



**Appendix A:**  
**Final Report on the Survey of Clients**  
*Provided with Advice or Brief Services*  
*by Pennsylvania Legal Aid Programs Funded*  
*under the Access to Justice Act*

*Report Prepared for the*  
*Pennsylvania IOLTA Board*

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**About This Report** This report, related to funding received as a result of the Access to Justice Act (42 Pa. C. S. Section 4901 et. seq.), was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Lawyers Trust Account Board (the PA IOLTA Board), with data provided by the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN, Inc.) and by the ten legal aid programs that participated in the Client Survey. The report was produced for the PA IOLTA Board by The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.

Attachments to this report containing details about the data and methodology used in the Client Survey described in the report, are

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**Prepared for the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board**

**By**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overview

This report summarizes the principal findings, conclusions and recommendations from interviews with a representative sample of 400 clients whose cases were closed by advice-only or brief services from Pennsylvania legal aid programs in 2011.

This study (the “Client Survey”) was a key element of a comprehensive evaluation of the telephone-based advice-only and brief services provided by Pennsylvania legal aid programs.

The Client Survey encompassed all ten civil legal aid programs in Pennsylvania that operate telephone-based legal assistance systems. They included nine regional programs serving the general low-income population and one specialized provider of health law services.

One purpose of the Client Survey was to address an important question raised in a May 2011 performance audit of the Access to Justice Act (AJA) conducted by the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (the “Performance Audit Report”): how are the 50 percent of cases closed through advice (including both “advice-only” and “brief services”) resolved?

A second purpose was to shed light on another question raised in the Performance Audit Report: how effective is *telephone-based* legal assistance? Telephone legal “helplines” have grown in importance among Pennsylvania legal aid programs and across the country as legal aid organizations seek to help more people with limited resources and to improve access to their services, particularly for people facing barriers such as physical disability, lack of access to public transportation and location in rural areas far from program offices.

An additional purpose was to assess the extent to which the results of telephone-based legal assistance are affected by any or all of three major factors: whether clients had received advice-only or brief services; whether clients had been served primarily by telephone or in-person; and what types of specific legal problems clients faced.

The Client Survey was conducted by The Resource for Great Programs, Inc., working with a Steering Committee and leaders of the ten programs to implement a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey of 400 clients, with cases selected at random from all those closed as advice-only or brief services by Pennsylvania legal aid programs in the latter half of 2011. Procedures and protocols were developed to make sure the Client Survey produced valid and reliable information while also aligning with an informal opinion of the Pennsylvania Bar Association regarding protection of the confidentiality of clients whose perspectives were sought in the survey.

### Summary of Findings on Advice-Only and Brief Services Cases

The Client Survey provided for the first time a picture of what happens to clients who receive advice-only or brief services from Pennsylvania legal aid programs. It revealed that:

- **One out of every three recipients of advice-only or brief services reported positive outcomes that were tangible and measurable** (page 8). For example, they were granted custody of their children, obtained the public benefits they applied for, or avoided a crisis such as eviction or foreclosure.

- **A Majority of Clients Achieved Their Goals** (page 10). Often all that clients desired was simply to talk with a legal advocate to learn the legal implications of situations they were facing and to get advice about what to do.
- **Almost half of the cases produced complete or partial solutions to clients' legal problems** (page 11).
- **Six out of ten recipients achieved results they deemed favorable** (page 12). In some cases the result was dealing with a major crisis, such as a suspension of heating fuel delivery in the midst of winter. In other cases, it was bringing closure to a lingering dispute such as repairs promised by a landlord but never delivered.
- **Eight out of ten recipients reported that the legal aid program was helpful to them** (page 13).

These findings shed light on the question raised by the auditors: is the advice being provided to clients “effective?” For a strong majority of clients, the answer was “Yes” – six out of ten achieved results they deemed “favorable,” and eight out of ten obtained services they found “helpful.” The evidence shows that these services are not only effective; they are essential. Without them, thousands of low-income families a year would be forced to confront their legal problems without any legal help at all, with consequences that in some circumstances would be devastating.

## **Summary of Overall Findings on Telephone-Based Legal Assistance**

In addition to clarifying the results being achieved through advice-only and brief services generally, the Client Survey shed light on the effectiveness of those services when delivered via one of the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems that have come into wide use by Pennsylvania legal aid programs since 2000. The Client Survey revealed that:

1. ***Legal aid programs' telephone-based legal assistance systems are more than “hotlines”*** (page 18). They are serving as the “front door” of a sophisticated, multi-faceted service delivery approach that performs intake, triage and case assignment by telephone for the whole of array of legal services offered by the program. These services include advice-only and brief services (over the telephone or at a program office), appointments at legal clinics or with pro bono attorneys, or extended representation by program advocates if the situation and available resources warrant it.
2. ***The majority of clients of telephone-based assistance receive follow-up from the program after having been served*** (page 19). In this respect, the Client Survey affirmed that the Pennsylvania telephone-based legal assistance systems are in alignment with one of the best practices recommended by the 2002 Hotline Study.
3. ***Pennsylvania legal aid clients are benefiting from best practices developed through a decade of research and technical assistance by the legal aid community on telephone-based legal assistance*** (page 20).
4. ***The vast majority – between 79 and 96 percent - of clients served by telephone took follow-up action on the advice they were given*** (page 21).
5. ***Between 50 and 88 percent of those who took action said it worked “very well” for them*** (page 23).

6. ***Telephone-based services achieved significant results for clients*** (page 24). Approximately half of clients achieved their goals “completely” or “somewhat.” Twenty nine percent achieved positive outcomes beyond receipt of advice-only or brief services.
7. ***One-half of the clients served by telephone achieved complete or partial solutions to their legal problems*** (page 25). This was comparable to, or slightly better than, the results found by the 2002 Hotline Study (page 26).
8. ***Six out of ten clients considered the results of their cases to be “favorable”*** (page 26).
9. ***Three out of four clients of telephone-based assistance said their experience was positive*** (page 27).

These findings provide strong evidence that from a clients’ perspective, telephone-based advice and brief services are providing not only broader and more convenient access to services but real solutions to legal problems and outcomes clients deem favorable, even in some cases where the facts of the situation are not favorable to the client’s preferred outcome. Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that telephone-based legal assistance is a legitimate vehicle for effective, high-quality assistance to clients.

### **Summary of Findings Regarding Impacts of Major Variables on Effectiveness of Telephone-Based Legal Assistance**

The Client Survey found that:

1. ***There were no large differences in results between advice-only cases and brief services cases*** (page 31).
2. ***Marginally better results were reported for in-person services than for services provided primarily by telephone*** (page 32).
  - The slight advantage of in-person assistance suggests that programs should continue to assign difficult cases or clients with extra challenges to program offices for in-person services (page 36). Special screening procedures should be applied at intake to ensure that these cases are flagged for in-person service.
  - The fact that the advantage of in-person assistance is so slight suggests that telephone-based assistance can produce good results for the majority of clients whose situations do not pose special challenges calling for in-person services (page 36).
3. ***The results achieved by clients were found NOT to be correlated with the legal problems they faced*** (page 36). Differences in results might indeed exist, but the sample sizes for the Client Survey were not large enough to say with confidence that some problems are more amenable to telephone-based legal assistance than others.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The Client Survey sheds light on the question raised by the Performance Audit Report: what results are achieved by clients in the 50 percent of the total cases handled by AJA-funded legal aid programs that are resolved by advice – either advice-only or brief services cases?

Advice-only and brief services are legal aid's "emergency room" cases. The evidence shows that these services are not only effective; they are essential. Without them, thousands of low-income families a year would be forced to confront their legal problems without any legal help at all, with consequences that in some circumstances would be devastating.

Another issue on which the Client Survey provides additional insight concerns the results achieved by clients when the advice-only or brief services are delivered by telephone. The Client Survey provides strong evidence that from a client perspective, telephone-based advice and brief services are not only effective but provide more convenient access to services and enable vastly more people to get legal help than would be possible through only traditional face-to-face methods with the same amount of resources.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that telephone-based legal assistance is a legitimate vehicle for effective, high-quality assistance to clients. For a strong majority of clients, these services are enabling many thousands of people a year across Pennsylvania to address simple legal problems quickly, with much better results than they could get on their own.

