

Legal Representation Makes a Difference for Vulnerable, Low-Income Californians

What is the Shriver Program?

The Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act program was legislatively established in 2009 (AB590) and expanded in 2019 (AB330) to provide legal services to low-income people on critical livelihood issues like housing, child custody, domestic violence, and family guardianship. Since the program inception in 2011, eleven pilot projects have been funded. All projects involve collaborations between legal services agencies and the local superior courts. Program goals are to improve access to the legal system, court efficiency, and the quality of justice dispensed by California's courts.

PROJECT TYPE	COUNTIES SERVED
Eviction	Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Yolo
Child Custody	Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco
Guardianship & Conservatorship	Santa Barbara

A Range of Services are Available

Legal services agencies provide:

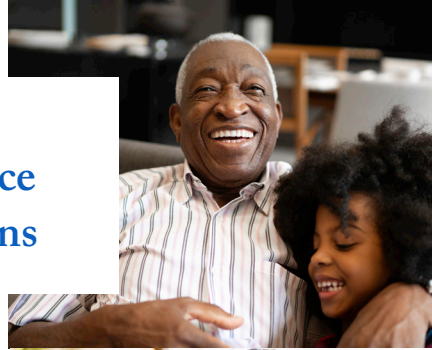
- **Legal representation** (a Shriver attorney represents the client and manages the case)
- **Unbundled legal services** (help with discrete tasks such as legal advice and preparation of forms)
- **Additional creative problem-solving efforts:** Two housing projects include **housing inspectors** to investigate allegations of poor housing conditions. One custody project has **social work interns** conduct thorough needs assessments, offer social service referrals, and provide counseling.

Court-based services include:

- **Expanded self-help assistance:** Several housing courts offer expanded self-help services, including **help preparing court papers**. One court staffs a **Probate Facilitator** to assist litigants with the complex paperwork required for guardianship and conservatorship petitions.
- **Special settlement programs:** A designated **Housing Master** facilitates mandatory settlement conferences in one housing court. **Shriver Settlement Conferences** are facilitated by a judicial officer in one custody court.

Study Shows Positive Impacts of Pilot Projects

An independent multi-year evaluation of the Shriver pilot projects compared outcomes between cases that involved Shriver services and those that did not. The study found a range of positive impacts for litigants and the court. Results are summarized on the reverse side.



How many people have been served?

From 2011 to 2019, a total of 43,266 low-income Californians received civil legal assistance through the Shriver Program. These services impacted 106,593 household members.

43K



Clients

107K



Household Members

HOUSING PROJECTS

39,461

TOTAL SERVED

55%

received representation by a Shriver attorney



CUSTODY PROJECTS

2,824

TOTAL SERVED

51%

received representation by a Shriver attorney



GUARDIANSHIP/CONSERVATORSHIP PROJECT

311

TOTAL CLIENTS SERVED BY LEGAL AID

41%

received representation by a Shriver attorney

670

TOTAL CLIENTS SERVED BY PROBATE FACILITATOR



Overall Impacts of the Shriver Program



Shriver attorneys educate litigants and help them settle their cases, affording them a voice in the outcome.

- **Eviction:** Shriver attorneys often brokered settlement agreements that provided tenants a “soft landing” while allowing landlords to regain possession of their property.
- **Custody:** Shriver attorneys often calmed emotional tensions between the parties, helping parents identify reasonable solutions.
- **Guardianship and conservatorship:** Shriver services often helped ease discord among family members and made uncontested care arrangements possible.



Shriver services improve court efficiency.

Litigants are better educated about the process and better prepared for hearings; filings are complete and accurate; and requests are reasonable and appropriate for the context:

- Clerks spend less time reviewing errant and incomplete paperwork.
- Judges spend less time educating litigants in the courtroom and having to handle unnecessary hearings and continuances.
- Judges receive more comprehensive information about the case, supporting their ability to make fair decisions.
- Because Shriver representation increases the likelihood of settlement, there is a decreased necessity for trials which are more resource-intensive for the court.

Shriver projects reach low-income litigants from marginalized communities and those who are vulnerable.

Many low-income litigants are at risk of being unable to effectively navigate the court system or of experiencing significant harm as a result of their court case. From 2011 to 2019, Shriver services assisted underserved populations:

79%

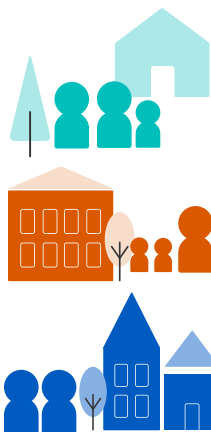
were people of color

39%

had a disability or chronic health condition

\$1,010/month

Shriver clients' median household income



Shriver projects provide low-income Californians with improved access to the legal system.

- **Eviction:** Tenants have only 5 days to file a response to an eviction complaint to avoid a default. Default judgments result in tenants losing their home without presenting their side of the case. In 2019, the average default rate across counties with Shriver housing projects was 40%. Among tenants receiving Shriver services, the default rate was close to zero.
- **Guardianship and conservatorship:** Shriver services helped litigants successfully file their petitions and complete the rigorous probate paperwork, which self-represented litigants often cannot do.

Shriver services support litigants' longer-term stability.

Shriver pilot projects help low-income litigants resolve their civil cases in ways that create more stability for them and their families.

- **Eviction:** Shriver attorneys often settled cases with terms that support tenants' longer-term housing stability. Most clients avoided a lockout and had extra time to move, with reduced debt and protected credit.
- **Custody:** Combining Shriver representation and Shriver Settlement Conferences yielded custody orders that were durable for 90% of families over 2 years. Sustained custody arrangements increase stability for children and reduce court congestion.
- **Guardianship and conservatorship:** Most cases were resolved with guardianship or conservatorship letters granted, ensuring stable and legal care arrangements for the children and dependent adults.

SUMMARY

Shriver pilot projects provide critical legal assistance to thousands of low-income individuals who are facing eviction, child custody disputes, or the need for a family guardianship. Shriver services lead to more settlements, fewer trials, and reduced demand on limited court resources. Case outcomes support the longer-term stability of litigants and their families. By enabling people to more meaningfully participate in the legal system and by safeguarding the involuntary waiver of rights, Shriver projects support access to justice for many low-income Californians.