

# SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

NEWS FROM FFLA, FORMERLY THE FLORIDA BAR FOUNDATION  
Volume 17 Issue no. 1

## FFLA grants \$93 million in IOTA funds to 35 grantees

The board of directors of FFLA approved a general distribution of \$89,748,976 in Interest on Trust Account (IOTA) funds to 35 Florida legal aid organizations at its Dec. 6, 2024 meeting (see chart, p. 3). Organizations must use the grant money within calendar year 2025. The board also approved using \$3,636,425 in IOTA funds for its Pro Bono Support and Enhancement grant program (see chart, p. 7). FFLA is the designated administrator of IOTA program.

"Because of a substantial increase in IOTA collections last fiscal year, FFLA is able to distribute to grantees 165% more IOTA grant funding and double Loan Repayment Assistance Program loans to legal aid lawyers from \$5,000 to \$10,000 each," Roberto R. Pardo, FFLA president, said.

"This funding is transformative for Florida's network of legal aid providers, allowing them to retain and hire more highly qualified legal professionals, expand facilitation of pro bono volunteerism and ultimately

increase the number of clients receiving legal assistance."

With approval from the Florida Supreme Court in October, FFLA also placed an additional \$142.8 million of IOTA collections in a reserve for future distribution to qualified grantee organizations.

The goal of FFLA's reserve is to hold a balance that can be used to fund grantees at consistent levels even when interest rates fluctuate, affecting the amount of collections year to year. Steady levels of funding allow grantees to plan more effectively for the future.

From 2022 to 2023, the number of qualified legal services providers employed by IOTA grantees increased from 587 to 639. As of Nov. 5, 2024, 691 are employed, an 18% increase.

Grantees also reported increasing the total number of clients they served from 114,002 in 2022 to 123,729 in 2023, reducing the number of clients they had to turn away due to a lack of resources.



*IOTA distributions funded Dade Legal Aid attorney Adriana Salazar, left, who helped client Eurides with a guardianship matter.*



*Coast to Coast Legal Aid of South Florida paralegal Rosa Diaz, left, welcomes a client to their Advance Directive Clinic for seniors. IOTA funding made the event possible.*



*FFLA President Roberto R. Pardo's term began July 1, 2024. He practices in the areas of criminal defense and personal injury in Miami. Pardo earned his law degree from the University of Miami School of Law. Pardo served on the board of directors of The Florida Bar Foundation, now FFLA, from 2007-2013. He rejoined the board in 2016 and has served on more than a dozen committees. He served eight years on the Eleventh Circuit Judicial Nomination Commission. He has also served on the boards of the Cuban American Bar Association, earning its Presidential Award in 2021, the Miami chapter of the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the League of Prosecutors. Pardo also served on the Eleventh Circuit Unlicensed Practice of Law Committee "D" and the Grievance Committee "B," for which he twice received a Meritorious Public Service Award.*

As I reflect on the first half of my term as FFLA's president, I am filled with profound gratitude for each of you who make our mission possible. The amended IOTA rule has had a remarkable impact on legal aid in Florida, increasing much needed funding and securing a foundation of steady funding in the future. But people, not just funding, have transformed countless lives in our state.

I want to especially recognize the Florida Supreme Court's forward-thinking that has expanded access to lawyers, exemplifying the highest ideals of our justice system.

The support of our banking partners, who have championed access to legal aid through participation in IOTA, has enabled us to fund 35 legal aid non-profits that provide direct legal services. Their commitment to corporate citizenship sets an excellent example.

To our partners at The Florida Bar, your leadership and encouragement have contributed to more lawyers making donations to legal aid and providing pro bono services every year.

Finally, the expertise and compassion of our grantees' legal professionals help tens of thousands each year, providing critical civil legal aid that helps families stay in their homes, seniors protect their life savings, and domestic violence survivors find safety.