## I. INTRODUCTION – PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

This report summarizes the principal findings, conclusions and recommendations from interviews with a representative sample of 400 clients whose cases were closed by “advice-only” or “brief services” from Pennsylvania legal aid programs in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

This study (the “Client Survey”) was a key element of a comprehensive evaluation of the telephone-based advice-only and brief legal services provided by Pennsylvania legal aid programs. Separate reports describing the evaluation and assessment of Pennsylvania legal aid programs and their alignment with “best practices” for telephone-based legal assistance are available from the PA IOLTA Board.<sup>2</sup>

**Background.** In May 2011, the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget & Finance Committee released the results of its performance audit of Pennsylvania’s Access to Justice Act (AJA), which recommended that the General Assembly consider making the AJA fee and surcharge permanent to provide a more stable funding stream for civil legal aid.

The Performance Audit Report<sup>3</sup> recommended a “follow-up process” to determine whether telephone-based legal assistance provided by Pennsylvania legal aid programs is effective. Clarity was sought because “[c]ase resolution was unknown for the 50 percent of cases that were resolved through advice to clients.”

## This Report at a Glance

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<sup>1</sup> “Advice only” refers to legal advice provided by a legal aid program to an eligible client. “Brief services” (also called “Limited Action”) are matters in which a legal aid program took limited action(s) on behalf of an eligible client that addressed the client’s legal problem that is not so complex or extended as to require an entry of appearance in a court or administrative hearing. Examples include communications by letter, telephone or other means to a third party; preparation of a simple legal document such as a routine power of attorney; or assisting a person who is representing oneself in a court or administrative law proceedings with the preparation of documents.

<sup>2</sup> See “*An Analysis of Best Practices Applied by Pennsylvania Legal Aid Programs in Delivering Telephone-Based Legal Assistance*,” (the “Best Practices Report”) available from the PA IOLTA Board.

<sup>3</sup> See “*A Performance Audit of Pennsylvania’s Access to Justice Act*,” Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, May 2011, page S-5.



In response, the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board undertook a comprehensive evaluation of telephone-based intake and legal assistance. To conduct the evaluation the PA IOLTA Board:

- Invited ten major Pennsylvania legal aid programs that provide telephone-based intake and legal assistance to participate in the Client Survey. (See Exhibit 1, page 4 for a map of the service areas covered by the ten programs.)
- Established a Steering Committee that included representatives of several of the AJA-funded legal services programs, Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN, Inc.), and the IOLTA Board.
- Engaged *The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.*, (“The Resource”) to provide technical assistance with this effort.<sup>4</sup>

**Purposes of the Client Survey.** One central purpose was to address an important question raised in the Performance Audit Report: how are the 50 percent of cases closed through advice (including both advice-only and brief services) resolved? Data from the Client Survey were used to address the following questions:

- What actions, if any, did clients take after receiving legal advice and assistance?
- Was the advice helpful?
- What outcomes resulted from the legal assistance clients received?
- Did contacting Legal Aid help clients achieve their goals?
- Were clients satisfied with the results?

Another purpose was to shed light on the effectiveness of telephone-based legal assistance, which has grown in importance among Pennsylvania legal aid programs and across the country as legal aid organizations seek to help more people with limited resources and to

### Key Elements of the Client Survey

- **Ten participating legal aid programs** (see list and map on page 4).
- **400 clients**, randomly sampled from the 10 programs (between 26 and 58 clients per program, depending on case volumes).
- **All clients provided informed consent** to participate prior to being contacted by the researchers.
- **Data collected via computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey** conducted by Northwestern Michigan College under contract with The Resource for Great Programs.
- **Sampling period:** Clients served from July 1 through December 15, 2011.
- **Interviews conducted in February and March 2012**
- **Sample included:**
  - Cases closed by either advice-only or brief services.
  - Not cases closed by extended representation.
  - Clients served either by telephone or in-person.
  - All legal problem types except those involving domestic violence.\*
- **Sample stratified by:**
  - *Phone-based* versus *in-person* cases.
  - *Advice-only* versus *brief services*
  - *Legal problem* – Most frequent four types handled by each program plus random sample of all other types.

\* Cases involving domestic violence were excluded from the Survey out of concern that any follow-up contact with these clients could put some in danger.

<sup>4</sup> *The Resource* is a national corporation dedicated to providing strategic support to civil justice programs that seek to expand access to justice for low-income people. Details about this organization may be obtained at [www.GreatPrograms.org](http://www.GreatPrograms.org).

improve access to their services, particularly for people facing barriers such as physical disability, lack of access to public transportation and location in rural areas far from program offices.

Data from the Client Survey provided context for better understanding of:

- The impact of whether legal assistance was provided by telephone or in-person on the results that were achieved.
- The impact of whether the service was advice only or brief services (such as a call or a letter to an opposing party on the client's behalf) on the results that were achieved.
- The impact of a client's legal problem on the results that were achieved – for example, whether the client was seeking prevention of an eviction from rental housing or custody of one's children.

**Approach.** The Resource worked with the Steering Committee and leaders of the ten programs to conduct a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey of 400 clients, with cases selected at random from all those closed as advice-only or brief services by Pennsylvania legal aid programs in the latter half of 2011. Procedures and protocols were developed to make sure the Client Survey produced valid and reliable information while also aligning with an informal opinion of the Pennsylvania Bar Association regarding protection of the confidentiality of clients whose perspectives were sought in the survey.

**Overview of the Report.** Following this Introduction, Section II provides an overview of the ten programs included in the Client Survey. Section III describes the methodology that was used – a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey of a probability sample of clients provided with advice-only or brief services by the 10 programs over a 5-1/2 month period ending in December, 2011.

Section IV presents findings on the first goal of the Client Survey, which was to learn what results are achieved by clients after they have received advice-only or brief services from a Pennsylvania legal aid program, a question raised by the legislative auditors in their May 2011 Performance Audit Report.

Section V presents findings on the second goal of the Client Survey, which was to assess the effectiveness of telephone-based legal assistance received by legal aid clients in Pennsylvania. This was the second question raised in the May 2011 report by the legislative auditors.

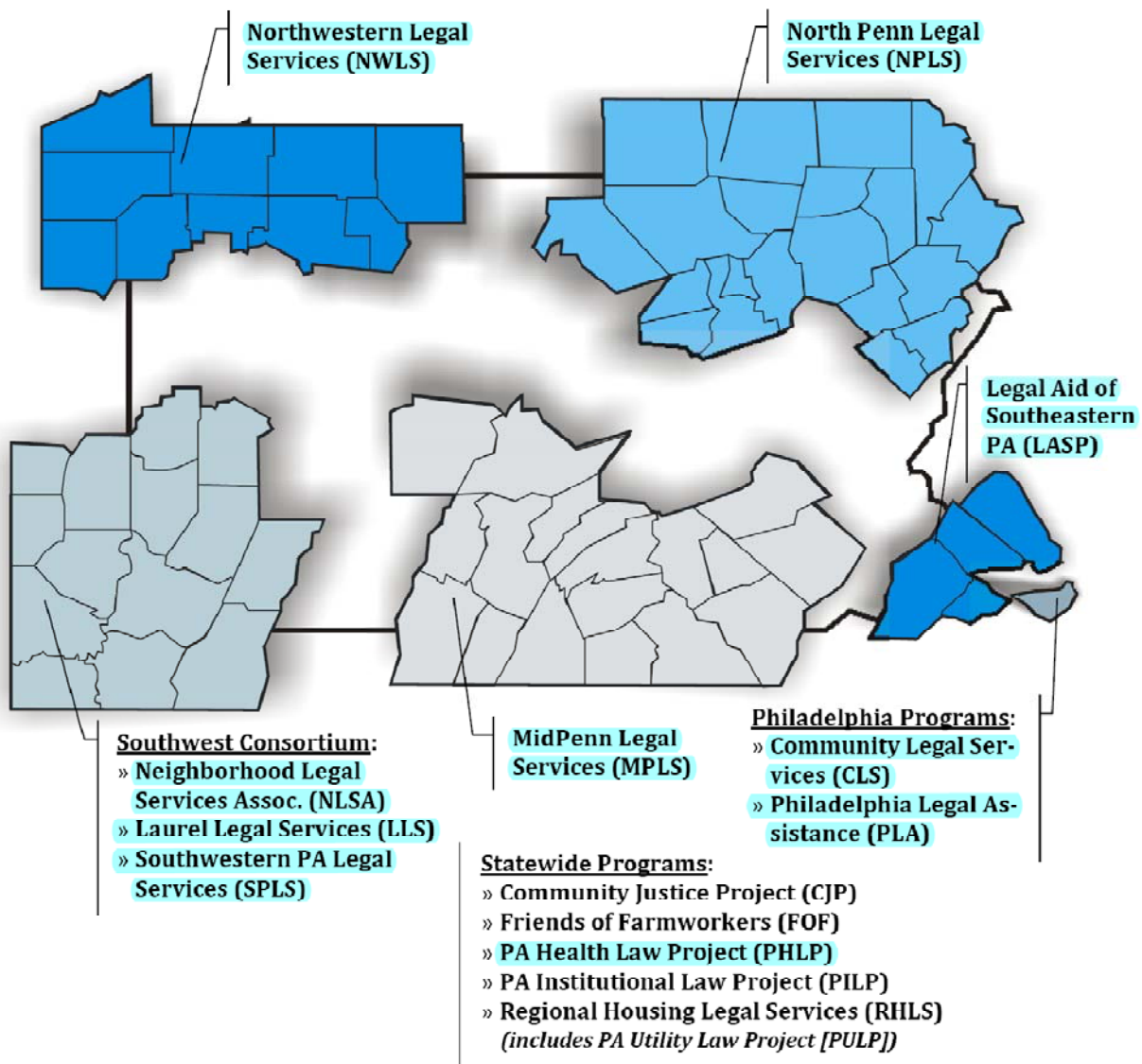
Section VI presents the results of a further analysis of the Client Survey data regarding the impact on results of three major factors: whether clients had received advice-only or brief services; whether clients had been served primarily by telephone or in-person; and whether results were better or worse depending on the specific legal problems faced by clients.

