

# North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Inc.

# **2022 ANNUAL REPORT**



**LSC**

America's Partner  
for Equal Justice

LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

# About NMRLS

North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Inc. (NMRLS) was established August 6, 1966 in Oxford, Mississippi. It is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation and has a 15-member board of directors consisting of 10 attorneys and 5 client representatives. NMRLS began at the University of Mississippi School of Law and continues to have a close relationship with the law school. It provides learning and training opportunities for law student interns and student volunteers on a year-round basis.

NMRLS provides free, civil legal services and representation to the poor, the elderly, and the disabled who may need assistance with issues such as custody, adoptions, protective orders, taxes, housing (foreclosure prevention and landlord/tenant issues), bankruptcy, and elder care (fraud prevention, wills, advanced directives and powers of attorney). Being a full-service law firm, NMRLS is able to greatly improve the standard of living for the client-community. [Statement](#)

## **Mission Statement**

North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, a charitable nonprofit legal aid program, provides zealous attorney representation, advocacy and community education to ensure equal access to the civil justice system for the most vulnerable members of our society.

## **Vision Statement:**

North Mississippi Rural Legal Services is dedicated to preserving the hope, dignity and independence of our most vulnerable communities by relentlessly and tirelessly committing our expertise and resources to provide high quality legal assistance to our clients who otherwise would not have equitable and effective access to the civil justice system.

## **Core Values:**

- Cultural sensitivity/competence/ dignity and respect: Provide quality services while respecting all regardless of differences in race, ethnicity, culture, education, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identification and abilities.
- Accountability: Accept responsibility for our actions that influence the lives of our clients, coworkers and organization.
- Transparency and Integrity: Act with honesty, fairness, and the highest ethical standards.
- Diversity: Ensure that the program has a capable, culturally competent, and diverse staff whose composition is diverse in terms of experience, gender, race, and disability status.
- Zealous Advocacy: Maximize available resources to provide effective and efficient legal services.
- Commitment: Demonstrate and exemplify loyalty and dedication to the furtherance of the tenets of the program's mission.
- Community: Demonstrate social responsibility by involvement and participation in programs and activities impacting the service area.
- Committed Collaboration: Partner with stakeholders, private bar association, private sector, and community organizations to supplement its resources to provide access to the legal system.

**This 2022 Annual Report is dedicated in loving memory to  
Catherine Virginia “Ginny” Kilgore**

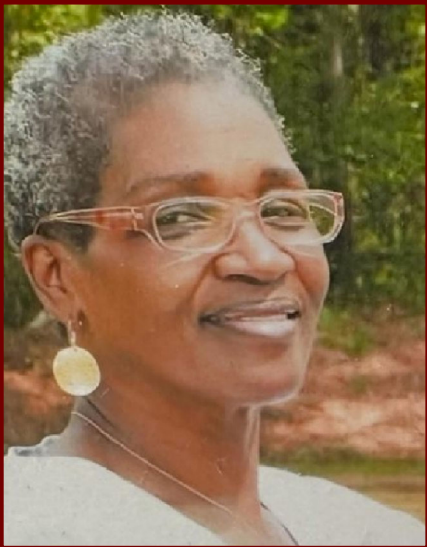
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# Message from the Board Chair



**Katherine Weatherby**  
Chairperson  
NMRLS Board of Directors

Beginning in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was devastating to the people of North Mississippi and the nation as a whole. The economy was rocked, and all businesses were forced to change their methods of operation in order to continue to exist. NMRLS was no different. Our case numbers initially plummeted but began to rise again as we adapted to meet the challenge of serving clients without having the ability to meet face to face. We worked remotely and used Zoom meetings for interviews and court appearances. Even with the limitations imposed on the staff by Covid-19, we managed to prevent foreclosures, resolve landlord/tenant issues, provide protection from domestic violence, and secure benefits for economic security through disability and unemployment insurance claims.

NMRLS stood strong during the pandemic, and now, coming out of it, we look forward to continuing to serve the northern 39 counties of North Mississippi.

## Board of Directors

NMRLS is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors consisting of 10 attorneys and 5 client representatives.

**Mrs. Katherine Weatherby** - Client Member - Sallis, MS, *Board Chair*

**Hon. Gwendolyn Baptist-Rucker** - Southaven, MS, *Vice Chair*

**Hon. Kristin G. Belvin** - Tupelo, MS  
*Board Secretary*

**Hon. I. Richard Gershon** - University, MS  
*Board Treasurer*

**Hon. Nina Stubblefield-Tollison** - Oxford, MS

**Hon. Levi Boone, III** - Cleveland, MS

**Ms. Martha Kimmons** - Client Member - Oxford, MS

**Hon. Derrick T. Simmons** - Greenville, MS

**Hon. Solomon Curtis Osborne** - Greenville, MS

**Ms. Mattie Tucker-Todd** - Client Member - Indianola, MS

**Ms. Mary Hastings** - Client Member - Baldwin, MS

**Hon. Robert Alexander Carson, III** - Clarksdale, MS

**Hon. Betty W. Sanders** - Greenwood, MS

**Hon. Karen Peairs** - University, MS

**Ms. Latarsha Jones** - Client Member - Marks, MS

# Message from the Executive Director

The primary source of funding for North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Inc. (NMRLS) is the national Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Congress annually appropriates funds for the delivery of civil legal services to the poor in the United States and Territories. LSC currently funds 132 grantee programs including NMRLS. Funding is determined by the total annual congressional appropriation divided by the number of poor persons within the program service area based upon the most recent census figures. The American Bar Association (ABA) has a long history of advocating for increased funding for civil legal services to the poor. In recent years, support for increased funding has come in the form of letters of support from The Conferences of Chief Justices and Court Administrators, support letters signed by a number of bipartisan state attorney generals, law school deans, law firms, corporate General Counsels, and Dear Colleague Letters signed by a number of members of Congress, both Democrat and Republican. Consequently, funding to LSC has gradually increased each of the last few years.



**Ben Thomas Cole II**  
Executive Director

NMRLS regularly communicates with the Mississippi Congressional Delegation whose districts are within its 39-county service area. The goal is to educate them and their staff about the services NMRLS provides to their constituents and how to refer persons needing our services. NMRLS participated in a virtual staff meeting with the office of Congressman Bennie Thompson. I was also able to visit the offices of Congressman Trent Kelly and Senators Cyndy Hyde-Smith and Roger Wicker during a trip to Washington, D. C. in September.

