

Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. ®



We provide free legal aid to people with civil legal problems in western New York.

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How LawNY Can Help Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc.® (LawNY®) provides civil legal help to victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in a 13-county region, including Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Livingston, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tompkins, Tioga, Wayne and Yates Counties.

LawNY can help victims/survivors with a wide range of legal issues related to the abuse, including help obtain a Family Court order of protection, custody/visitation, support or divorce, as well as issues that people often do not realize can be associated with abuse, such as housing, public benefits, employment, health and consumer issues. Our attorneys and paralegals who work with victims/survivors are specially trained in the dynamics of domestic violence and the challenges faced by victims of sexual assault. Twice monthly, our advocates meet to share information and strategize about cases. We also work closely with 14 partner agencies, each a licensed domestic violence and/or sexual assault service provider, that refer cases to LawNY attorneys and provide supportive services to victims/survivors. We meet regularly with these partner agencies to improve coordination of services to victims/survivors. One of our attorneys spearheaded a special project focused on campus sexual assault and established a hotline [(866) 341-7773] to respond to questions from victims/survivors of campus sexual assault.

LawNY attorneys and paralegals also work with local coordinated community response teams. For example, a LawNY paralegal serves as the facilitator of the Steuben County Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART). DART works to ensure victim safety, offender accountability and raise community awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault. DART provides training to law enforcement, town and village justices, Family Court personnel, health care providers and other key people in the system about domestic violence and sexual assault and the best practices for addressing these issues. We also work to address systemic problems that create barriers that undermine the safety of victims.

LawNY's work on behalf of victims/survivors is funded in large part by a U.S. Department of Justice Legal Assistance for Victims grant, S.T.O.P. Violence Against Women Act grants, a grant from the United Way of the Southern Tier and funding from the New York State Judiciary Civil Legal Services program. Most recently, LawNY received a Risk Reduction Civil Legal Assistance Program grant from the New York State Office for Prevention of Domestic Violence, in partnership with Arbor Housing and Development as the lead agency. With this grant, we have

hired an attorney who will spend a substantial portion of her time representing victims/survivors in Steuben County who have been identified as being at high risk for lethality. In order to identify victims/survivors who are at high risk, we are using the Danger Assessment, a tool developed by Jacquelyn Campbell, Associate Dean of Nursing at Johns Hopkins University. Our staff, as well as the DART team, has been trained to use this tool so that we use the same criteria to identify high-risk situations and then work together to reduce the risk for those victims/survivors.

One thing we know from our work is that the system can be very hard on victims/survivors. We have made progress over the years, but victims/survivors are still often treated poorly. Unlike other crime victims, victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault often are not believed. They are interrogated as if they are the perpetrators, and they are made to feel ashamed and humiliated as they proceed through the system. LawNY is committed to working with our community partners to ensure that the system is fair and just to all, including victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

One of our former clients recently testified at a hearing convened by the Chief Judge of the State of New York about the need for civil legal services. Our client spoke about the impact the services she received from LawNY had on her life: "I wouldn't have tried to attempt to solve these issues without their help and support. From someone's perspective that knows nothing about how the court system works, it's easier to just give up. I would have." She went on to say: "I am happy, blessed, safe, and successful. All these things are outcomes because of the services Legal Assistance of Western New York has provided to me."

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