As I enter the second half of my term, I am thrilled to lead an organization dedicated to embracing a generational opportunity to strengthen and expand our state's civil legal aid delivery system. This effort is crucial in upholding the Rule of Law and ensuring equal access to justice for all. Thank you for your continued support.

Roberto R. Pardo

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# IOTA distributions fund 35 legal aid organizations

In 2024, **Emerald Coast Legal Aid** helped Anna\*, who had rented a home with an agreement that part of her rent would go toward purchasing the home. The owner died and his children decided to evict Anna. Her legal aid lawyer defended the eviction and the owners then allowed Anna to purchase the home.

Funded by IOTA, **Bay Area Legal Services** attorneys helped Patty\* adopt her nephew soon after he was born. Patty's brother, the child's father, signed a consent as he is in poor health and unable to care for the child. The child has special health needs related to eating and nutrition, which are closely monitored by Patty, a school nurse.

**Legal Aid of Manasota** helped domestic violence survivor Jenecia\*, whose abuser was physically violent and disrupting her personal and work life. The abuser created fake social media accounts, sharing all of Jenecia's personal information, including photos of her child and her address. The way Jenecia was portrayed in the fake accounts resulted in unknown men contacting her. After a highly contested hearing, a long-term Injunction for Protection was granted.

Using IOTA funding, **Legal Aid Service of Broward County's** Consumer Law Unit successfully defended against wage garnishment for 15 low-income clients, generating \$195,925 in economic benefits. IOTA funding also supported the work of LASBC's Housing Unit, which prevented 55 clients and their households from being evicted or foreclosed from housing.

Wilma\*, a disabled 84-year-old woman, came to **Legal Services of Greater Miami** because she was facing foreclosure of her reverse mortgage. Her bank claimed she had ceased using the home as her principal residence. LSGMI filed counterclaims against the bank alleging she did not breach the contract and that the bank violated the Florida Consumer Collection Practices Act. A settlement was negotiated and the bank dismissed the case, withdrew its demand for money, and reinstated Wilma's mortgage agreement. LSGMI voluntarily dismissed its counterclaims.

## 2025 IOTA Distribution Grantees (distributed Dec. 30, 2024)

### Region 1

Legal Aid Foundation of Tallahassee	\$232,447
Legal Services of North Florida	\$4,091,060
Emerald Coast Legal Aid	\$929,786

### Region 2

Jacksonville Area Legal Aid	\$4,831,927
Three Rivers Legal Services	\$2,482,084

### Region 3

Brevard County Legal Aid	\$2,101,241
Community Legal Services	\$7,609,678
Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Assoc.	\$5,108,189
Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society	\$1,738,959

### Region 4

Bay Area Legal Services	\$6,636,062
Community Law Program	\$901,639
Gulfcoast Legal Services	\$3,381,146
Legal Aid of Manasota	\$1,127,049
St. Michael's Legal Center for Women and Children	\$901,639

### Region 5

Florida Rural Legal Services	\$1,564,527
Heart of Florida Legal Aid Society	\$974,578
Lee County Legal Aid Society	\$1,218,223
Legal Aid Service of Collier County	\$1,461,868
Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County	\$7,217,971

### Region 6

Catholic Legal Services	\$719,972
Coast to Coast Legal Aid	\$1,919,924
Legal Aid Service of Broward County	\$5,105,253

### Region 7

Catholic Legal Services	\$3,071,033
Community Justice Project	\$981,608
CABA Pro Bono Legal Services	\$1,346,206
Dade Legal Aid	\$2,629,309
Legal Services of Greater Miami	\$2,299,769

### Statewide

Americans for Immigrant Justice	\$4,726,275
Florida Health Justice Project	\$1,479,529
Florida Justice Institute	\$986,353
Florida Legal Services	\$5,535,084
Florida's Children First	\$493,176
IDignity	\$657,568
Innocence Project of Florida	\$986,353
Lawyers for Children America	\$986,353
Southern Legal Counsel	\$1,315,138

**Total**

**\$89,748,976**

\*Client names have been changed to protect their privacy.