Relationships with supporters of our work are crucial in developing and maintaining LSC and non-LSC funding for our programs. NMRLS fully participates with the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission, The Mississippi Bar Foundation, and Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) Program, facilitates the involvement of private lawyers in the delivery of civil legal services to the poor, and cooperatively collaborates with other providers of civil legal services in the state.

I am proud of the work of NMRLS which has existed for over fifty-six (56) years. I publicly thank the Board of Directors for their leadership, foresight, and guidance, and the dedicated and highly motivated staff, and volunteers. We look forward to reaching the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organization, a most notable milestone worth celebrating. I thank you all for your continued support of NMRLS and its work.

# What Sets Us Apart



## Attorneys

In 2022, NMRLS had 19 attorneys, located in the administrative office and four branch offices, who provided free civil legal assistance to eligible applicants. Staff attorneys were supplemented by private attorneys who either worked pro bono or for a reduced fee. Our attorneys are well-versed in handling the myriad issues facing the client community. As a result of our efforts, NMRLS was able to have a significant impact on low-income clients across North Mississippi.



## History

We are one of the oldest legal aid programs in the State of Mississippi. Founded in 1966 at the University of Mississippi School of Law, NMRLS opened its first office in Oxford, Mississippi on August 11, 1966. Since that time its lawyers have litigated significant issues which resulted in U.S. Supreme Court decisions setting national precedents and ordinary, but equally important, issues which the client community faces.



## Transparency

NMRLS carefully measures impact and strives for full transparency so that our donors and supporters can see the value of their financial assistance. We keep detailed records of the results of each case, including the number of clients assisted and the dollar value of the benefits received.



## Measurable Impact

The staff works hard to make a difference in the lives of clients by providing service in a variety of areas. In 2022, NMRLS handled 102 cases involving victims of domestic abuse, helping 229 persons who were victims of domestic violence. NMRLS handled 317 cases involving housing security, aiding 691 individuals. NMRLS handled 96 cases involving income maintenance, assisting 203 individuals. NMRLS also handled 430 estate planning cases, assisting 434 families with preparing and executing documents. NMRLS is a full-service law firm.



## Broad Reach

NMRLS offers a full range of service delivery methods including advice and referral, community legal education, use of pro bono resources, and extended representation. NMRLS' priorities consist of four core areas: consumer, family, housing, and economic security. These core areas reflect NMRLS' commitment to direct its resources to addressing the safety, stability, health concerns, economic security, and adequate housing of low-income citizens of the 39 counties in NMRLS' service area.



## Statewide Website

The statewide website, [mslegalservices.org](https://mslegalservices.org), makes finding meaningful legal education materials quick and easy. With very demanding life situations and limited time availability, Mississippians can easily select the right educational material with just the click of a button.



# In Memoriam

**Catherine V. “Ginny” Kilgore** was a state and national treasure. Ginny was an eloquent champion and diligent spokesperson for the poor, the young, the aged, the infirmed and all whom North Mississippi Rural Legal Services is charged to serve. Ginny genuinely cared for others and chose a profession and an employer which she believed would allow her to put that caring into action which would have an impact on the lives of people. Following a short stint working as a private attorney, NMRLS employed Ginny from 1978 until 2020. During those years she worked in the Administrative Office, the Oxford Litigation Office, and the Batesville Litigation Office. She served as a Staff Attorney, Managing Attorney, Senior Attorney, Director of the Council on Aging Project, and the Elder Law Director. Ginny also served, for almost twenty years, as an Adjunct Professor for the Elder Law Clinic, a part of the University of Mississippi School of Law’s Poverty Law Clinical Program. Her efforts were duly noted and appreciated. She received the Mississippi Bar Association’s 2000 Legal Service Lawyer of the Year Award, the University of Mississippi School of Law’s 2002 Public Service Award, and the 2021 National Aging and Law Award from the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.

In addition to her legal endeavors, Ginny had a passion for legal services’ history in general and the role of women in the provision of legal services in particular. Following this passion, she spearheaded the NMRLS Oral History Project and received a Fellowship from the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies. As a result of her continued efforts, NMRLS made an oral history documentary, *Quest of Fire*, which was a 2022 entry at the Oxford Film Festival. Ginny was also instrumental in producing a second film, “A Rich Untold Story: the Role of Women at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services,” through the Sarah Isom Center.

Ginny led a full and productive life and left the world a much better place. We who remain behind, including her husband of more than fifty years, Rance Kilgore, are richer for having known her. We miss her terribly.



**Catherine V. “Ginny” Kilgore**



**Ginny and Rance**

Stephen G. White, Ginny’s nephew, wrote a touching tribute to her that can be viewed on the [nmrls.com](http://nmrls.com) website by scanning the QR code below:



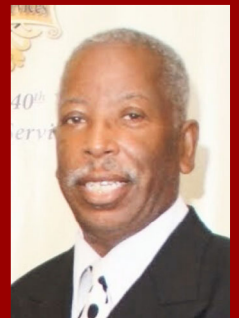
# In Memoriam



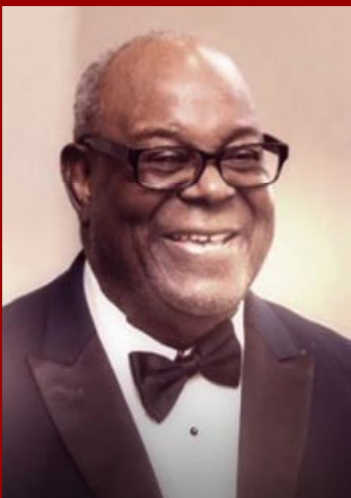
**Walterine Langford**

**Walterine Langford** had a larger-than-life personality. She was a graduate of Tougaloo College and the University of Mississippi Law School who smiled often and had a deep laugh which was contagious. Her personality was so endearing that it came as a surprise when Walterine went into her lawyer mode. She was a formidable advocate for her clients. Walterine enjoyed the challenge of legal work. She was creative in remedying the clients' legal issues. Walterine was initially employed as a staff attorney in the Clarksdale Litigation Office. Later, she was the managing attorney for the office. She handled diverse types of cases with equal skill. Walterine gave the same measure of enthusiasm and skills to her prisoner rights' cases as she did to her administrative law, family law, and consumer cases. She excelled in all venues, be it justice, chancery, circuit, or appellate courts. Her legal talents were appreciated by all who knew her at NMRLS, Mississippi Center for Legal Services, and the City of Vicksburg. Walterine left a legal legacy any lawyer would be proud to possess.