And Section VII summarizes the overall conclusions from the Client Survey.

## II. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THE CLIENT SURVEY

Exhibit 1 below highlights the ten programs whose clients were included in the survey and the geographic areas they cover.<sup>5</sup>

**Exhibit 1**



<sup>5</sup> One of the programs in the Client Survey, Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA), does not receive AJA funding but was included in the Study because of its importance as the operator of the telephone-based legal assistance system serving Philadelphia, the largest city in the state.

Exhibit 2 below summarizes the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems in place in the ten programs. Below we describe each of the following elements:<sup>6</sup>

- Geographic coverage.
- Population segments served.
- Services provided by telephone.
- Hours of operation.
- Volume of telephone-based legal assistance.

**Exhibit 2:  
Snapshot of Telephone-Based Intake and Legal Assistance Systems  
Used in Legal Assistance Programs in Pennsylvania<sup>7</sup>**

**Key for Self-Ratings**

- Practice in place
- In place in some locations - See Note 1
- Special populations or circumstances - see notes 2 and 3.

OVERVIEW	LLS	LASP	MPLS	NLSA	NPLS	NWLS	PHLP	PLA	SPLS
<b>1. Geographic Area Covered by Telephone-Based Legal Assistance:</b>									
a. Entire service area of program	•	•	○	•	•	•	•	•	•
b. Specific counties or cities									
<b>2. Population Segments Served by Telephone-Based Legal Assistance:</b>									
a. General low-income population	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
b. Special population(s)							□		
<b>3. Services Provided by Telephone:</b>									
a. Advice	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
b. Brief services	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
c. Legal education materials	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
d. Referral	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
e. Coaching and/or materials for self (pro se) representation	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>4. Hours of Operation for Telephone-Based Assistance:</b>									
a. Weekdays	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
b. Evenings	•			•			□	•	•
c. Weekends							□		
<b>5. Volume of Telephone-Based Cases Closed in FY 2010-2011:</b>									
a. By "advice & counsel":	1,412	1,978	1,641	4,785	3,259	1,905	1,140	5,377	541
b. By "brief services":	37	114	121	352	389	332	879	890	570
<b>c. Total Telephone-based advice-only and brief services cases:</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>2,092</b>	<b>1,762</b>	<b>5,137</b>	<b>3,648</b>	<b>2,237</b>	<b>2,019</b>	<b>6,267</b>	<b>1,111</b>
d. Total advice-only or brief services cases closed by program (including telephone and in-person) in FY 2010-11:	1,945	6,048	6,257	7,824	5,466	3,443	2,019	9,017	1,966
<b>e. Telephone-based cases as a percentage of total advice-only and brief services:</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>57%</b>

**Note 1:** MPLS planned to roll out its telephone-based legal assistance system to all counties in mid-2012.

**Note 2:** PHLP Helpline serves people with health insurance problems, or who do not have health insurance. Total AJA- (and IOLTA-) eligible, advice & brief services cases closed in FY 2010-11: **2,019**. In total, counting clients served with funding from other sources, PHLP closed **3,714** advice/brief services cases in FY 2010-11.

**Note 3:** NWLS does not have evening or weekend intake hours, but has a web intake application for services which can be completed at any time by an applicant for services.

<sup>6</sup> See the "Best Practices" report (cited in footnote 2) for a more detailed description of the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems operated by the Pennsylvania programs.

<sup>7</sup> The table shows only the nine programs that operate telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems. A tenth program, Community Legal Services (CLS) in Philadelphia also participated in the Client Survey, but was not included in the above table because its intake and legal assistance is provided in-person at the program's offices only. Telephone-based intake and limited assistance for the general low-income population in the Philadelphia region is provided by Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA). The two programs collaborate closely as the principal legal aid programs in Philadelphia under an arrangement that assigns specific services to each program.

## **A. Geographic Coverage.**

As indicated in Exhibit 2 (see above), all regions of the Commonwealth are covered by telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems. Each of the regional legal aid programs maintains a centralized telephone intake and legal assistance system covering its entire service area.<sup>8</sup>

## **B. Population Segments Served.**

Eight of the programs serve the general low-income population with their telephone-based legal assistance systems. The ninth program – the Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP) – operates a statewide telephone helpline that helps eligible Pennsylvanians establish or maintain state funded health care coverage (primarily Medicaid) and ensures the insured population receives medically necessary services. PHLP serves the 2.1 million low-income Pennsylvanians on Medicaid, the one million Pennsylvanians without health insurance, and the 197,000 low-income children enrolled in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Many of these more than three million Pennsylvanians also have some complicating combination of private insurance or federal health insurance (*e.g.*, Medicare, Veterans Administration).

## **C. Services Provided by Telephone.**

Intake is conducted by telephone in most programs. Legal advice, brief services and referrals for further assistance are also provided. For most of the programs, the telephone-based system serves as the primary channel for intake; however, in most programs, clients can also come to program offices for service during scheduled intake hours or call for an appointment.

## **D. Hours of Operation.**

All programs provide telephone-based legal services during regular business hours. Clients of the three programs serving Southwestern Pennsylvania and clients of the Pennsylvania Health Law Project can also get help during evening hours on specific weekdays.

## **E. Volume of Telephone-based Legal Assistance.**

As indicated in Exhibit 2, the volume of cases handled by telephone-based assistance varies widely among programs. For example, only 28 percent of the advice-only/brief services cases handled by MidPenn Legal Services (MPLS) are handled primarily by telephone. At the other end of the spectrum, Pennsylvania Health Law Project conducts 100 percent of its direct legal assistance for low-income people through its statewide legal advice-only/brief services helpline.<sup>9</sup>

*Please see the “Best Practices” report for a more detailed description of the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems operated Pennsylvania programs.*

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<sup>8</sup> PLA provides a telephone intake/advice system covering the entire Philadelphia Region served by both PLA and CLS, under an agreement between the two programs. MidPenn planned to expand its telephone-based system to cover its entire service area by mid 2012.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to its services for low-income people, PHLP also assists people whose income is above the income guidelines for AJA and IOLTA, using grant funds from other sources. PHLP clients included in the Client Survey consisted only of clients whose incomes met the AJA and IOLTA eligibility guidelines.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The Client Survey was carried out using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) facilities and trained survey interviewers at Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) in Traverse City, Michigan. The Resource worked with the ten legal aid organizations participating in the Client Survey to select representative samples totaling 400 clients (an average of 40 per program) from the universe of all cases closed by advice-only or brief services between July 1 and December 15, 2011. Details about the process used in obtaining informed consent from clients and selecting the samples are provided in Attachment A.