# December Board of Directors report

The FFLA Board of Directors met in person in Jacksonville on Dec. 6, 2024. Jacksonville University College of Law hosted the meeting. Prior to the meeting, grantee Florida Legal Services gave a presentation on their Statewide Training Initiative, and grantee Jacksonville Area Legal Aid presented on their Veterans' Benefits Program. The Board extends its gratitude to the presenters for their informative and well-prepared sessions. The major actions of the board and reports received included:

## FFLA officers elected for 2025-26

Pursuant to its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, the Nominating Committee of FFLA presented, and the Board elected, the following officer nominees for a term beginning July 1, 2025, and concluding June 30, 2026:

President: Ashley N. Sybesma  
 President-elect: Maria G. Gonzalez  
 First Vice President: Ret. Judge Hugh Carithers  
 Second Vice President: Ret. Justice Peggy A. Quince  
 Immediate Past President: Roberto R. Pardo

## IOTA Grantee Reserve Funds Investment Sub-Policy approved

The Board reviewed and approved a sub-policy for the investment of grantee IOTA reserves. The purpose of the fixed income allocation is to invest grantee IOTA reserve funds in a conservative, short-term fixed income portfolio designed to meet liquidity annually. The portfolio will maintain a short duration posture with maturities aligned with the anticipated distributions. Additionally, investments will be limited to U.S. Government, its agencies, and/or Certificates of Deposit.

The primary objectives of this investment portfolio include:

1. Preservation of capital and protection of principal.
2. Safety of funds and investments.
3. Production of income consistent with low volatility of principal.
4. Structure of the portfolio to meet liquidity requirements that may occur annually, depending on IOTA collections for the given Fiscal Year.

All realized gains and interest earned in this reserve account will accrue to the sole benefit of the grantees in accordance with FFLA's IOTA Spending & Reserve Policy for Grantees. All new reserves shall be approved in advance by the Florida Supreme Court per the IOTA rule.

## Law School Civil Legal Clinics suspended pending further review

Based on two recommendations emanating initially from a Law School Civil Legal Clinic Work Group followed by the Grants Committee's recommendation, the Board approved the following actions:

1. Suspend Law School Civil Legal Clinic Grant Program.
2. Retain the Law School Civil Legal Clinic Work Group to continue exploring alternative ways to promote public service among law students, making it an integral part of their law school experience.
3. Submit further recommendations to the Board by May 1, 2025, in time for FY 2025-26 budget considerations.

FFLA will also communicate the decision to law schools while underscoring FFLA's commitment to law schools and their students. The Work Group will solicit ideas from law schools as to how FFLA may support and help law schools help law students.

## Pro Bono Support and Enhancement Grants approved

The Board approved the continuation of FFLA's Pro Bono Support & Enhancement Grants Program (PBS&E) and further approved funding in the total amount of \$3,636,425.50 (see chart, p. 7). While the Board initially allocated \$5 million for the program, it voted to roll the unspent allocated amount, \$1,363,574.50, into the December IOTA distribution.

The PBS&E distribution plan was designed to provide additional funding for grantees not federally funded through Legal Services Corporation who substantially complied with the grant's performance metrics and was essentially based on grantees' actual pro bono expenditures as reported by them.

In addition, the rollover funds allow Legal Services Corporation-funded grantees to receive an incremental increase in IOTA funds with the understanding that pro bono metrics will be gauged and collected from all grantees receiving IOTA funds. All grantees present at the Board meeting were reminded that IOTA funds distributed in December may be used for pro bono efforts, provided expenditures are consistent with the IOTA Rule.

## \$1,483,460 approved for 2025 Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP)

Previously, the Board allocated \$2,000,000 in LRAP funding for 2025, representing funding for up to 200 LRAP loans at \$10,000 each, up from \$5,000 in past years. FFLA received 154 LRAP loan applications for CY 2025 loans.

