Finding and Accessing Free and Affordable Legal Help
**FIRST STEPS**

1. In most cases, the best place to start is by calling CARPLS, the Cook County Legal Aid Hotline. *See more details on page 5.*


3. If you can afford to pay something, consider low-cost lawyers and affordable options. *See more details on page 5.*

4. Understand the legal aid and pro bono landscape. This Guide answers some commonly asked questions and gives more information about the legal help that may be available.
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FIRST STEPS—MORE DETAILS

Call CARPLS at 321-738-9200

- CARPLS lawyers give legal advice and other help, and if an organization might be able to take your case, CARPLS lawyers will tell you where to call.

- Many people call CARPLS for free legal help and the hotline is very busy. If you get a busy signal, call back at another time, but keep trying. When you get through, you may hold for up to 20 minutes. Follow the instructions and if you are asked to leave a message, someone will call you back.

- For $25, you can avoid waiting and set a time for a lawyer to call you. You need a credit card and access to the internet.

- CARPLS helps people up to 350% of the Federal Poverty Level. A link to a chart that shows the current federal poverty levels is available on www.IllinoisLegalAid.org/Cook.

- Visit www.carpls.org to make an appointment or learn more about services offered by CARPLS.

Learn about your legal problem and find forms on www.IllinoisLegalAid.org
(AyudaLegalIL.org for Spanish speakers)

- Find information on over 30 areas of law.

- In some areas, you can apply for legal services at a limited number of legal aid organizations. Look for the pop-up screen when you visit a page.

- Use form prep programs to easily complete and print your court forms.

- Free and available 24/7.

Low-Cost Options

If you need to hire a lawyer, you should know that there are good lawyers who charge reasonable fees. They may be able to handle just part of your case or coach you on handling your case to make it more affordable.

- **The Justice Entrepreneurs Project**
  - Lawyers in the Justice Entrepreneurs Project (JEP) provide lower cost, quality legal services that often include fixed fees and flexible representation options (like unbundled, a la carte services).
  - Many JEP lawyer have fee estimates on their websites, so you can find out what it might cost to hire a lawyer.
  - Find more information or contact a lawyer at jepchicago.org or 312-546-3282.

- **The Chicago Legal Clinic**
  - The Chicago Legal charges clients fees based on their ability to pay.
  - Visit www.clclaw.org or call 773-731-1762.
• **The Chicago Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service**
  - The Lawyer Referral Services connects people to experienced lawyers who charge fees for their time and services.
  - Some kinds of cases allow lawyers to earn fees, but clients pay for those services. Some examples are personal injury and consumer fraud cases.
  - Find more information or connect with the service at www.chicagobar.org or 312-554-2001.

**Other Helpful Websites and Information**

• **Circuit Court of Cook County**
  - www.cookcountycourt.org
  - Information about court operations and services; information about court-based help desks in Cook County (under For People without Lawyers)

• **Circuit Clerk of Cook County**
  - www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org
  - Dockets, schedules, e-filing and a downloadable mobile app

• **Illinois Supreme Court Citizen Self-Help Section**
  - www.illinoiscourts.gov
  - Links to statewide standardized forms, including appearance forms and fee waivers, and other useful resources
COMMON QUESTIONS

Can I get a free lawyer?

It depends on the type of help you need. In non-criminal or "civil" cases, you do not have the right to a free lawyer. But there are many legal aid and pro bono programs that provide free legal help. Most organizations have limits on how much money a person has and what type of problem they have. Visit www.illinoislegalaid.org/cook for more information about income guidelines or call CARPLS (312-738-9200).

What types of cases do free lawyers take?

Pro bono and legal aid organizations provide free (sometimes called pro bono) legal help in many kinds of cases, including:

- Family (divorce, child custody and support, domestic violence, guardianship)
- Housing (evictions, foreclosure, condition of property)
- Money and Debt (bills, debt, utility shutoff, bankruptcy)
- Public Benefits (food stamps, unemployment, Social Security, Social Security disability, Medicaid, TANF)
- Immigration (citizenship, asylum, visas)
- Most organizations do not take criminal cases. If you have a criminal case, you may need to hire a lawyer. Some lawyers charge low fees. You may also get a public defender.