Stratified random samples of cases were drawn by The Resource from master lists of all cases closed by the programs during the sampling period. The samples were stratified by:

- Programs (10 programs total - see the map on page 4)
- Service mode applied in each case – “Phone-Based” versus “In-person”
- Service Type – “Advice & Counsel” versus “Brief services” (*as these terms are defined for statistical reporting purposes by funders PA IOLTA, PLAN Inc. and the Legal Services Corporation*).<sup>10</sup>
- Legal problem –Standardized across PLAN programs. Cases were sampled randomly from each of four most frequent legal problem types for each program plus random sampling from all other legal problems handled by each program.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to the survey interviews, each program sought informed consent from each client whose case had been selected in the sample from a list provided to The Resource from which personally-identifiable information (such as names or telephone numbers) had been excluded to protect client confidentiality. Once consent had been obtained, the programs forwarded names and contact information for consenting clients to the research team for use in the Client Survey.

The questions asked of each client are listed in Attachment B. The interviewers followed a protocol that grouped questions across seven categories:

- 1) Legal situation/problem faced by the client
- 2) Interactions with the legal advisor from the program
- 3) Legal assistance received from the program
- 4) What the client did; what follow-up action s/he took following the advice or information received from the program
- 5) How well this worked, from the client’s perspective
- 6) The results or outcomes, and the client’s perspective on how favorable these were
- 7) The client’s perspective on the assistance s/he received from the legal aid program

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<sup>10</sup> In the legal aid community, “Advice & Counsel cases” are also called “advice-only cases,” or abbreviated as “advice cases.” In this report, these terms all mean “Advice & Counsel” cases as defined in the Case Statistical Reporting (CSR) Handbook issued by the Legal Services Corporation, available at [http://grants.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/Grants/RIN/Grantee\\_Guidance/CSR/CSR%20Handbook%202008%20as%20amended%202011.pdf](http://grants.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/Grants/RIN/Grantee_Guidance/CSR/CSR%20Handbook%202008%20as%20amended%202011.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> The top four legal problem types differed by program. To maximize representativeness of samples, the samples were stratified to reflect each program’s unique case type distribution. For example, the cases of Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP) were stratified into the following five groups: (1) custody/visitation; (2) private landlord/tenant; (3) bankruptcy/debtor relief; (4) unemployment compensation; and (5) all other legal problem types. Cases were then sampled randomly from each stratum. See Attachment A for details.

The measures of “effectiveness” that were developed from the clients’ responses consisted of the following:

- Results achieved by the client, including:
  - Objective outcomes achieved – for example, monetary awards; defense against claims for money; favorable rulings by courts or administrative agencies
  - Extent to which client reported that his or her goals were achieved
  - Extent to which client considered the problem “solved”
  - Extent to which client considered the outcome “favorable”
- Client’s perspective on the legal assistance s/he had received, including:
  - How helpful the assistance was
  - Impact on the client’s capacity to address his/her legal situation
  - Likelihood that the client would seek legal assistance from the program again in the future

#### **IV. FINDINGS REGARDING RESULTS OF “ADVICE-ONLY” AND “BRIEF SERVICES” CASES HANDLED BY PENNSYLVANIA PROGRAMS**

One of the purposes of the Client Survey was to clarify the resolution of “advice” cases, a matter identified in the Performance Audit Report:

*Effectiveness measures for [legal service program] services are generally positive – Case resolution statistics where the outcome is known for FY 2009-10 show about 74 percent of the AJA-funded cases were successfully resolved and 26 percent were considered unsuccessfully resolved. Case resolution was unknown for the 50 percent of cases that were resolved through advice to clients (emphasis added)<sup>12</sup>.*

In this passage, “advice to clients” cases refer to two case closing categories: “Advice & Counsel” and “Brief Services.” The Client Survey elucidated these matters through the follow-up telephone interviews with a representative sampling of clients whose cases were closed by either “Advice & Counsel” or “Brief Services” in the latter half of 2011. The Client Survey produced the following information.

##### **A. Outcomes: Both Advice-Only and Brief Services Cases Achieve Significant Results.**

One out of three clients reported positive outcomes beyond receipt of advice-only or brief services. (See Exhibit 3 on the next page and the box, “*Examples of Outcomes*” on page 10.)

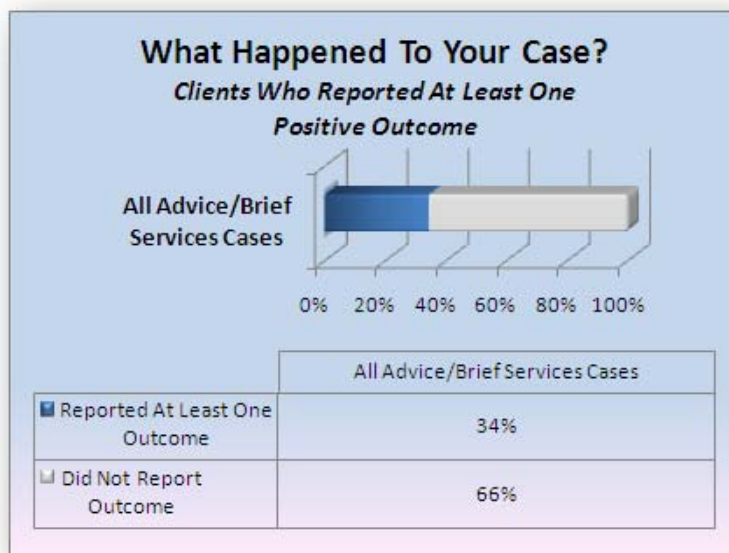
- **Thirty-four percent** of clients interviewed reported their cases were resolved and they achieved specific, positive outcomes beyond simply the receipt of advice-only or brief

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<sup>12</sup> See *A Performance Audit of Pennsylvania’s Access to Justice Act*, Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, May 2011, page 42.

services. These outcomes were identified by the clients in direct response to a series of questions following the open-ended question, “*What happened to your case?*”<sup>13</sup>

### Exhibit 3



This percentage compares favorably with the incidence of positive outcomes reported by legal aid programs generally.<sup>14</sup>

- In Virginia, for example, programs reported having achieved positive outcomes beyond advice-only or brief services for **32 percent** of all of their cases in FY 2010-11.
- In New York, programs reported having achieved positive outcomes beyond advice-only or brief services for **35 percent** of all their cases in 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Please see Attachment C for a listing of the outcome categories that were used to code the client’s response to the question, “*What happened in your case?*” The outcome categories were based on a standardized list applied by Pennsylvania legal aid programs in coding benefits achieved for clients at case closing.

<sup>14</sup> The statistics from New York and Virginia are presented above as benchmarks of outcomes achieved by legal aid programs generally. In these two states, mandatory, statewide outcome reporting, using consistent categories and definitions, has been in place for almost two decades, overseen by the statewide funders, the IOLA Fund of New York and the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia. In Pennsylvania, legal aid programs report outcomes to PLAN Inc. for cases for which the resolution is known at the time of closing – for example, where the case is resolved by a court decision or a negotiated settlement among the parties. The outcome categories used for these reports to PLAN, Inc. are more general than those used in New York or Virginia; they consist of whether cases were won, lost, settled, withdrawn or advised. If a monetary settlement was involved, the amounts of back awards and/or monthly benefits generated for the client are reported. Reporting of the more detailed major benefits data – such as whether custody was achieved or an eviction was averted – is not required by the principal state funders, or by LSC, the federal funder. Seven of the ten Pennsylvania legal aid programs in the Client Survey collect detailed client benefit data for their own internal purposes. However, there is significant variation in data categories and consistency of data collection across programs, and the research team did not feel it understood that data sufficiently to use them in deriving benchmarks for this study.



