:

- All clinics remain free and open to the public.
- Due to the virus, we're offering all clinics virtually.
- Clinics provide you with the guidance and paperwork necessary to handle certain basic legal issues without hiring an attorney.
- Clinics provide general information only. If you need help specific to your case, call us toll-free at 1.866.219.LANC (5262) to apply for services.



Visit this link for recordings of past Facebook Live clinics:
www.facebook.com/LegalAidNC/live

For upcoming Facebook Live clinics, visit:
www.facebook.com/LegalAidNC/events/



Videos of online presentations are also posted to our YouTube Channel, so you can view them whenever convenient. We offer almost 20 videos on housing topics alone that answer specific questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Visit [YouTube.com/LegalAidNC](https://www.youtube.com/LegalAidNC).



What you need to know about our Self-Help Library:

- The library provides extensive information on the following topics: expunction, disaster relief, domestic violence and sexual assault, education, employment, health insurance, and housing.
- The library offers access to a wide range of self-help videos.
- Also available in the library is our "Small Claims Court Guide," a 57-page downloadable booklet that explains how to fill out the right forms, prepare for trial, handle the trial, and follow through on the judge's decision.

Visit this web page to get started: www.legalaidnc.org/self-help-library.

LEGAL AID NC



**LANC
AT A
GLANCE**

**LEGAL AID OF NC
IS ONE OF THE LARGEST LAW
FIRMS IN NORTH CAROLINA**



> 72K 

During FY 19–20, LANC provided critical legal help to **72,197 PEOPLE IN NC**

NC has the **9th** highest **UNINSURED RATE** in the nation.

The NC Navigator Consortium (led by LANC) helped **77,002 PEOPLE** enroll in healthcare coverage on **HealthCare.gov**.



**NC NAVIGATOR
CONSORTIUM**



48% of our clients' households **INCLUDE CHILDREN**

ALMOST **25%** OF **NORTH CAROLINIANS** struggle to make ends meet



**OVER
50,000
VIEWS**

In 2019, our videos garnered 38,207 views, a 60% increase from 2018. With the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, videos quickly surpassed **50,000 views**.

Statistics refer to FY 2019–2020 unless otherwise noted.

Know Your Rights: Unemployment

COVID-19 is affecting many aspects of your rights under the law, including unemployment benefits. Below is a brief summary of the unemployment extension contained in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 that passed on 12/27/20. The programs below require the US Department of Labor to issue guidance to the NC Division of Employment Security so they can implement them. Visit www.des.nc.gov/ for the most up-to-date information. If you are denied, call LANC toll-free at 1.866.219.LANC (5262) for possible assistance with your unemployment claim.



Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

Will provide up to an additional 11 weeks of benefits, to a maximum of 50 weeks.

Weekly certification will be required.

Claimants are required to provide documentation of eligibility to qualify for PUA beginning January 31, 2021.

PUA will be available until the week ending March 13, 2021 (no new applications after that date), with an allowance for three additional weeks of benefits for those who have not reached the maximum number of weeks through the week ending April 3, 2021.

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)

Will provide up to 11 weeks of an additional \$300 weekly benefit to eligible claimants.

A claimant must be eligible through a separate unemployment program to receive FPUC.

Once implemented, FPUC will be available to cover weeks of unemployment between December 27, 2020, and the week ending March 13, 2021.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)

Will provide up to an additional 11 weeks of benefits, to a maximum of 24 weeks.

PEUC will be available until the week ending March 13, 2021 (no new applications after that date), with an allowance of three additional weeks of benefits for those who have not reached the maximum number of weeks through the week ending April 3, 2021.

Know Your Rights: Social Security Disability

Do you think you might be eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

On March 17, 2020, the Social Security Administration (SSA) closed its field offices and hearing offices for most in-person appointments due to the virus. However, you can currently have a hearing by phone or online video. You can also choose to wait to see a judge in person. Unfortunately, we don't know yet when SSA offices will be open to the public again and therefore can't estimate when you'd be able to have an in-person hearing. LANC therefore encourages people who need a decision on their claim to consent to a phone or online video hearing.



You can currently have a hearing by phone or online video. You can also choose to wait to see a judge in person.