**Ledell Howard Robinson** was born four minutes before his brother, Lenard Harold Robinson, who preceded him in death in 2021. Cleveland, Mississippi natives, Ledell and Lenard graduated from Mississippi Valley State University. They also studied law in the Mississippi Bar Association's Preceptorship Program at the University of Mississippi School of Law. NMRLS employed both brothers. The Twins, as they were affectionately known by the NMRLS staff, shared a love of God, a love of music, and a love of helping others. They worked as paralegals in the Cleveland and Clarksdale Litigation Offices. Such was their desire to assist the client community that at one time both brothers worked and shared the same paycheck. Both Ledell and Lenard represented clients in disability cases, employment cases, and other administrative matters, winning hundreds of thousands of dollars in benefits for low-income families through their advocacy. They set a high standard for the paralegals who followed in their wake.



**Ledell  
Howard  
Robinson**



**Clencie L. Cotton**

**Clencie Lewis Cotton** was an imposing figure, but his outward appearance was softened by a wide, warm smile which was generally accompanied by a deep chuckle. He came to NMRLS in the mid-eighties and served as the PAI Coordinator initially before being employed as the Managing Attorney for the Holly Springs Office. Clencie had a passion for helping people and was always willing to do what he could to improve the lives of those around him. This passion was evident during his work at NMRLS. It continued after leaving NMRLS, as he served as a PAI attorney, accepting NMRLS clients on a no fee or reduced fee basis. It was also exemplified with his long-term involvement in the NAACP. He had a deep and abiding love for Rust College and served as Executive Director of the Rust College Community Development Corporation. Clencie's desire was to make a difference for as many people as he could, and he used his time and talent to that end. Clencie succeeded, and he will be missed.



# In Memoriam

**Annie Lee Burt** died at the age of 103, leaving behind a rich legacy as a community advocate. She was employed at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) for more than twenty-five (25) years. The organization initially hired her as a community worker. Her job was to serve as a liaison between NMRLS and the client community. People felt comfortable in bringing legal issues to Ms. Burt who then brought them to the attention of the NMRLS staff. She was dedicated and diligent, always trying to improve the lives of others. Recognizing her value, NMRLS hired Mrs. Burt as a paralegal. In that capacity, among other duties, she conducted hearings before administrative boards, including the Social Security Administration. Mrs. Burt helped countless individuals over the years receive food stamps and disability benefits to which they were entitled. She was an amazing asset to NMRLS for many years, and her legacy as a dynamic advocate will be long remembered within the organization.



**Mary A. Hastings** was very active in her community. She always sought to improve the opportunities for those who struggled with poverty and to alleviate any social injustice witnessed around her. As part of this mission, Mrs. Hastings was an active member of the NAACP. This desire to improve the lives of people made her a good fit as a client board member of NMRLS. Selected by her community to represent them on the board, Mrs. Hastings served as a client board member for seven years. As part of her board duties, she was a member of the Audit and Finance Committee, Personnel and Grievance Committee, and the Executive Director Evaluation Committee. Her energy was boundless and matched only by her enthusiasm to make certain NMRLS remained a viable source of change in North Mississippi. Her dedication will not be forgotten.

# Staff Spotlight on . . .

## Clarence H. Franklin,\* Administrative Office



There was a time some years ago when I was asked to do a brochure on North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS) and what it is that we do. As part of that assignment, I was given the names of three clients in different parts of our service area to interview to include their testimony in the brochure. I visited each of them in their homes and sat down with them to listen to their stories. They were informal conversations where I let them do most of the talking. All three had nothing but praise for NMRLS and the wonderful job the program had done for them. I came away from those sessions with a renewed sense of pride to be working at NMRLS.

During my 43 years at NMRLS, I have never worked directly with clients. I had never witnessed first-hand what NMRLS does. So, it did my heart good to hear first-hand what NMRLS was doing for its clients.

What exactly is it that I do to have never had contact with clients, you may ask? For an organization of attorneys, paralegals, case workers, and administrators like NMRLS to function, there has to be someone in charge of infrastructure, someone to provide them with everything that they need to do their jobs. That's where I come in. As Network Administrator/Operations Manager it is my job to provide those services.

As Network Administrator, I am in charge of everything technology related. That includes computers, laptops, printers, software, copiers, internet service, telephones, etc. My job includes but is not limited to, hardware and software upgrades and maintenance, software training and support, and acting as the one-stop help desk. Hardware and software upgrades and maintenance are handled in

the background so that the end-user experience is uninterrupted and seamless.

Facilities management and purchasing are my primary functions as Operations Manager. It is my job to find appropriate office spaces for NMRLS, negotiate lease agreements, and, in many cases, design or redesign the interior to make it appropriate for NMRLS occupancy. That was the case with the current Administrative/Oxford and West Point offices and the previous Clarksdale office. I laid them out and worked with the landlords to make them functional for NMRLS. I maintain a good rapport with all landlords to quickly address any issues that may arise. I am also the purchaser for NMRLS. It is my job to purchase all office supplies, furniture, computers, and equipment for each office. I work with the NMRLS Accounting Department in the preparation of documentation needed to pay invoices, and I sign checks. I also maintain the inventory for all NMRLS assets.

No, I do not work directly with clients, but I provide the infrastructure that everyone else needs at NMRLS to carry out their functions. I am happy to be a part of the important work we do.

I am originally from a small town in southwest Mississippi called Centreville. I came to Oxford in 1970 to attend Ole Miss. I met my wife, Niler Perry from Starkville, Mississippi while in school. We married in 1976 and have two sons, Christopher and Kenneth. We liked the small-town atmosphere of Oxford, along with the amenities related to the proximity of the University, and just never left. I began working with NMRLS in 1980.

One of my joys away from work has been playing basketball. I also bowled competitively in a city league for 10 years achieving a handicap of 2.

Writing, however, is my number one joy. I was editor/publisher of a local magazine called the *Soul Force* for 17 years, as well as editor/publisher of my church newsletter, *Jacob's Ladder*, for the last 23 years. I also recently published 3 science-fiction novels that I originally wrote in high school over 50 years ago about a group of Black high schoolers that had their own spaceship in segregated southwest Mississippi in the late 1960s. They can be found on Amazon.com by searching for my name.