## Examples of Outcomes

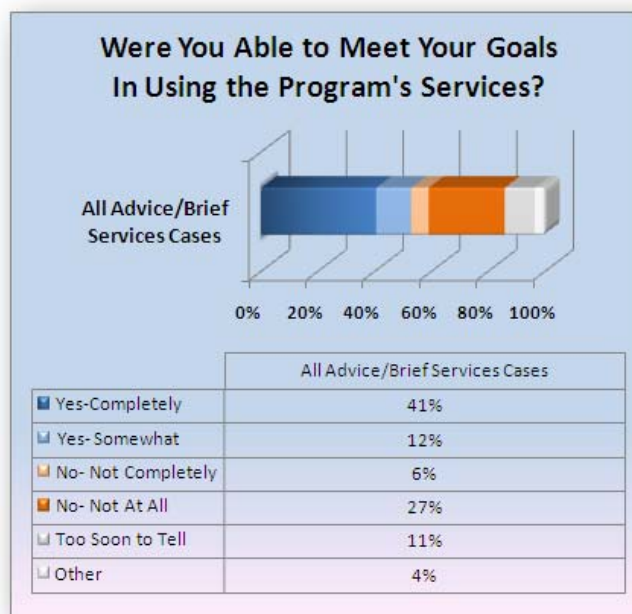
Thirty-four percent of clients interviewed for the Client Survey indicated they achieved positive outcomes. The following are examples of comments by these clients:

- **Obtained alternative housing.** *The house that I was in was going into foreclosure and I was trying to get in other housing. I called Legal Aid to be informed of my rights. I followed all the steps and called all the people. I wrote a letter to the housing authority and was able to get into housing.*
- **Got credit straightened out.** *I contacted Legal Aid to inquire about claiming bankruptcy. After talking with them, I checked my credit and it wasn't too bad. I ended up not filing for bankruptcy. I applied for a mortgage and went back to work.*
- **Dealt with bad news from Social Security.** *I got a letter from Social Security that said I owed \$4000 for SSI. There was a form that I was supposed to fill out and I didn't understand it. Legal Aid helped me with the form and Social Security waived the overpayment. I didn't have to pay it back.*

*A Majority of Clients Achieved Their Goals.* (See Exhibit 4, below.)<sup>15</sup>

- **53 percent** of clients **achieved** their goals “completely” or “somewhat.”<sup>16</sup>
- **33 percent** said they achieved their goals “not completely” or “not at all.”
- **15 percent** said it was “too soon to tell” (that is, the outcome was still pending) or had an “other” response.

### Exhibit 4



<sup>15</sup> Responses in some exhibits do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

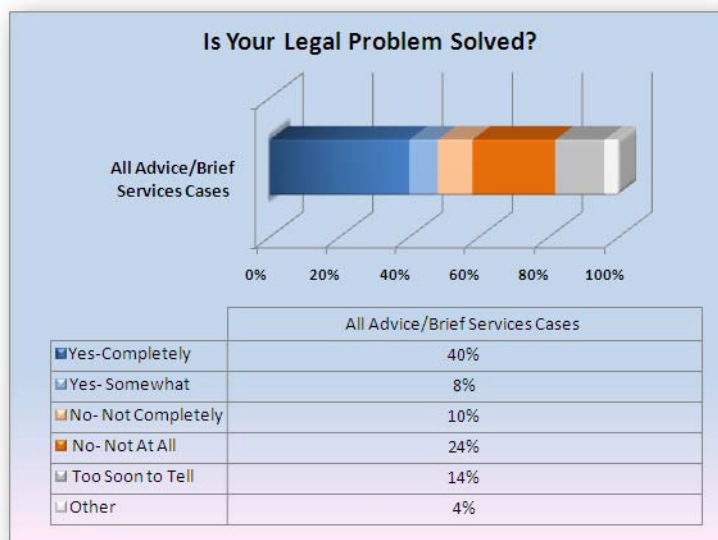
<sup>16</sup> Choices posed to clients were: “Yes, completely,” “Yes, somewhat,” “No, not completely” or “No, not at all.”

**B. Solutions: Almost half of the cases produced complete or partial solutions to clients' legal problems.**

(See Exhibit 5 and the box, "Examples of Problem Solutions" below.)

- **48 percent** of clients considered their problems to be "completely" or "somewhat" solved.
- **34 percent** said their problems were solved "not completely" or "not at all."
- **18 percent** said it was "too soon to tell" or had an "other" response.

**Exhibit 5**



**Examples of Problem Solutions**

Forty-eight percent of clients interviewed for the Client Survey indicated their problems were "completely" or "somewhat" solved. The following are examples:

- **Problem with a landlord.** *My landlord had put a lock on my door so I could not enter. My legal advisor contacted my landlord's attorney and informed him that his actions were illegal and he had 24 hours to get the lock off so I could get my things. The lock was removed within the time period and I was able to get my things.*
- **Enforcement of a custody agreement.** *I wanted to protect my child and uphold my court order. Legal Aid wrote a letter to my child's school explaining that my custody agreement stated that my son was not to be released to his father. It was taken care of.*

### C. Client Perspective on Results: *A strong majority of clients considered the results of their cases to be “favorable.”*

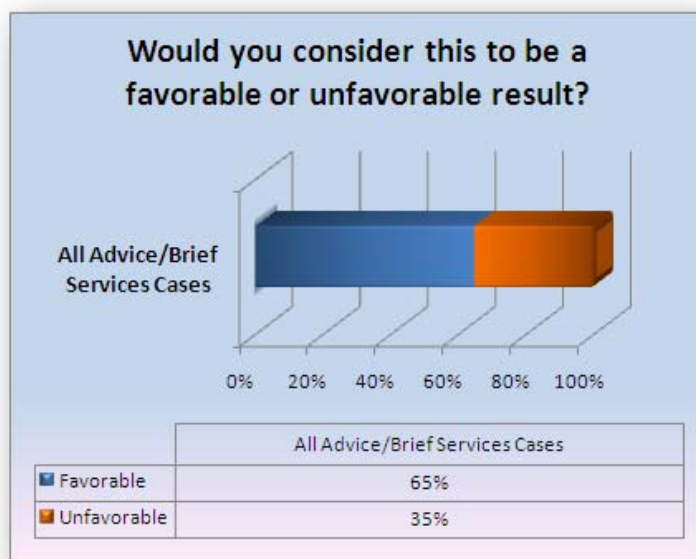
In a question following the client’s description of what happened in his or her case, the interviewer asked, “*Would you consider this to be a favorable or unfavorable result?*” The responses were as follows (see Exhibit 6 and the box, “*Examples of Favorable Results*” below):

- 58 percent of clients considered the result of their case to be “favorable.”
- 32 percent said their results were “unfavorable.”
- 10 percent said they were not sure or didn’t answer this question.

If we include only the clients who expressed an opinion (that is, drop the “not sure” or “did not answer” responses) then the contrast in perspectives is shown in sharper focus:

- **65 percent** of those who expressed an opinion said their results were “favorable.”
- **35 percent** deemed their results to be “unfavorable.”

**Exhibit 6**



#### **Examples of Favorable Results**

Sixty-five percent of clients who expressed an opinion indicated their results were favorable. The following are examples:

- ***Got help getting health insurance.*** *I was diagnosed with cancer in February of 2010. I was going to a free clinic. I signed up and received an insurance card and I was cut off from insurance benefits. Legal Aid told me about a different program that I qualified for. I received my insurance benefits.*
- ***Got security deposit released.*** *I wanted my security deposit returned. The Legal Services helped me to write a letter to the landlord and I received my deposit back.*

**D. Client satisfaction: *Eight out of ten clients were positive about their experience with the legal services program.***

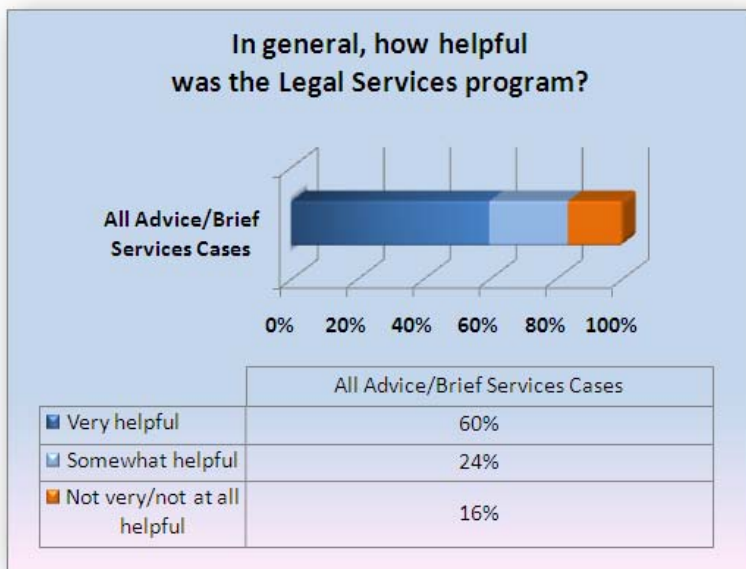
(See Exhibit 7 and the box, “*Examples of Client Satisfaction*” below.)