Ninety-six applications were active LRAP participants that remained eligible and in good standing for the program. Fifty-eight applications were either first time applicants or returning applicants from prior years. The average amount of student loan debt for these 154 applicants was reported at \$164,884.

The Board approved funding 151 applications in the total amount of \$1,483,460.

See BOARD, p. 5

## 14 Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowships approved with assistance from Family Law Section

The Board approved 14 Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowships designed to allow law students to work with FFLA grantees for 10 weeks from May to August while getting paid. The Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowship program was revived in 2023 after a hiatus due to the pandemic and lack of funding.

The fellowships introduce law students to real time experiences with clients, courts, and lawyers engaged in handling civil legal aid issues on behalf of low-income clients. Four fellowships were sponsored, for the second year in a row, by The Family Law Section of The Florida Bar.

### Presentation and review of audited financial statements

Audit Committee Chair Steve Salzer briefly presented Audited Financial Statements for FFLA and The Florida Bar Foundation Endowment (FBFE) as prepared by Carr Riggs & Ingram CPAs (CRI).

Heather Mosier, a partner with CRI, was present to answer questions and presented financial highlights for FFLA and FBFE related to the FYE June 30, 2024. After an executive session, Chair Salzer announced that the Board accepted the audit subject to completion of final supplemental schedules and authorized Mr. MacKenzie as Executive Director and Mr. Frye as Director of Finance to sign the applicable representation letters related to the audit process upon approval by Ms. Mosier.

### Executive Director's report

Donny MacKenzie provided a short report that provided directors with required annual information related to FFLA's updated schedule of insurance coverage and briefly reviewed several issues pertinent to grantees, many of which were in attendance in person and virtually.

Earlier in the meeting, a matter relating to the Executive Committee's November 13, 2024, approval of revised Objective Standards relating to FFLA's implementation of the IOTA Rule was taken off of the consent agenda for later discussion. That matter was then taken up and Mr. MacKenzie shared a brief history of the genesis and development of the revised Objective Standards. Presiding Officer Sybesma then invited any grantee in attendance an opportunity to offer comments not previously made either verbally or in writing relating to the revised Objective Standards.

Afterward, the Board went into executive session to discuss the revisions and various comments made by grantees regarding them. After a thorough review and discussion, the Board voted unanimously (with one recusal) to move forward and not disturb the Executive Committee's November 13 decision adopting and approving the standards.

*(Note: Grantees are encouraged to submit questions about the revisions to a review committee established as part of the revised Objective Standards. Ret. Justice Peggy Quince, Mr. Joseph Jacquot and the current president of FFLA's board or his/her delegate will constitute the review committee. To ensure transparency, all questions received—without attribution—along with their answers, will be posted publicly. Grantees are also encouraged to collaborate through the Florida Civil Legal Aid Association to consolidate questions and reduce duplication, thereby enhancing efficiency.)*

### Next Meeting

The Board's next scheduled meeting will be on March 14, 2025, in Gainesville, Fla., at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. FFLA is most grateful for the warm hospitality provided by Jacksonville University College of Law and looks forward to a productive and pleasant meeting in Gainesville.

## Application for new IOTA distribution grantees launches



FFLA has developed and formally launched an application process for qualified non-profit organizations providing free civil legal aid services to apply for qualified grantee organization status with FFLA.

"In an effort to expand the number of civil legal aid providers in our network,

FFLA has created an application that allows our staff and board to evaluate potential new grantees," FFLA President

Roberto R. Pardo said.

"The application ensures that all potential grantees are thoroughly vetted and have an opportunity to provide detailed information about their services."

FFLA distributes IOTA funds collected each fiscal year no later than six months after the end of the fiscal year. In December, FFLA distributed \$93 million to 35 qualified grantee organizations.

Per Florida Bar Rule 5-1.1(g), FFLA must select qualified grantee organizations based on objective standards FFLA developed. The application incorporates those standards, as well as questions about financial stability, staffing and client selection.