What kind of help can I get?

INFORMATION: free to everyone, available online and through workshops

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE: available on the phone, through help desks in the court, community legal clinics or a short meeting with a lawyer; some can only help low-income people

REPRESENTATION IN YOUR CASE: a free or affordable lawyer may represent you in some of your case (called unbundled legal services) or all of your case (start to finish)

Do I need a lawyer?

Lawyers are trained to know what the law says about your legal problem, what your options are, how to help you decide what’s best for your case, and how to present your case. For many legal issues, it is best to have help from a lawyer. For simpler matters, you may be able to handle the matter on your own with help from legal information. To help decide whether you need a lawyer, consider the following questions:

1. How important is the matter to you? The more important the matter, the more important it is to have a lawyer.
2. How much is at stake if you do not win? If a lot is at stake, it is important to have a lawyer.
3. How complicated is your legal issue? If your matter is complicated, legal assistance may be needed.
4. How comfortable are you filling out forms and appearing in court? If you are not comfortable with forms or speaking in public, assistance from a lawyer is important.
5. Does the other side have a lawyer? If so, it may be more important for you to have a lawyer.
SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

The legal aid organizations listed in this Guide provide free or low-cost legal services. Many websites have helpful information about their services, including the type of cases they accept, the areas they serve, and income eligibility. Visit the websites to learn more about their services and intake process. You can apply online for services at some organizations on their websites or on www.IllinoisLegalAid.org.

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**Accidents/Personal Injury**

*Note: Private lawyers often represent injured people in exchange for part of the recovery, meaning they do not charge fees up front. Go to page 5 for more information about how to find these lawyers and for information about lawyers who charge reasonable fees.*

**Chicago Legal Clinic**
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

**Chicago Volunteer Legal Services**
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

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**AIDS**

**Legal Council for Health Justice**
312.427.8990
www.legalcouncil.org

**LAF**
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

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**Adoption**

**Chicago Volunteer Legal Services**
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

*For families impacted by HIV/AIDS:*

**Legal Council for Health Justice**
312.427.8990
www.legalcouncil.org

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**Age Discrimination**

SEE ALSO “EMPLOYMENT”

*Note: In this area, the law sometimes requires the other side to pay your lawyer’s fees if you win the case. Go to page 5 for more information about how to find these lawyers.*

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**Artists**

**Lawyers for the Creative Arts**
312.649.4111
www.law-arts.org

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**Asylum/Refugees**

**National Immigrant Justice Center**
312.660.1370
www.immigrantjustice.org

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**Bankruptcy/Debt Collection**

**Chicago Legal Clinic**
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

**Chicago Volunteer Legal Services**
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

**LAF**
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org
Bankruptcy Assistance Desk
*advice and help with forms only*
Dirksen Federal Building
Call 312-435-6032 for a recorded message or
www.ilnb.uscourts.gov/bankruptcy-assistance-desk to learn more

*For persons with HIV/AIDS:*
Legal Council for Health Justice
312.427.8990
www.legalcouncil.org

*For elderly and disabled persons:*
Center for Disability and Elder Law
312.376.1880
www.cdelaw.org

**Child Custody**

Chicago Legal Clinic
*charges fees based ability to pay*
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

Catholic Charities Legal Assistance
312.948.6821
www.catholiccharities.net

*For individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system:*

Cabrini Green Legal Aid
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

**Child Guardianship**

Chicago Legal Clinic
*charges fees based ability to pay*
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Catholic Charities Legal Assistance
312.948.6821
www.catholiccharities.net

*For individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system:*

Cabrini Green Legal Aid
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

**Child Support**

Chicago Legal Clinic
*charges fees based ability to pay*
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

Catholic Charities Legal Assistance
312.948.6821
www.catholiccharities.net
For individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system:

Cabrini Green Legal Aid
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.cclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

For discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or gender:

Roger Baldwin Foundation of ACLU, Inc.
312.201.9740
www.aclu-il.org

For people with disabilities:

Access Living
discrimination based on disability in housing, government programs, and access to businesses
312.640.2100 voice
800.613.8549 toll free
312.640.2169 TTY
888.253.7003 toll free TTY
www.accessliving.org