- 78 percent of clients thought the program was “very” or “somewhat” helpful.
- 15 percent said the program was “not very” or “not at all” helpful.
- 6 percent reported they were “not sure” or did not answer this question.

If we include only the clients who expressed an opinion (that is, drop the “not sure” or “did not answer” responses), the consensus appears even stronger:

- **84 percent** of those who expressed an opinion said the program was “very” or “somewhat” helpful.
- **16 percent** percent said the program was “not very” or “not at all” helpful

**Exhibit 7**



**Examples of Client Satisfaction**

Seventy-eight percent of clients interviewed for the Client Survey indicated that the legal services program was “very” or “somewhat” helpful. The following are examples:

- **“Very helpful.”** *I needed help as I am a widow and live alone. I ran out of oil and needed help to heat my home and the oil company would not give me any more oil until I paid my bill which they said was \$1800. Everything turned out to my satisfaction. The payment was dropped to \$50/month and I don't have to worry about the contract they said I was obligated to pay. They [Legal Aid] were wonderful.*
- **“Somewhat helpful.”** *My landlord seems like a nice guy. My problem was I looked at this place and he promised me he would get some things done right away. I took his word, but they didn't get done. After I called Legal Services, that's when he actually got some stuff fixed around here. There are still some things that need to be fixed. I am probably going to have to move.*

## E. Summary of Findings on Advice-Only and Brief Services Cases.

The Client Survey provided a picture of what happens to clients who receive advice-only or brief services from Pennsylvania legal aid programs. It revealed that:

- **One out of every three recipients of advice-only or brief services reported positive outcomes that were tangible and measurable** – for example, they were granted custody of their children, obtained the public benefits they applied for, or avoided a crisis such as eviction or foreclosure.
- **Six out of ten recipients achieved results they deemed favorable.** In some cases the result was dealing with a major crisis, such as a suspension of heating fuel delivery in the midst of winter. In other cases, it was bringing closure to a lingering dispute such as repairs promised but never delivered by a landlord.
- **Eight out of ten recipients reported that the Legal Services program was helpful to them.** Often all that clients desired was simply to talk with a legal advocate to learn the legal implications of situations they were facing and to get advice about what to do.

This sheds light on the question raised by the auditors: is the advice being provided to clients “effective?” For a strong majority of clients, the answer was “Yes” – six out of ten achieved results they deemed “favorable,” and eight out of ten obtained services they found “helpful.”

The advice-only and brief services provided by Pennsylvania legal aid programs are enabling many thousands of people a year to address simple legal problems quickly, with much better results than they could get on their own.

Advice-only and brief services are legal aid’s “emergency room” cases. The evidence shows that these services are not only effective; they are essential. Without them, thousands of low-income families a year would be forced to confront their legal problems without any legal help at all, with consequences that in some circumstances would be devastating.

## V. FINDINGS REGARDING “TELEPHONE-BASED” LEGAL ASSISTANCE

In addition to resolving the question of what results were being achieved generally through advice-only and brief services, an important goal of the Client Survey was to assess the effectiveness of those services when delivered via the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems that have come into wide use by Pennsylvania legal aid programs. This issue was presented as a recommendation in the Performance Audit Report, as follows:

*The IOLTA Board and PLAN, Inc. should develop a follow-up process, possibly using a university or law school program, to determine whether telephone services have been effective...Confidentiality issues would need to be addressed, but such a survey would provide feedback to the programs to determine whether the telephone assistance, which accounts for about half the LSPs’ caseload, is effective.<sup>17</sup>*

The findings of the Client Survey on that topic are provided in detail below and summarized beginning on page 29. This section first describes the types of assistance that clients reported receiving, and then outlines the results clients achieved as a consequence of this assistance.

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<sup>17</sup> See *A Performance Audit of Pennsylvania’s Access to Justice Act*, Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, May 2011, page S-5.

Finally, this section describes the findings of an analysis of the impacts of three major variables in clients' cases:

- Whether the services clients received consisted of *advice-only* or *brief services*;
- Whether the assistance was provided by *telephone* or *in-person*; and
- What type of *legal problem* the client faced – for example, a child custody dispute or a landlord-tenant issue.

**A. Types of Assistance: *Clients received an array of advice-only and brief services by telephone.***

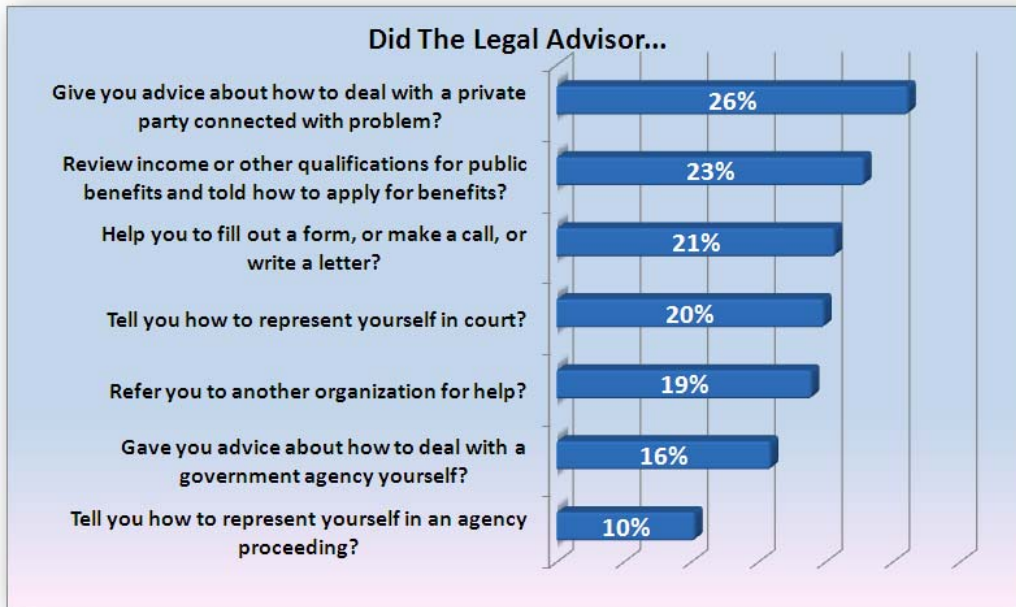
Survey respondents whose cases had been handled by the programs' telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems were asked to indicate whether they received any or all of the following services:

- **Advice** on issues such as...
  - How to deal with a private party
  - How to deal with a government agency
  - How to represent oneself in court or a government agency proceeding
- **Review** of income or other qualifications and how to apply for public benefits
- **Brief services**, such as...
  - Help with filling out a form
  - Making a call on the client's behalf
  - Writing a letter on the client's behalf
- **Referrals** to another organization such as a public agency or human services organization as an element of the legal advice or brief services provided – for example, to obtain further assistance with an application for public benefits

Exhibit 8 on the next page indicates the percentages of clients of telephone-based legal assistance who responded "Yes" to any the above list of services.

*Continued on next page...*

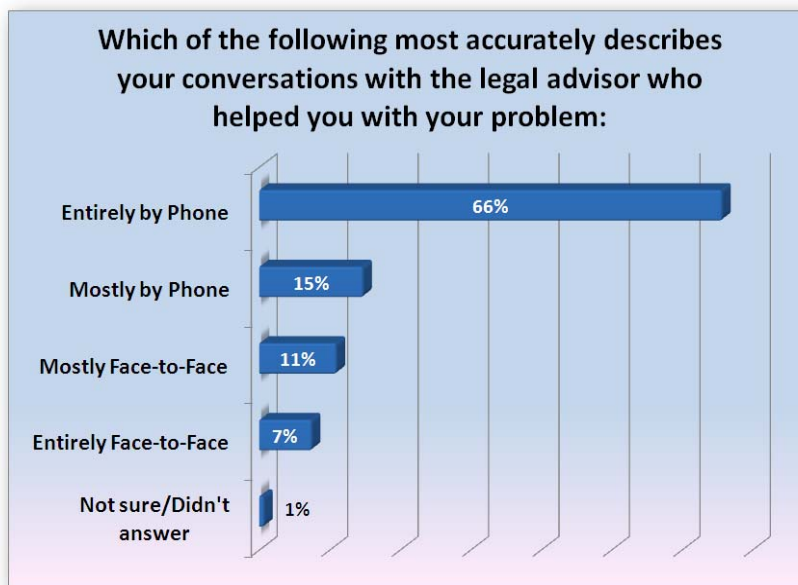
## Exhibit 8



### **B. Interactions with Legal Advocates: *Clients were served mostly by telephone, but a significant percentage was served in person.***