I still enjoy my work at NMRLS and the work that NMRLS does. I don't see myself retiring anytime soon.

**\*In his own words**



# Staff Spotlight on . . .

## Katrina Porter, West Point Office



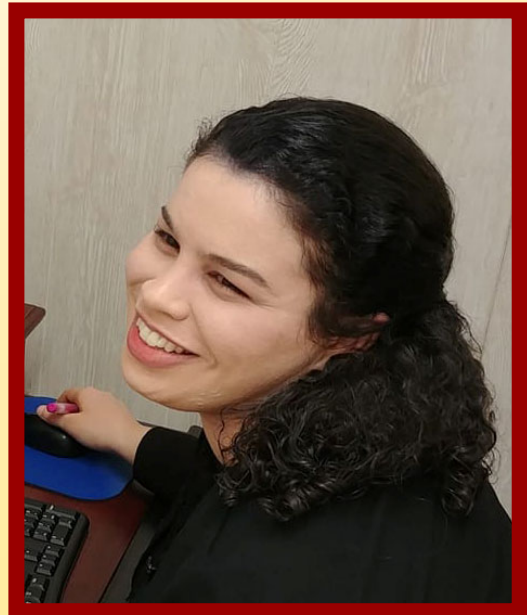
In addition to being the Case Maintenance/Fiscal Secretary for the West Point Office Katrina Porter assisted with the Adams Benefits Enrollment Center, the Emergency Rental Assistance Project and the MS Homesavers Project.

Katrina says she works for NMRLS because she enjoys helping others and strives to help in whatever way possible because she realizes you never know when you are going to be the one needing help. Her standard is to always treat others as she would want herself or her family treated.

During her free time she likes shopping and spending time with her family including a 3-year-old who gives her a run for her money and gets a lion's share of her time on weekends.

## Stephanie Gobert, Call Center Attorney

Stephanie Gobert is a Call Center Attorney within the NMRLS Intake Call Center. Stephanie speaks with clients regarding their legal issues and the facts of their case to determine what must be done to obtain the outcome they hope to reach. Although most cases within the program's case acceptance guidelines are transferred to a branch office for further assistance, she helps as many of those that she can herself. She advises clients in a variety of areas ranging from landlord-tenant law, employment discrimination, debt collection, the Child Protection Services (CPS) investigative procedure and youth court cases, estate planning, solving their property issues, divorces, protection orders, and foreclosure prevention - the list goes on. She is originally from a small farming community in rural Texas, and she graduated from the University of Houston with her bachelor's degree before moving to Mississippi to attend law school at Ole Miss. She began volunteering with the Pro Bono Initiative at the Ole Miss Law School and the First Chancery District's *pro se* family law clinics while pursuing her law degree and fell in love with public service and providing legal services to those who could not otherwise afford or obtain legal counsel. She enjoys volunteering with other nonprofits in her free time. She has been a licensed and practicing attorney for four years.





# Student Volunteers

## Angelica (Bella) Alimot (Oxford)



My name is Bella Alimot, and I started interning at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services in September of 2022. During that time, I gained valuable experience as a Political Science major. I established strong connections with the University of Mississippi's Social Science Research Lab director, Jon Winburn. We aided in the process of redeveloping the needs assessment survey. I worked with my mentor, Al Cutturini, to help organize and plan the Zesty Zeniors community fair that will take place this summer. I promoted outreach events by using my journalism minor to create engaging flyers. I did a

survey for MSCARES to see what our local partners needed from NMRLS. The mentorship and guidance I have received were an enriching and eye-opening experience that laid the groundwork for my future career aspirations.

## Nathaniel Williams, II (Greenville)



My Mississippi journey started with North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (NMRLS). Wanting to use my recently acquired legal knowledge and skills to serve the most underprivileged in the legal system, I googled nonprofits and NMRLS appeared in my searches. After volunteering over 50 hours with the organization during my 2L spring semester at Howard University School of Law, I applied and received the John Paul Stevens Fellowship, which paid for my ten-week summer internship in the Mississippi Delta. I did not know then that NMRLS would become my second family.

Upon my arrival in Greenville, I felt immediately lost. I had grown up and lived in a very urban area, Western Washington State, which was the opposite of the Mississippi Delta. I had never previously been to Mississippi and had no family or friends in the state. The only person I knew when arriving in Mississippi was Managing Attorney Gail P. Thompson. She immediately introduced me to NMRLS' Greenville office, and I became family with Angela, Gloria, Shirley, Jasmine, and herself. They told me where not to go, where to experience the best festivals, and where to eat the tastiest Southern foods. They looked out for me, even though I had only briefly known them. By the end of the internship, I felt at home in Mississippi.

More than that, NMRLS' collective passion for indigent clients inspired me to give my best effort to ensure every client had the best opportunity for justice. Our combined effort was successful during my summer internship. I helped NMRLS achieve an \$88,000 judgment in a breach of contract case and get a property settlement judgment altered based on an unconscionable division. We provided a voice for the most underprivileged in the legal system.

# The Year In Review

Although Mississippi holds equal justice for all as a core value, it has a long way to go to fulfill that ideal. In the state of Mississippi and most states, people are not generally entitled to a lawyer in civil cases, no matter how devastating the resulting consequences may be.

That means that in cases involving domestic violence, potential eviction, public benefits, and adoption proceedings (among others), people must pay out of pocket or attempt to represent themselves in court. For people living in poverty, paying for these legal services is often out of the question. That's why NMRLS is so important to the client community.

	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
Clients Served	3066	709	2354
Foreclosure Prevention	42	8	34
Divorce/Separation/Annulment	626	74	552
Domestic Violence Prevention	72	1	71
Wills and Other Estate Documents	430	152	277
Bankruptcy Protection	217	46	171
Guardianship, Conservatorship, Guardian <i>ad litem</i>	148	14	134
LITC	47	15	32

# NMRLS' Impact

## NMRLS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Project

NMRLS' VITA Project, consisting of a partnership between NMRLS, Brown Missionary Baptist Church, Cadence Bank (branches in Olive Branch and Tupelo), Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Lift Incorporated, and Mid-State Opportunities, Inc., through the volunteer services of over 100 trained and certified greeters, preparers, reviewers, and site coordinators, provided free tax return preparation services to over 2250 low-income and rural federal tax filers during the tax filing services. Refunds totaled \$4,358,476.00 and included \$1,374,977.00 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$1,035,123.00 in Child Care Tax Credits. During this tax season, the partnership also filed 1847 Mississippi state tax returns.

## Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC)

The taxpayer contacted the tax clinic after receiving a Notice of Deficiency for the 2019 tax year. The deficiency was the result of an audit during which the IRS determined that the taxpayer was not entitled to claim his 2 children as dependents, thus disallowing his Earned Income Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Head of Household filing status.

Instead of receiving a refund of nearly \$9,000, the taxpayer was left owing a balance of \$688. The tax clinic assisted the taxpayer in filing a petition in Tax Court as well as an application for waiver of the filing fee. While the Tax Court litigation proceeded forward, the taxpayer became the victim of a "premature assessment," in which the IRS fails to acknowledge the timely filing of the Tax Court petition. In this case, the taxpayer suffered the loss of his 2020 tax refund because he failed to recertify for the disallowed credits from 2019 (recertification should not have been required because no final determination on the 2019 disallowances had occurred).

The tax clinic worked with the taxpayer to gather evidence to support his eligibility for the credits in question. After extended discussions with Area Counsel, the IRS conceded the 2019 issues and reversed the prior assessment. As a result, the taxpayer finally received his full refunds for both 2019 and 2020 which totaled over \$17,000.

## Victims of Crime Act Grant (VOCA)

The client had been a victim of domestic violence for several years, often with police intervention. The husband would not only physically assault her but also isolate her from family/friends and take her transportation.

At the time the client came to VOCA, the husband had removed her from the marital home, forcing her to leave their child and all personal belongings behind. He transferred their minor child to another school and refused to allow the client to have any contact with him. VOCA obtained an order of protection for the client and her minor children and also obtained custody of the couple's child so he could be returned to his regular school.

The Court placed visitation restrictions on the husband, but he failed to comply with them. He took the client's car during a visitation exchange and left the client and a child, who was not the husband's child, standing in a parking lot of an out-of-state convenience store. The husband made it clear he did not intend to comply with the orders of the Court if the orders did not meet his approval. VOCA filed for emergency relief which the Court granted. The husband was denied any contact with the couple's minor child until such time as he could come before the Court and show cause for his actions. From that point forward, the client was able to rebuild her life and the lives of her children.



# NMRLS' Impact

## Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC)

The client, a 65-year-old male, sought assistance from the Adams Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC) on three matters. One, he desired assistance with payment of his Medicare Part B premium. Two, the client wanted assistance with obtaining funds for home repairs. Three, the client needed to know if he was receiving the maximum amount of disability benefits.

The BEC advocate, William Young, completed an application for the Medicare Savings Program. The client, based on his income, was eligible for Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB). The client was able to get his Medicare Part B Premium paid by Medicaid, and the monthly premium payment was restored to his check. Thus, the client was able to receive an additional One Hundred Sixty-Four (\$164.00) in monthly benefits.

The client's home required repairs. The BEC advocate assisted the client with an application to receive a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA is currently processing the application, and the client is gathering bids for the contractor.

The BEC advocate determined the client should qualify for dual benefits from Medicare and Medicaid based on his income. He directed the client to apply for Supplemental Security Income Benefits (SSI). The Social Security Administration approved the application, and the client now receives SSI benefits along with Medicaid. As a result of the BEC assistance, the client's quality of life improved.

## Foreclosure Prevention Program (FPP)/Greenville Office

A single forty-five (45) year-old widow and parent of two called our legal hotline in December 2022 seeking assistance to transfer the title of her deceased sister's home to her to stop the foreclosure sale advertised in the newspaper and scheduled within two weeks. The client's elderly mother also lived in the home. The client sought to assume the mortgage loan and apply for mortgage assistance that would bring the loan current as her sister's mortgage was almost two years behind.

With only two weeks left, the Mortgager informed the client she would not be able to assume the mortgage until she established herself as a successor in interest. The Managing Attorney in the Greenville Office prioritized the case. To establish her successor in interest status, the Managing Attorney prepared an heirship affidavit identifying the heirs of the deceased sister and a quitclaim deed for the heirs to convey their interest to the client. Following the execution and recording of these documents, the title was in the client's name alone, and she was established as a successor in interest. The Managing Attorney then referred the client to the Foreclosure Prevention Program.

As a "successor in interest," the client was eligible to apply for the Home Saver Program (HSP). With the foreclosure sale only two days away, the FPP Manager was successful in getting the HSP application expedited and approved. On the last day, the foreclosure sale was canceled. The mortgage was reinstated by the HSP program payment in the amount of \$43,831.74, and an additional three months of mortgage payments were made. As a result of the collaborative efforts and advocacy by the FPP staff, the Managing Attorney, and the diligence of the client, the client and her family members were able to avoid foreclosure and continue residing in their home.

## West Point Office

The client, a 55-year-old male, was found disabled as of January 19, 2017. The claimant's medical condition at the time included cirrhosis of the liver with portal hypertension and abnormal liver function. On September 30, 2020, the Social Security Administration, after reviewing the claimant's medical records, determined there had been medical improvement. Thus, the client was no longer entitled to receive SSDI benefits. He appealed the

# NMRLS' Impact

unfavorable decision and requested a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge.

The client then opened a file with NMRLS requesting representation in the administrative hearing. After downloading and reviewing the client's numerous medical records, the client's advocate concluded the records did not show any improvement in his condition. If anything, they showed that his condition had deteriorated. On the day of the hearing, the Administrative Law Judge reached the same conclusion. He reinstated the client's monthly benefits based on the record without requiring a hearing on the matter.

## Clarksdale Office

Mary Little, a 56-year-old woman, received a summons to defend a Petition for Appointment of Guardianship/Conservatorship filed by her brother, Jerry Little, to be appointed guardian/conservator over their mother who resided in a local nursing home with multiple medical issues including early onset dementia and the inability to be mobile without mechanical assistance. The brother sought to remove Mrs. Little from the nursing home and care for her in his home, where he would provide primary care. Afraid that releasing her mother from the nursing home would eliminate necessary medical care and hasten her death, Mary came to NMRLS to make sure her mother remained in the nursing home.