Even if you initially declined a telephone or online video hearing, you can contact your local hearing office to have your hearing scheduled.

**CALL TOLL-FREE:
1-800-772-1213
(TTY) 1-800-325-0778**

**Monday – Friday
8AM – 5:30PM**

For more info about hearing options and locating your hearing office, visit: ssa.gov/appeals/hearing_options.html and ssa.gov/appeals/ho_locator.html.

SSA maintains an excellent COVID-19 Updates page: ssa.gov/coronavirus

SSA must have your consent to schedule a telephone or online video hearing for you. For hearing requests filed on or after December 7, 2020, they will send a special notice 30 days after acknowledging receipt of your hearing request. They will include a form you can fill out to confirm that you agree to appear at a virtual hearing. The notice they send will provide instructions on how and when to return the form. Your appointed representative may sign this form for you. SSA will also accept a verbal agreement to appear by telephone or online video.



Need additional information on SSDI/SSI?

Attend one of LANC's online clinics on preparing for your hearing and more. These Zoom clinics are held via Facebook Live on the first Thursday of each month at 2:30 pm.

Visit our website for details: www.legalaidnc.org/ssdiclinic

Know Your Rights: Food Stamps

Are you struggling to put food on the table during the pandemic?

You might qualify for food stamps, even if you did not before the current public health crisis. Through the USDA, North Carolina has temporarily increased the maximum allotment of FNS monthly benefits by 15% for eligible households.

For example, for a low-income household of four, the maximum allotment for food stamps has increased from \$680 to \$782 each month. This increase should remain in place through June 30, 2021. In addition, on a month-by-month basis DHHS has been issuing emergency allotment supplements to households to increase the household's benefits to the maximum allotment.



For a low-income household of four, the maximum allotment for food stamps has increased from \$680 to \$782 each month.

To apply for Food Stamps

(also called FNS or Food and Nutrition Services), visit this web page of the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS):
www.bit.ly/2N4FLmZ

If you need help applying for benefits, call LANC's toll-free helpline: 1.866.219.LANC

Are You an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD)?

Temporary Suspension of Work Requirements for ABAWD Participation in FNS

There is a temporary suspension of work requirements and time limits for receiving food stamps due to COVID-19. Previously, food stamp benefits were limited to any three months in a 36-month period, unless the claimant met the ABAWD work requirements or qualified for a second three-month period of eligibility.

These two provisions are currently being waived. In other words, claimants may not need to meet work requirements and may also be able to receive more than three months of benefits during the pandemic.

If you're having trouble paying your rent or mortgage due to the pandemic, you're not alone.

Millions of Americans are behind on their payments. As of this writing, the nationwide eviction moratorium had been extended to 1/31/21 and may be lengthened further. The Federal Housing Finance Agency had also extended until the end of January its moratorium on foreclosures for borrowers with mortgages backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.



We may be able to help you stay in your home!

For up-to-date information on eviction moratoriums, avoiding eviction, mortgage forbearance (relief), visit legallaidnc.org and click on the red alert bar at the top of the page.



For housing resources in our self-help library, visit www.legallaidnc.org/housing

FREE ONLINE CLINIC ON HOUSING

To participate in a free online clinic on housing conducted by a LANC staff member or volunteer, visit [facebook.com/LegalAidNC](https://www.facebook.com/LegalAidNC) on Mondays at 4PM.

These Zoom clinics are streamed live on Facebook, and you can ask general questions using the Zoom chat feature or making a comment on Facebook.

You do *not* need to create a Zoom or Facebook account to take advantage of these events.

See pages 4 and 5 for more info on our virtual clinics.

If you need individualized assistance with housing, call our statewide helpline toll-free at 1.866.219.LANC (5262).

Need Help and Don't Know Where to Turn? Call 2-1-1.

Families and individuals in all 100 counties in North Carolina can call 2-1-1 for free, confidential information on health and human services within their community. Available in most languages, NC 211 is an information and referral service provided by United Way of North Carolina. Contact NC 211 to be referred to local organizations that can help with numerous issues, including the following:

- Food and shelter
- Utility assistance
- Parenting support and resources
- Healthcare and substance abuse
- Resources specific to older adults
- Resources for the disabled

When you call, a trained specialist conducts a search based on your location and gives you contact information for organizations that may be able to help you directly. The call specialist may also be able to provide you with eligibility requirements, the intake process for a program, the hours of operation, and accessibility information.