Exhibit 9 below summarizes clients' experience with legal services. Most clients (over 80 percent) were served entirely or mostly by telephone, but a significant percentage (18 percent) was served in-person ("face-to-face"), including "Mostly" (11 percent) and "Entirely" (7 percent).<sup>18</sup>

## Exhibit 9

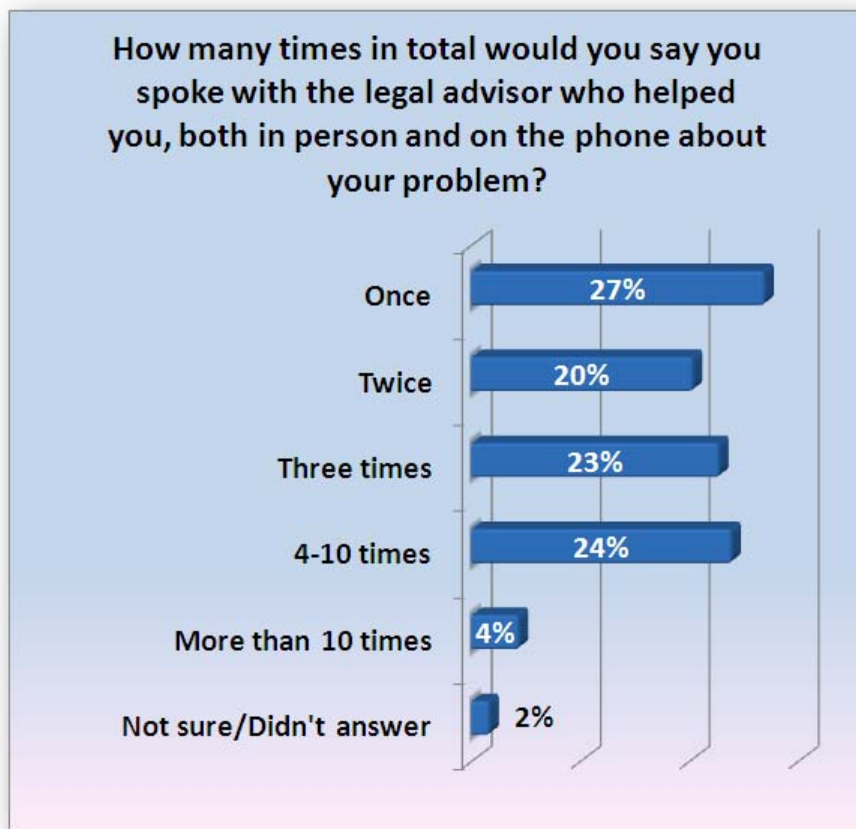


<sup>18</sup> These likely were clients whose initial contact was with the telephone helpline but were given appointments to receive service in a program office.

**Phone-based legal assistance ranged from a single conversation to ten or more conversations.**

More than three-quarters of the recipients of telephone-based services spoke with their advocate more than once during the course of their case – see Exhibit 10 below.

**Exhibit 10**



*Continued on next page...*

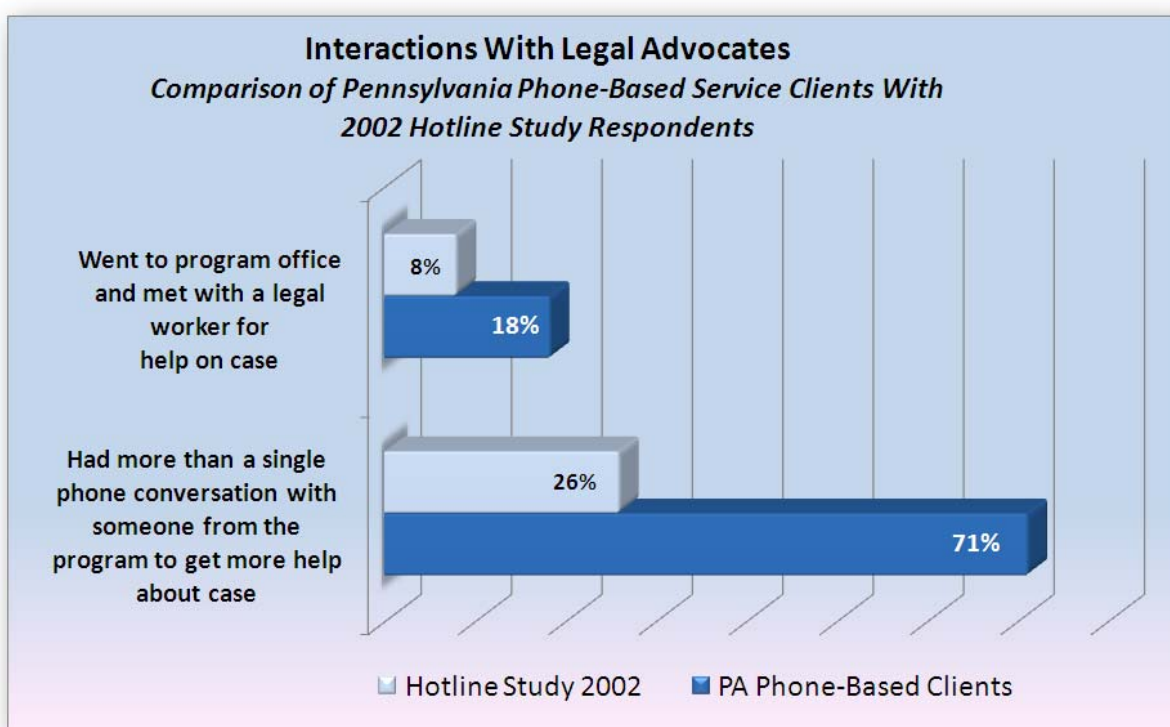


**Pennsylvania clients reported a higher level of interaction with their legal advocates than did respondents to the Hotline Study a decade ago.**

Exhibit 11 below compares the Pennsylvania Client Survey with the 2002 Hotline Study<sup>19</sup> in terms of responses to similar questions about the frequency and nature of interaction (that is, by telephone versus in-person) between clients and their legal advocates.

- Pennsylvania clients were over twice as likely (18 percent versus eight percent) to receive services in-person in the program office as the 2002 Hotline Study respondents.
- Pennsylvania clients were almost three times as likely (71 percent versus 26 percent) to have more than a single conversation with their legal advocates as were the clients interviewed in the 2002 Hotline Study.

**Exhibit 11**



**An implication of Exhibit 11: *Legal aid programs' telephone-based systems are more than "hotlines."***

The above comparison emphasizes an important distinction between the telephone-based legal aid systems of today and a typical legal “hotline” of a decade ago. In Pennsylvania, telephone-based systems have evolved into the “front door” of a sophisticated, multi-faceted service delivery approach that performs intake, triage and assignment by telephone for the whole array of legal services offered by the program, including advice-only and brief services (over the

<sup>19</sup> Pearson, Jessica and Lanae Davis, “*The Hotlines Assessment Study: Final Report*,” 2002, available at <http://www.nlada.org/DMS/Documents/1037903536.22/finalhlreport.pdf>.

telephone or at a program office), appointments at legal clinics or with pro bono attorneys, or assignment to program advocates for extended service if the situation and available resources warrant it. Thus, many clients have extensive interactions with the program after intake, and a significant number are asked to come into the program office for in-person services. By contrast, the “hotlines” that were the focus of the 2002 Hotline Study served primarily as a quick source of legal information and limited representation, almost entirely by telephone.