NMRLS conferred with the client, the ombudsmen, and other family members in highlighting the danger of removing Mrs. Little from the nursing home and placing her in private care. The client emphasized the financial strain private care would place on the family, even with the assistance of Medicaid, and the lack of mandatory, professional care Jerry could provide. At the conclusion of the trial, the Court named Jerry and Mary as joint guardians/conservators but prohibited either from removing the ward, Mrs. Little, from the nursing home. Mary was very grateful that her mother was able to continue receiving the care she so desperately needs and appreciated NMRLS for assisting her in a very difficult battle.

## Elder Law Project

On January 19, 2022, a regional rehab facility served notice of intent to evict Mr. F., a resident of the facility, for smoking. Mr. F. is in a wheelchair and requires 24-hour care, which is why he was in a long-term care facility. Mr. F., through the local Ombudsman, objected to the eviction and requested a fair hearing. The Elder Law Project was contacted and agreed to represent him.

The facility Administrator argued Mr. F. had been warned this was a no-smoking facility, and he had signed an agreement not to smoke. The Elder Law Project attorney, Al Cutturini, argued Mr. F. had only been reported for smoking one time according to his file, and he was not actually seen smoking. He had been observed around two other residents who were smoking. No records of verbal warnings being given, or previous violations of the smoking ban were listed in the records, despite claims from the Administrator. The facility argued a discharge was warranted because the facility could not meet Mr. F.'s needs (his need to smoke), but the regulations state a discharge is warranted when "urgent medical needs" cannot be met. There were no records from any physician Mr. F. had been examined, and a determination made the facility could not meet his urgent medical needs. Such a statement is required as grounds for an eviction. The Administrator argued other residents were at harm due to Mr. F.'s smoking, but no records supported this argument.

The facility had made no preparation to discharge Mr. F., who used a wheelchair and required 24-hour care, to a safe location. No site was examined prior to the proposed eviction, and no other care facility had agreed to take him. He was being dumped into the care of his distant relatives, who advised the Hearing Officer they had no way to care for him as they were disabled themselves. The Hearing Officer found the facility did not complete the required Discharge Plan and failed to give adequate notice to Mr. F. of the details of his discharge. The Hearing Officer also found the facility "did not attempt to place him at a facility that may meet his

# NMRLS' Impact

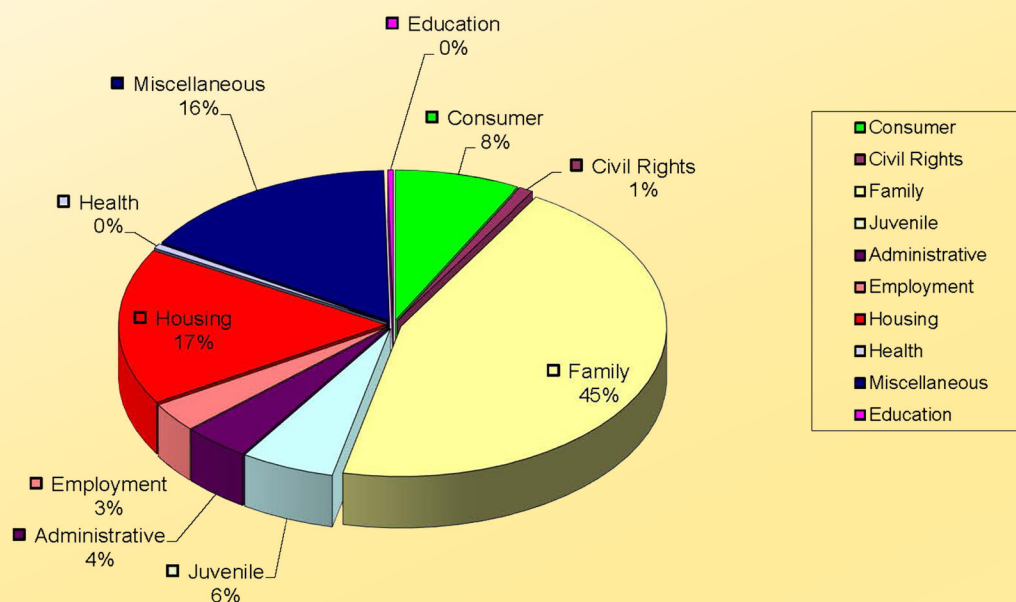
welfare.” The reason for discharge did not meet the proper requirements because it was lacking a safe location to discharge him to, there was no physician's statement outlining the need for a discharge, and there were no statements alleging other residents were at harm. The discharge was denied based on the Hearing Officer's findings and recommendations.

## Oxford Litigation Office

The client, a 52-year-old disabled male, lived with his wife and two children in a 3-bedroom home in Tupelo, Mississippi. The Kansas City Southern Railway Company (KC Southern) owned and operated a train track that ran directly behind the client's home. Roughly six months prior to the incident at issue, KC Southern's crew removed and replaced the old railroad ties along the portion of the track behind the client's property. The company discarded the old ties along the bank of the tracks, a gravel slope descending at a roughly 90-degree angle toward a drainage ditch. The ditch, located roughly 100 feet away from the client's property, carried water under a city street. A large thunderstorm passed through the area, washing the railroad ties down the bank and into the drainage ditch where they wedged beneath the city street causing water to flood the client's property. His basement was flooded with almost three feet of water, ruining his lawn equipment and his truck parked nearby. The client eventually had to replace the drywall in his basement due to the water damage.

The client filed a claim for damages directly with KC Southern's claims department, who after gathering evidence, denied his request without much explanation. He then retained NMRLS. After requesting an explanation for the denial and damages on the client's behalf and being dissatisfied with its response, NMRLS filed a complaint for damages in the County Court of Lee County. The matter was quickly removed to the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi on diversity grounds, KC Southern being incorporated in the State of Missouri. After several rounds of negotiations, NMRLS settled the claim in the client's favor in the amount of \$18,000.00.