2-1-1 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. You can call 2-1-1 or visit them online: nc211.org

Educating Homeless Children

As evictions and foreclosures increase as a result of the pandemic, so do the number of homeless children. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is a federal law that ensures that homeless kids can easily enroll in public school. For an overview of public school enrollment rights and more detailed information regarding McKinney-Vento, visit www.legalaidnc.org/education and click on "Advocacy Toolkit: Enrollment" in the Resources list.



You can visit the education section of our self-help library for detailed information on special education, school discipline, bullying, Section 504 plans, how to advocate for your child, and more: www.legalaidnc.org/education.

HOPE Program Has Helped Families Maintain Stable Housing During the Pandemic

Legal Aid of North Carolina distributed \$27 million in rent and utility assistance as a partner in the NC Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Evictions (HOPE) Program. These funds helped eligible low- and moderate-income renters experiencing financial hardship due to the economic effects of COVID-19 stay warm, healthy, and housed this winter.



LANC joined with other nonprofits throughout North Carolina to administer the HOPE Program. Our innovative helpline and intake programs facilitated being able to serve thousands of our neighbors during this time of crisis. We took on this challenge because it is a strategic, proactive response to poverty and to the worsening conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. We rely on partners, funders, and volunteers to be able to stand up for those who need access to justice, housing, healthcare, education, and economic stability. Thank you for supporting equality and justice in North Carolina!

Need assistance with housing or utilities?

If you did not apply to the HOPE Program and still need assistance, you can visit nc211.org/hope and scroll down for information on other programs that may be able to help. You can also continue to check this website for updates on any additional funding that may become available.

HOPE is a state government program administered through the NC Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR). NC 211 and United Way of the Greater Triangle are not the administrators of the program.

The NC Court System During Coronavirus

In addition to affecting your rights under the law, COVID-19 is affecting how courts operate. Face coverings are required in all courthouses, and only people with business in the courthouse can enter. Find the latest updates by county on orders, remote hearings, changes to hours of operations, and more at www.nccourts.gov/covid-19.

In 2020, the NC Judicial Branch launched a free, online document preparation service called eCourts Guide & File. This tool allows you to prepare court documents online in a few steps, helping to reduce the number of in-person courthouse visits. The service is appropriate for self-represented litigants, paralegals, and attorneys. It eliminates barriers and simplifies the legal process, especially for the hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians who come to court without a lawyer each year. Visit www.nccourts.gov/services and scroll down to access this tool.

Our Commitment to Racial Justice

We share your grief for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and other Black Americans murdered by police or by private citizens with police acquiescence.

Every day in our work, the staff and volunteers of LANC are witnesses to racism and to lives in peril as a result. Predatory lending, unlawful evictions, unhealthy housing conditions, unfeeling bureaucracy, sexual harassment, unfair employment practices, the school-to-prison pipeline—these civil injustices fall overwhelmingly, and heavily, on people of color.

We continue to find the strength to provide assistance to those who have the scales of justice tilted against them. We're working each day to champion leaders of color, confront our own unconscious bias, and actively create inclusive communities. Our offices across the state are committed to acting strategically to combat racial injustice, from micro aggression in our local communities to egregious injustices in our courts.

We Stand with You. We Stand for Justice.



**"The time is
always right to
do what is right."**

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

CLE Program Update

LANC routinely sponsors free or low-cost continuing legal education (CLE) sessions for attorneys who want to learn more about poverty law or become a pro bono volunteer. Sessions are held throughout the year and are conducted via live webcast. We cover a wide range of topics, including: fair housing, bankruptcy, response to natural disasters, and how to represent domestic violence survivors in DVPO hearings.

Special note: Significant changes to expunction law took effect at the state level in December of 2020. These changes expanded the rights of many people across our state and will have a major impact on our expunction work. We anticipate receiving many calls from potential clients for assistance with expunction. Interested attorneys can take advantage of a series of CLE sessions regarding these changes in the law.

To view our CLE calendar and sign up, visit www.legalaidnc.org/cle.