# Donation roundup

## CY PRES AWARDS

FFLA recently received two cy pres awards totaling \$309,957 from two class action settlements. FFLA will use the awards to fund legal aid throughout Florida.

In *Contreras v. Nationstar Mortgage*, mortgage borrowers in California, Florida and Illinois who made payments online or over the phone claimed fees were not properly disclosed to them. Class members from Florida joined the suit pursuant to Florida's Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act. Judge Morrison C. England, Jr., Senior United States District Judge for the Eastern District of California, approved the cy pres distribution. FFLA will use the \$265,130 award to fund grants that support low-income Floridians subjected to deceptive and unfair trade practices.

In *Wenston Desue v. 20\_20 Eye Care Network, Inc.*, a settlement was reached for class members whose patient information was accessed, removed and deleted by an unauthorized individual in a data breach. Judge Rodolfo A. Ruiz II of the U.S. District Court Southern District of

Florida approved the plan for distribution of the remaining settlement funds. As a result, FFLA received a \$44,827 cy pres award.

"FFLA is honored to be the recipient of these awards, as it reflects the trust and confidence the courts have in our ability to administer funding for legal aid," FFLA President Roberto R. Pardo said. "Our reputation for transparency and facilitating impactful work ensures that cy pres funding is used in a responsible and efficient manner."

Under cy pres, courts can approve distribution of unclaimed class action funds to a charitable organization that could vindicate class member rights in the future. The term cy pres comes from the French, "cy près comme possible," meaning "as near as possible." The doctrine often is applied in class action cases where full restitution to all injured parties is impossible or infeasible.



## FAMILY LAW SECTION DONATION WILL FUND FOUR LEGAL AID SUMMER FELLOWS



The Florida Bar Family Law Section has donated \$39,600 to FFLA to fund four 2025 Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellows. FFLA's Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowship program provides stipends for second- and third-year law students to spend 10 weeks working at a

legal aid organization that is an FFLA grantee.

More than 40 law students applied to be a 2025 fellow.

Fourteen have been offered placements at legal aid host organizations. Four of those 14 will be funded by the Family Law Section and spend at least 50 percent of their time on family-law-focused duties.

Each fellow will receive a \$9,000 stipend and host organizations will receive additional funding to cover payroll taxes. FFLA funds the Civil Legal Aid Summer Fellowship program with non-IOTA collections and donations. In 2025, FFLA will offer the opportunity to sponsor 2026 summer fellows to any Florida Bar section.

For more information or to make a donation, visit [FundingFLA.org](https://FundingFLA.org) or contact Development Director Michelle Fonseca at 407-960-7000 or [mfonseca@FundingFLA.org](mailto:mfonseca@FundingFLA.org).

## SAVE THE DATE

### THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 2025



Join us for our annual award ceremony and breakfast as we recognize the winners of the Medal of Honor, Doyle Award, Curran Award and more.

Scan QR code for sponsorships, tickets and more.



Medal of Honor Award Presenting Sponsor

# Eighteen grantees receive 2024-25 pro bono grants

The first year of FFLA's Pro Bono Support and Enhancement grant program, in which 20 grantees received \$3,687,158, ended in September. Grantees' final reports showed that pro bono staff positions collectively increased by at least 144% and 4,698 cases were accepted by pro bono attorneys. The

number of attorneys participating in the grantees' pro bono networks grew from 7,620 to 10,193. The chart below illustrates the 18 organizations that will receive grants totaling \$3,636,425 in 2024-25, and their successes during the first year of the grant program.