## NORTH MISSISSIPPI RURAL LEGAL SERVICES Yearly Report 2022





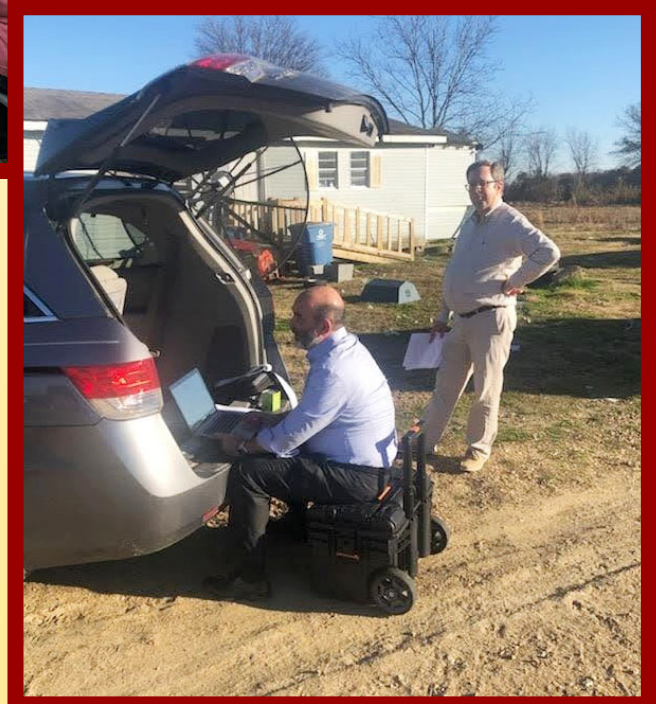
# Community Outreach



**Veterans Administration Outreach, Holly Springs, MS**



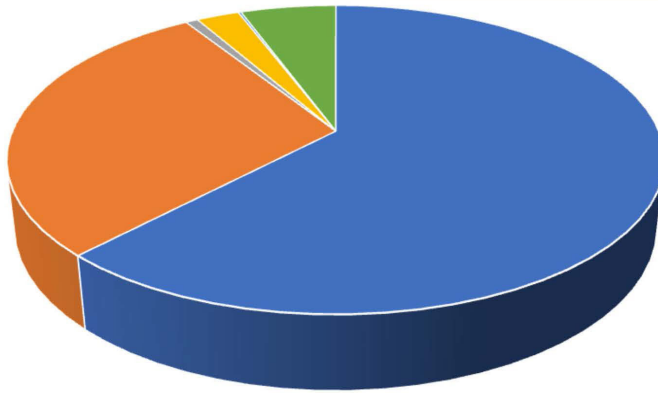
**2022 Coldwater Community  
Will Day Outreach**



**Rural Outreach**

# Financial Highlights

## 2022 Revenue



Legal Services Corporation
Grants and Contracts Non LSC
Lawyers Trust Fund
Older Americans Act
Fundraising
Other
Total

## Financial Overview

January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022

Net Assets-Beginning of Year	\$ 765,475	
2022 Revenue		
Legal Services Corporation	\$ 2,228,181	62.12%
Grants and Contracts Non LSC	\$ 1,035,982	28.88%
Lawyers Trust Fund	\$ 26,171	0.73%
Older Americans Act	\$ 90,067	2.51%
Fundraising	\$ 5,885	0.16%
Other	\$ 200,593	5.59%
Total	\$ 3,586,879	100.00%

<b>2022 Expenditures</b>		
Personnel	\$ 2,416,375	71.50%
Occupancy	\$ 196,640	5.82%
Supplies and Postage	\$ 62,894	1.86%
Telephone/Internet	\$ 98,254	2.91%
Travel and Lodging	\$ 43,955	1.30%
Other	\$ 561,362	16.61%
Total	\$ 3,379,480	100.00%
Net Assets-End of Year	\$ 791,361	

# Donors

## FOUNDATION/GOVERNMENT GRANTS/DONORS

North Mississippi Rural Legal Services receives funding from a wide range of sources. These donors, who make our work possible, illustrate the broad base of support we enjoy.

Brown Missionary Baptist Church

Cadence Bank

Golden Triangle Area Agency on Aging

Internal Revenue Service

Legal Services Corporation

LIFT Community Action Agency, Inc.

Mid-State Opportunity, Inc.

Mississippi Access to Justice Commission

Mississippi Bar Foundation, Inc.

Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Mississippi Home Corporation

Mississippi Department of Health, Office of  
Interpersonal Violence

Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project

North Central Area Agency on Aging

North Delta Area Agency on Aging

Northeast Area Agency on Aging

Pleasant Hill M.B. Church

South Delta Area Agency on Aging

The Kroger Company

Three Rivers Area Agency on Aging

TOP Jewish Foundation

(Ellen Weiss, Executive Director)

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban  
Development

U. S. Department of Justice

West Tennessee Legal Services

Hon. Kristen Belvin

Queen E. Booker

Hon. George C. and Jane Carlson

Hon. Ben Thomas Cole, II

Arnetchers Dudley

Hon. I. Richard Gershon

Hon. Minnie P. Howard

Schenille Martin

Marianne D. Wharton

Hon. Ruby White

Springer Law Office

InCloud LLC

*All funds received by North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Inc. are spent in accordance with the Legal Services Corporation Act of 1974, as amended 1977, 42 I.S.C. § 2996 et. seq., its implementing regulations, 45 C.F.R. § 1600 et. seq., and other applicable laws.*



# NMRLS Staff

## Administrative and Oxford Offices Staff

Ben Thomas Cole, II, Esq. - Executive Director  
Minnie P. Howard, Esq. - Deputy Director  
Ruby White, Esq. - Advocacy Director  
Schenille Martin - Fiscal Manager  
Clarence H. Franklin - Network Administrator/  
Operations Manager  
Arnetchers Dudley - Administrative Assistant  
Cynetra Freeman - Resource Development (part-time)  
Gloria Bogan - Administrative Assistant  
Eunice Carter - Special Projects Accountant  
Anne Wanjohi - Accounting Clerk  
Al Spann - Financial Support Staff  
Sandra Murray - Private Attorney Involvement Coordinator  
Glen Holman, Esq. - Assistant PAI Coordinator  
Francine Green - Case Maintenance Secretary  
Michael Nolan - LITC Support Staff  
Romara Johnson - VOCA Support Staff  
Hillory Howell - VOCA Paralegal  
Miracle Baker - Part-time Temporary Homesaver Support Staff  
Leolia Eggerson - Senior Community Service Program Volunteer



## ATTORNEYS

W. Ledyard Williamson, Esq. - Managing Attorney  
Ben Wilkerson, Esq. - Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Manager  
Christi McCoy, Esq. - Victims of Crime Act Project Manager  
Al Cutturini, Esq. - Elder Law Project Manager  
Nora Rasco, Esq. - Call Center Manager  
Lacy Hollins, Esq. - Call Center Attorney  
Stephanie Gobert, Esq. - Call Center Attorney  
Priscilla Grantham, Esq. - Victims of Crime Act Staff Attorney  
Adreain Reynolds, Esq. Staff Attorney