Preventing Homelessness in North Carolina

Muhammad lived with his three young children in a rental home that was in severe disrepair. Determined to provide a stable and safe home for his family, he asked his landlord to make necessary repairs. The response: Vacate in 30 days or be evicted! Afraid of becoming homeless with three kids and an eviction on his record, he called LANC for help. After hearing about the horrifying conditions of the property, an attorney talked to Muhammad about his rights as a renter. Muhammad was empowered by his lawyer's advice and filed his own action for damages against the landlord. A pro bono attorney provided expert assistance along the way. Muhammad was awarded \$5,000 in damages and given enough time to find a suitable new home for his family.



Protecting Victims of Harassment and Domestic Violence

Our client was not sure at first that we could help. A neighbor had referred her to us because the client was unsettled by a former boyfriend who would not take "no" for an answer. His behavior had escalated from mailing post cards and letters to showing up uninvited at her home and posting notes all over her door and windows. She had clearly told him to stay away. He insisted she owed him an explanation as to what had happened to their "friendship" and asked personal and invasive questions about her current situation. LANC sent him a certified letter, asking that he cease and desist. He did not return our phone call. A few weeks later, he again mailed a present to the client with notes scribbled all over about how he missed her and the times they had together. Legal Aid sent a second letter, threatening legal action. Our client had wanted to avoid going to court. However, the abuser persisted by placing a photo book and a postcard in her mailbox. Shaken but filled with resolve, our client now agreed to go to court. At court, the defendant agreed to stay away from the survivor. Since the entry of the order, our client has had peace of mind and sleeps much better at night.



WE NEED YOU!

Your support is more important now than ever—
calls to our helpline are up over 300%.

COVID-19 is exacerbating the difficulties our clients face in areas such as housing, employment, public benefits, and domestic violence. The median income of LANC clients is \$15,600 a year.

If you have the means to support our work during this time of crisis, please visit LEGALAIDNC.ORG/DONATE today to make a one-time or monthly donation securely online.

Or, make your check out to
Legal Aid of North Carolina and mail it to:

Development Officer, Legal Aid of North Carolina
PO Box 28741
Raleigh, NC 27611



ADDITIONAL OPTIONS FOR GIVING INCLUDE:

DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS
MATCHING GIFTS
ENDOWMENT GIFTS
AMAZON SMILE
CY PRES FUNDS

For more information, visit
LEGALAIDNC.ORG/DONATE
or email our Director of
Development, Megan Milner, at
MeganW@legalaidnc.org.

We also offer volunteer opportunities for lawyers and others who want to donate their time and talents to serve North Carolinians.

To learn more about Lawyer on the Line (LOTL), our Volunteer Lawyers Program, and more, visit us at LEGALAIDNC.ORG/VOLUNTEER.

Necesitamos abogados que hablen español.

Our staff and pro bono volunteers have worked around the clock since the pandemic descended on our state in March of 2020. In the first stage of our COVID-19 response, we opened more than 3,011 COVID-related cases.

We have remained fully operational throughout this crisis and are assisting low-income people in all of our general practice areas, as well as with civil legal problems caused by the virus.

The coronavirus has put a spotlight on existing health disparities and the lack of access to affordable healthcare and only strengthens our resolve to promote health equity across the state. LANC is advocating for the poor during the ongoing Medicaid Transformation process. We are also the lead organization of the NC Navigator Consortium, which helps North Carolinians enroll in affordable health insurance plans through the Affordable Care Act. Our work continues with our Medical-Legal Partnerships as well.

Our deepest appreciation to the hundreds of funders and volunteers who make our work possible. Because of YOU, we are able to close more than 20,000 cases each year. Our ability to help more North Carolina families in need of legal assistance depends on your contribution of time and funds. Thank you for everything you do!

Millions continue to suffer—AND TO PERSIST—during this pandemic.

Our 20 offices across the state are serving all 100 North Carolina counties with legal issues caused by COVID-19, as well as in our general practice areas:

**HOUSING | CONSUMER | EMPLOYMENT
PUBLIC BENEFITS | DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT**



NEED LEGAL HELP?

If you need help, call us toll-free
1.866.219.LANC (5262)
legalaidnc.org

SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you are in a position to support
our work, please visit:
legalaidnc.org/donate