Equip for Equality
discrimination based on disability in employment, special education, transportation settings and voting rights
312.341.0022
800.537.2632 voice
800.610.2779 TTY
www.equipforequality.org

For persons with HIV/AIDS:

Legal Council for Health Justice
312.427.8990
www.legalcouncil.org

For homeless persons:

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
312.641.4141
800.940.1119 toll free
www.chicagohomeless.org

For discrimination based on sexual orientation:

Lambda Legal
312.663.4413
www.lambdalegal.org

Civil Rights

For discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, age or gender in housing or employment and hate crimes:

Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
312.630.9744
www.clccrul.org

Advice and referral: CARPLS | 321-738-9200
More information: www.IllinoisLegalAid.org/cook
For employment discrimination:

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

For Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers:

National Immigrant Justice Center  
312.660.1370  
www.immigrantjustice.org

For discrimination in housing:

John Marshall Legal Support Center and Clinic  
312.786.2267  
www.jmls.edu/clinics

Community-Based Organizations And Nonprofits

The Law Project  
312.939.3638  
www.thelawproject.org

Consumer Issues

Note: In this area, the law sometimes requires the other side to pay your lawyer’s fees if you win the case. Go to page 5 for more information about how to find these lawyers.

Chicago Legal Clinic  
charges fees based ability to pay  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services  
312.332.1624  
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services  
312.986.4200  
www.metrofamily.org

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

Catholic Charities Legal Assistance  
312.948.6821  
www.catholiccharities.net

For individuals with HIV/AIDS:

Legal Council for Health Justice  
312.427.8990  
www.legalcouncil.org

For the elderly or the disabled:

Center for Disability and Elder Law  
312.376.1880  
www.cdelaw.org

Criminal Law

Note: The public defender is the main provider of free criminal defense. Most of the time, you will need to pay for a criminal lawyer to take your case. Look at page 5 for information about affordable legal help. For issues relating to criminal records, look under expungement on page 15.

Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender  
312.603.0600

Federal Defender Program  
Federal cases  
312.621.8300

Office of the State Appellate Defender  
Criminal appeals  
217.782.7203  
www.state.il.us/defender

Chicago Bar Association Bar Attorney Program  
Assigns experienced lawyer each day to traffic and criminal courts in the Circuit Court of Cook County. Lawyers provide defendants with legal help for a reasonable fee or a cash bond.  
312.554.2001 voice  
312.554.2055 TTY  
www.chicagobar.org
Cabrini Green Legal Aid
_Criminal defense program that helps a limited number of people arrested in Chicago. CGLA is NOT able to take: DUI, other traffic cases, murder, manslaughter, sex crimes, or animal cruelty._
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

For youth 24 and younger in North Lawndale:

Lawndale Christian Legal Center
773-762-6381
www.lclc.net

For youth 21 and younger in Evanston:

James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy
847.492.1410
www.moran-center.org

If you or someone you know is arrested, detained or called in for questioning by the Chicago Police:

First Defense Legal Aid
1.800.LAW.REP4 (1.800.529.7374) right away
www.first-defense.org

_Disability_

For discrimination based on disability in employment, special education, transportation settings and voting rights:

Equip for Equality
312.341.0022
800.537.2632 voice
800.610.2779 TTY
www.equipforequality.org

For discrimination based on disability in housing accommodation, government programs and access to businesses:

Access Living
312.640.2100 voice
800.613.8549 toll free
312.640.2169 TTY
888.253.7003 toll free TTY
www.accessliving.org

For employment discrimination based on age or disability:

Center for Disability and Elder Law
312.376.1880
www.cdelaw.org

For public benefits, employment discrimination and special education:

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

For public benefits:

Uptown People’s Law Center
773.769.1411

_Divorce_

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org
For individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system:

**Cabrini Green Legal Aid**
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

**Domestic Violence**

Need help now? Call the Illinois Domestic Violence 24-Hour Helpline

**1.877.863.6338**

**Domestic Violence Legal Clinic**
312.325.9155
www.dvlcchicago.org

**Life Span Center for Legal Services and Advocacy**
312.408.1210
www.life-span.org

**Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services**
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

**Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation**
773.244.2230
www.caase.org

**LAF**
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

**Chicago Legal Clinic**
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

For respondents in orders of protection:

**Cabrini Green Legal Aid**
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

For immigration help:

**National Immigrant Justice Center**
312.660.1370
www.immigrantjustice.org

**Education**

**Equip for Equality Special Education Helpline:**
help getting appropriate education services
1-866-543-7046

**Access Living**
failure to serve or accommodate students with disabilities in educational setting
312.640.2100 voice
800.613.8549 toll free
312.640.2169 TTY
888.253.7003 toll free TTY
www.accessliving.org

**Equip for Equality**
special education
312.341.0022
800.537.2632 voice
800.610.2779 TTY
www.equipforequality.org

**LAF**
special education, school discipline, vocational colleges
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

**Evanston residents:**

**James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy**
school discipline cases and special education in Evanston
847.492.1410
www.moran-center.org

**Elderly**

**Center for Disability and Elder Law**
312.376.1880
www.cdelaw.org
Chicago Bar Association Senior Citizens Will Program
at various Chicago area senior centers; costs range from $50 to $125
312.554.2001
www.chicagobar.org

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services
312.986.4200
www.metrofamily.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

Employment

Note: In this area, the law sometimes requires the other side to pay your lawyer’s fees if you win the case. Go to page 5 for more information about how to find these lawyers.

Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
employment discrimination
312.630.9744
www.clccrul.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
312.353.2713
www.eeoc.gov

Illinois Department of Human Rights
312.814.6200
www.state.il.us/dhr

Working Hands Legal Clinic
wage and hour theft
312.795.9115
www.workers-law.org

Access Living
discrimination based on a disability
312.640.2100 voice
800.613.8549 toll free
312.640.2169 TTY
888.253.7003 toll free TTY
www.accessliving.org

Lambda Legal
employment discrimination based on sexual orientation
312.663.4413
www.lambdalegal.org

Legal Council for Health Justice
employment discrimination based on HIV/AIDS
312.427.8990
www.legalcouncil.org

Center for Disability and Elder Law
employment discrimination based on age or disability
312.376.1880
www.cdelaw.org

Equip for Equality
employment discrimination based on disability
312.341.0022
800.537.2632 voice
800.610.2779 TTY
www.equipforequality.org

Eviction
GO TO LANDLORD-TENANT
Expungement/Sealing Of Criminal Records

Cabrini Green Legal Aid
312.738.2452
www.cgla.net

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Juvenile Expungement:

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

Evanston youth and their families:

James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy
847.492.1410
www.moran-center.org

Family Law
GO TO CHILD CUSTODY, CHILD GUARDIANSHIP, CHILD VISITATION OR DIVORCE

Foreclosure

Circuit Court of Cook County Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program
if you have received a foreclosure summons
877.895.2444
www.cookcountyforeclosurehelp.org

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

Guardianship For Disabled Adults

Center for Disability and Elder Law
312.376.1880
www.cdelaw.org

Chicago Legal Clinic
charges fees based ability to pay
773.731.1762
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
312.332.1624
www.cvls.org

LAF
312.341.1070
www.lafchicago.org

For guardianship defense:

Equip for Equality
312.341.0022
800.537.2632 voice
800.610.2779 TTY
www.equipforequality.org

Hate Crimes

Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
312.630.9744
www.clccrul.org

Housing
SEE ALSO LANDLORD-TENANT, FORECLOSURE, DISCRIMINATION OR DISABILITY

Immigration

National Immigrant Justice Center
312.660.1370
www.immigrantjustice.org

Centro Romero
773.508.5300
www.centroromero.org
Chicago Legal Clinic  
charges fees based ability to pay  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

Indo-American Center  
773.973.4444  
www.indoamerican.org

Latinos Progresando  
773.542.7077  
www.latinospro.org

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

World Relief – Chicago Immigration Legal Services  
773.583.9191  
www.worldrelief.org/chicago

Victims of domestic and sexual violence:  
Life Span Center for Legal Services & Advocacy  
312.408.1210  
www.life-span.org

Insurance Benefits  
SEE ALSO PUBLIC BENEFITS

Legal Council for Health Justice  
312.427.8990  
www.legalcouncil.org

Chicago Legal Clinic  
charges fees based ability to pay  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services  
312.332.1624  
www.cvls.org