<b>Brevard County Legal Aid</b> \$141,000 In 2024, BCLA increased its pro bono network of attorneys by 68% and started a new clinic at a low-income housing complex.		<b>Jacksonville Area Legal Aid</b> \$408,000 JALA increased their number of cases accepted by pro bono attorneys by 111% and launched a weekly Eviction Diversion Court Program in 2024.	
<b>CABA Pro Bono Project</b> \$75,000 CABA hired a pro bono coordinator in 2024 and expanded services to include elderly low-income community members.		<b>Legal Aid Foundation of Tallahassee</b> \$120,000 In 2024, LAFT increased their number of clients by 50%, created a pro bono intake coordinator role and hired a full-time staff attorney.	
<b>Community Law Program</b> \$19,000 Building on last year's award, CLP will hire pro bono staff and continue its advice clinic.		<b>Legal Aid of Manasota</b> \$285,000 LAM increased their pro bono staff from 3 to 5, and collaborated with other agencies to form a Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project in 2024.	
<b>Dade Legal Aid</b> \$900,000 In 2024, DLA generated 22% more referrals to private attorneys, doubled their pro bono staff and streamlined intake and transfer processes.		<b>Legal Aid Service of Broward Cty.</b> \$370,000 With their 23-24 funding, LASBC recruited 79 new pro bono attorneys and began offering immigration and estate planning services.	
<b>Florida Health Justice Project</b> \$50,000 FHJP expanded services to low-income clients facing Medicaid coverage termination and hosted its first Ask-a-Lawyer event in 2024.		<b>Legal Aid Soc. of Palm Beach</b> \$225,000 LASPBC increased their pro bono assignments by 160% in 2024.	
<b>Florida Legal Services</b> \$50,000 Using its grant, FLS started its pro bono program in 2024.		<b>Legal Aid Soc. of Orange County</b> \$700,000 LASOCBA increased the number of clients served by pro bono attorneys by 50% and expanded services to social security cases.	
<b>Gulfcoast Legal Services</b> \$53,425 2024-25 will be Gulfcoast Legal Services' first year as a Pro Bono Support and Enhancement grantee.		<b>Northwest Florida Legal Services</b> \$30,000 This program restarted its pro bono program, reinstating a staff position and reconnecting with attorneys who had previously volunteered.	
<b>IDignity</b> \$25,000 IDignity built an infrastructure for its pro bono program and will continue recruiting lawyer and law student volunteers.		<b>Seminole County Bar Assoc. Legal Aid</b> \$60,000 SCBALAS increased the number of pro bono hours provided by 68% and the number of pro bono cases accepted by 40%.	
<b>Innocence Project of Florida</b> \$50,000 IPF began a pro bono program with FFLA's funding, hiring a paralegal to manage the program and establish its infrastructure.		<b>Southern Legal Counsel</b> \$75,000 In 2024, SLC added a second attorney to its pro bono program and trained pro bono attorneys.	



## Mission

To increase access  
to the justice system  
for people of limited means,  
FFLA funds legal services,  
develops innovative tools  
and programs, and supports  
legal aid providers  
and the courts.

[www.FundingFLA.org](http://www.FundingFLA.org)

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## Honor a legal hero with a Legacy Brick



*By Maria C. Gonzalez,  
FFLA First Vice President*

I will forever be grateful that my path crossed with someone as special and unique as Burton Young. You might have known Burton as a president of The Florida Bar, or as a president of The Florida

Bar Foundation. Over 26 years, I knew him as his associate and later, law partner.

Burton passed away in March. The words that come to mind when I remember him are, "it is no surprise." Knowing the fabric that made up Burton, it is no surprise that multiple professionalism awards were created in his honor.

Burton was dedicated to the practice of family law, so it is

no surprise that he was one of a handful who created the inaugural exam for board certification in marital and family law 39 years ago.

Burton instilled in me the need to mentor, provide pro bono service and to engage in voluntary Bar service. It is no surprise that he was so proud when I was appointed by the Board of Governors to be a Florida Bar Foundation board member.

So, it should be no surprise that I have honored a legal legend like Burton with an FFLA Legacy Brick. It will forever seal his commitment to improve our legal profession and access to justice that he held so close.

I encourage you to consider purchasing a brick for FFLA's Legacy Garden to honor a lawyer that has impacted your life like Burton did mine. (Scan QR code to view Legacy Brick options.)