# NMRLS Staff

## West Point Office

Edward Long, Jr., Esq. - Managing Attorney

Melissa King, Esq. - Victims of Crime Act Project Attorney

Lea Ann Lynch, Esq. - Staff Attorney

William Young - Benefits Enrollment Center Project Manager

Charlene Dotson-Orange - Fiscal/Case Maintenance Secretary

Chelsey Hodo - BEC/RAMP Support Staff

Jordan Harris - RAMP Support Staff

Katrina Porter - Case Management Secretary



## Clarksdale Office

Patricia Booker, Esq. - Managing Attorney

Cheryl Barnes - Temporary Case Maintenance Secretary

Nadia Gipson - Case Maintenance Secretary

Linda Strong - Fiscal Secretary/Call Center Intake

Naomi Keaton - Call Center Support Staff



## Greenville Office

Gail P. Thompson, Esq. - Managing Attorney

Angela Greene-Mayfield, Esq. - Foreclosure Prevention Attorney

Gloria Benson - Fiscal Secretary/Call Center Intake

Shirley McNeal - Case Maintenance Secretary

Jasmine Straw - Foreclosure Support Staff

Jeyon Thompson - Temporary Call Center Intake



# Donate to NMRLS

Each year, NMRLS provides access to the judicial system for thousands of low-income Mississippians. However, due to fewer resources, many low-income Mississippians are denied the legal assistance they need. You can assist in the effort of bridging this gap by donating today.

North Mississippi Rural Legal Services is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, and your donation is tax deductible. Because we receive a grant from the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, we are required by 45 CFR Part 1610 to notify you that our funds may not be expended for any purposes prohibited by the regulations governing the Legal Services Corporation. In addition, NMRLS is required to provide this notification to any individual or business who donates \$250 or more.

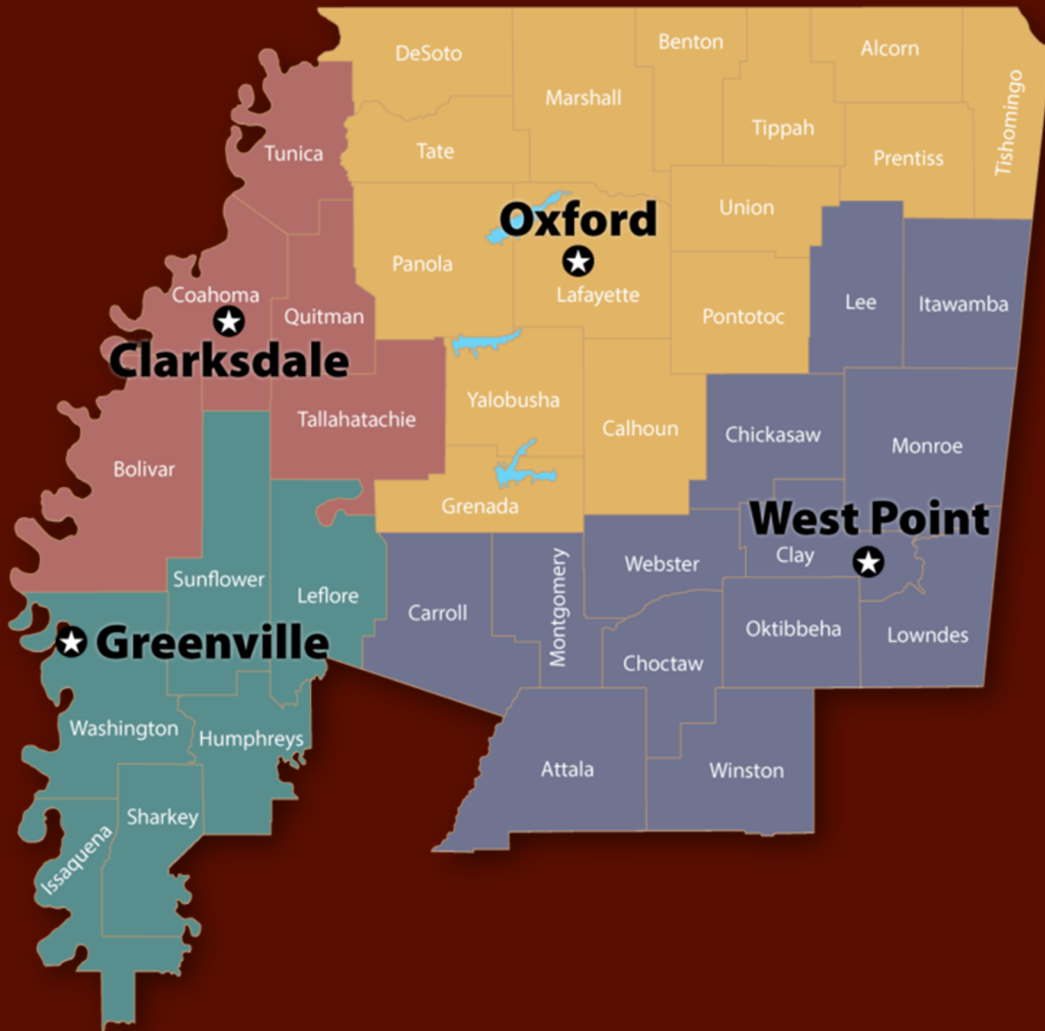
Donations are important for NMRLS to assist Mississippi's low-income individuals and families. You can make a donation to the North Mississippi Rural Legal Services by scanning the QR code below.



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# Branch Offices



## Administrative Office

493 Ryland Way  
P. O. Box 767  
Oxford, MS 38655-1259  
(662) 234-8731

## Clarksdale Office

504 Desoto Avenue  
P. O. Box 1107  
Clarksdale, MS 38614  
(662) 627-4184

## West Point Office

6671 Highway 45 Alt. South  
P. O. Box 277  
West Point, MS 39773  
(662) 494-6122

## Oxford Litigation Office Greenville Office

493 Ryland Way  
P. O. Box 928  
Oxford, MS 38655-1259  
(662) 234-2918

1024 Washington Avenue,  
Suite 101  
P. O. Box 858  
Greenville, MS 38701  
(662) 335-8203