Intellectual Property  
The Law Project  
312.939.3638  
www.thelawproject.org

Lawyers for the Creative Arts  
312.649.4111  
www.law-arts.org

Juvenile Abuse And Neglect

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

For families in the child welfare system:

Family Defense Center  
charges fees based on ability to pay  
312.251.9800  
www.familydefensecenter.net

Landlord-Tenant/Eviction

Chicago Legal Clinic  
charges fees based ability to pay  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services  
in limited circumstances, represents landlords in addition to tenants  
312.332.1624  
www.cvls.org

Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing, Inc.  
312.347.7600  
www.lcbh.org

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

Uptown People’s Law Center  
773.769.1411  
www.uplcchicago.org

For evictions, voucher terminations or denials of admission based on criminal legal involvement:

Cabrini Green Legal Aid  
312.738.2452  
www.cgla.net
**Mediation**

Center for Conflict Resolution  
312.922.6464  
www.ccrchicago.org

**Prisoner Issues**

*For civil rights issues on behalf of prisoners:*

Uptown People’s Law Center  
773.769.1411  
www.uplcchicago.org

*For disabled persons:*

Equip for Equality  
312.341.0022  
800.537.2632 voice  
800.610.2779 TTY  
www.equipforequality.org

*For incarcerated mothers:*

Cabrini Green Legal Aid  
312.738.2452  
www.cgla.net

**Public Benefits**

Legal Council for Health Justice  
312.427.8990  
www.legalcouncil.org

Chicago Legal Clinic  
*charges fees based ability to pay*  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

Equip for Equality  
312.341.0022  
800.537.2632 voice  
800.610.2779 TTY toll free  
www.equipforequality.org

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org

**Real Estate Closings**

Chicago Legal Clinic  
*charges fees based ability to pay*  
773.731.1762  
www.clclaw.org

The Law Project  
312.939.3638  
www.thelawproject.org

**Small Business**

The Law Project  
312.939.3638  
www.thelawproject.org

**Special Education**

GO TO EDUCATION

**Taxes**

Center for Economic Progress, Tax Clinic  
312.252.0280  
www.economicprogress.org

Chicago Volunteer Legal Services  
312.332.1624  
www.cvls.org

**Veterans**

LAF  
312.341.1070  
www.lafchicago.org
John Marshall Law School Veterans Legal Support Center and Clinic
veteran benefits claims
312.427.2737
www.jmls.edu/veterans

Wrongful Convictions
Northwestern Law School Bluhm Legal Clinic, Center on Wrongful Convictions
312.503.8576
www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic
INFORMATION ABOUT COURT-BASED HELP DESKS

- Court-based help desks provide legal information or legal advice and help with forms for people without lawyers. If possible, find help before going to court.
- Information and resources are available for a wide variety of legal needs.
- Desks do not provide representation in court.
- Desks generally are first-come, first served and often fill up early.

Go to the websites below to learn more about the services at the desks and their hours:

**State Court Matters in Cook County**
www.cookcountycourt.org (under “For People without Lawyers”)

**Bankruptcy Advice Desk in the Northern District of Illinois**
www.ilnb.uscourts.gov

**U.S. District Court Advice Desk (by appointment only)**
www.ilnd.uscourts.gov/ProSe.aspx

**City of Chicago Administrative Hearings Advice Desk**
www.carpls.org

OUTSIDE OF COOK

Free or low cost legal assistance is also available outside Cook County. Visit www.IllinoisLegalAid.org for more information.

**In Southern and parts of Central Illinois:**

**Land of Lincoln Legal Services Foundation, Inc.**
visit the website to learn how to apply for legal help and for information about the specific offices
877.342.7891.
www.lollaf.org

**In Northern and parts of Central Illinois:**

**Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.**
visit the website to learn how to apply for legal help and for information about the specific offices
800.531.7057
www.pslegal.org

**In DuPage:**

**DuPage Legal Aid Services**
630.653.6212
www.dcba.org

For immigration matters in Central and Southern Illinois:

**The Immigration Project**
309.829.8703
www.immigrationproject.org