**C. Follow-Up by the Program: *The majority of clients of telephone-based assistance received follow-up from the program after having been served.***

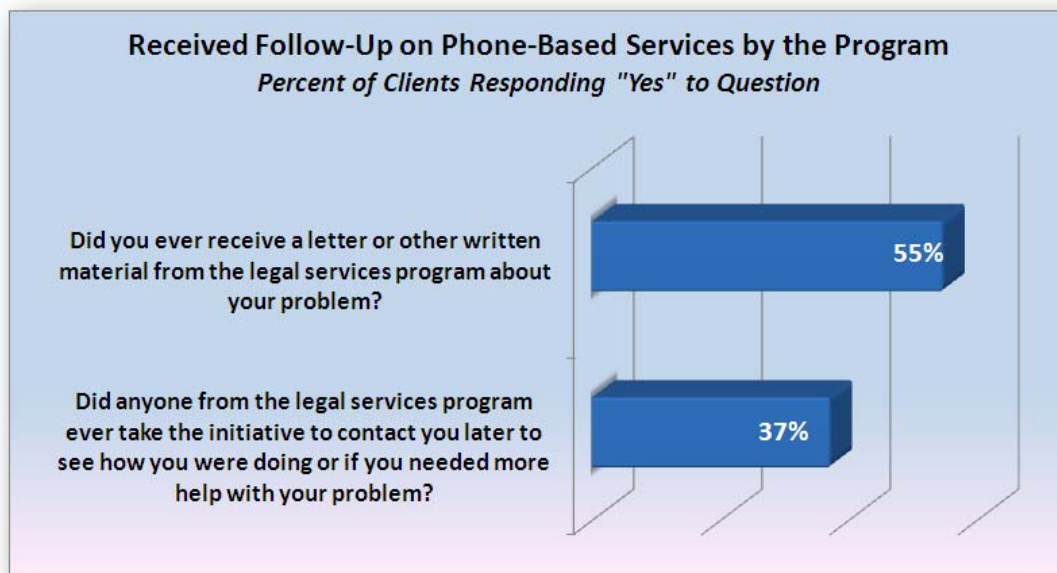
Two of the principal “best practices” recommended by the 2002 Hotline Study were:

- Clients should receive a summary in writing of the advice-only they have been given.
- Programs should check back with the client later to see how the client is doing, especially if the situation could have serious consequences for the client if the advice is not followed.

Most legal aid clients in the Client Survey reported that they had received a letter or other written material from the program – see Exhibit 12 below.<sup>20</sup>

Over one in three clients reported they had received a contact from the program later to see how they were doing.

**Exhibit 12**



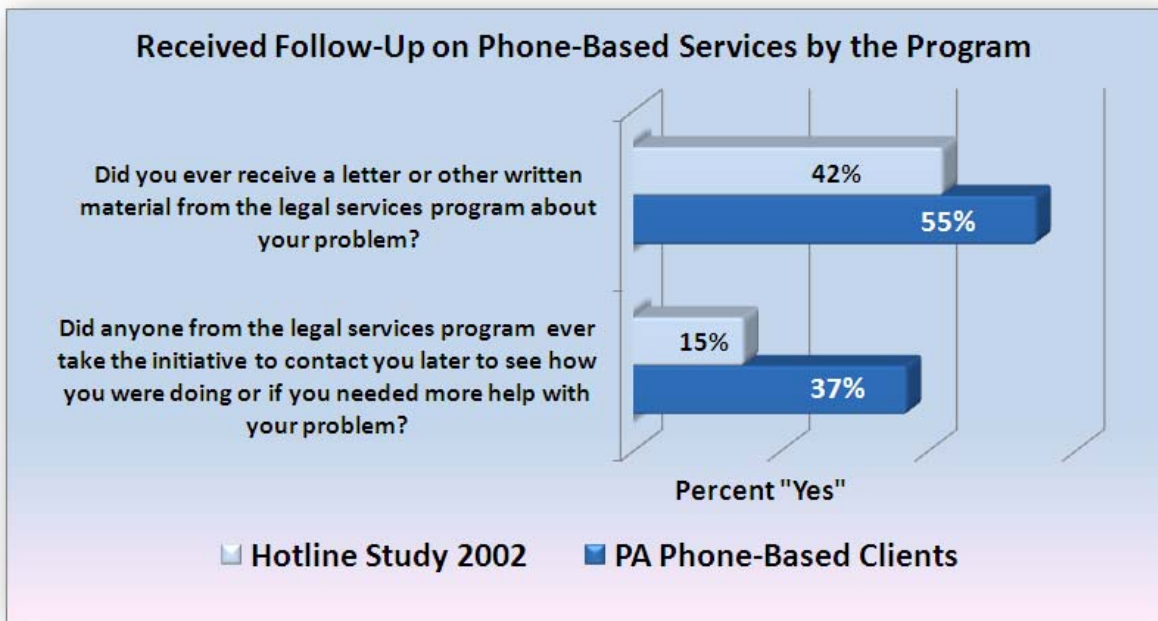
<sup>20</sup> This response by clients on the Client Survey affirmed the reports from the programs regarding their policies of confirming in writing the legal advice provided to clients by telephone.

**Pennsylvania clients are benefiting from best practices developed through a decade of research and technical assistance by the legal aid community.<sup>21</sup>**

This is suggested by Exhibit 13 below, which compares the Pennsylvania Client Survey with the 2002 Hotline Study in terms of the follow-up contacts clients reported after they had been served by telephone.

- A higher percentage of legal aid programs' clients reported receiving follow-up assistance than clients who were interviewed in connection with the 2002 Hotline Study.
- As indicated, these kinds of follow-up activities were recommended by the Hotline Study and reinforced in the training and technical assistance provided subsequently through the national support efforts of the legal aid community.<sup>22</sup> It appears that the legal aid programs benefitted from those recommendations and adopted them as standard practices.

**Exhibit 13**



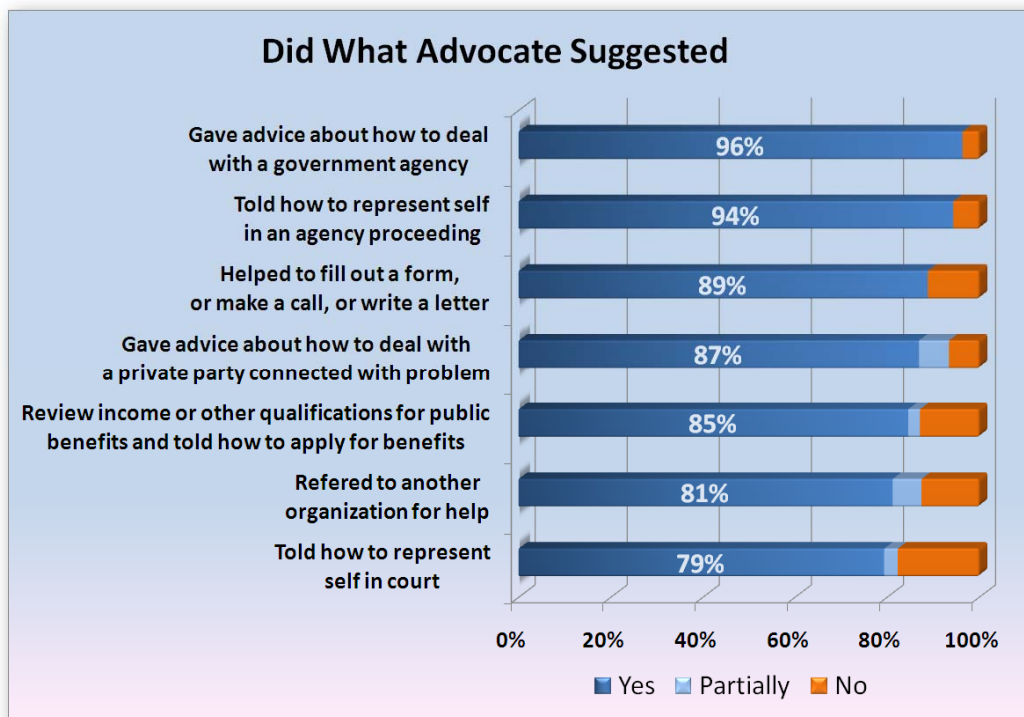
<sup>21</sup> See Pearson, Jessica and Lanae Davis, "The Hotlines Assessment Study: Final Report;" 2002, available at <http://www.nlada.org/DMS/Documents/1037903536.22/finalhlreport.pdf>, Table V-10 (page 44).

<sup>22</sup> Extensive training and technical assistance on telephone-based legal assistance has been provided by the ABA, NLADA, LSC and AARP from 2003 to present. An important vehicle for this support has been the annual Equal Justice Conference (EJC) co-sponsored by NLADA and ABA.

## D. Action by Clients: *The Vast Majority Follow Up on the Advice They Receive.*

As indicated in Exhibit 14 below, between **79 percent** and **96 percent** of clients indicated they followed up on what the legal worker advised them to do.

**Exhibit 14**

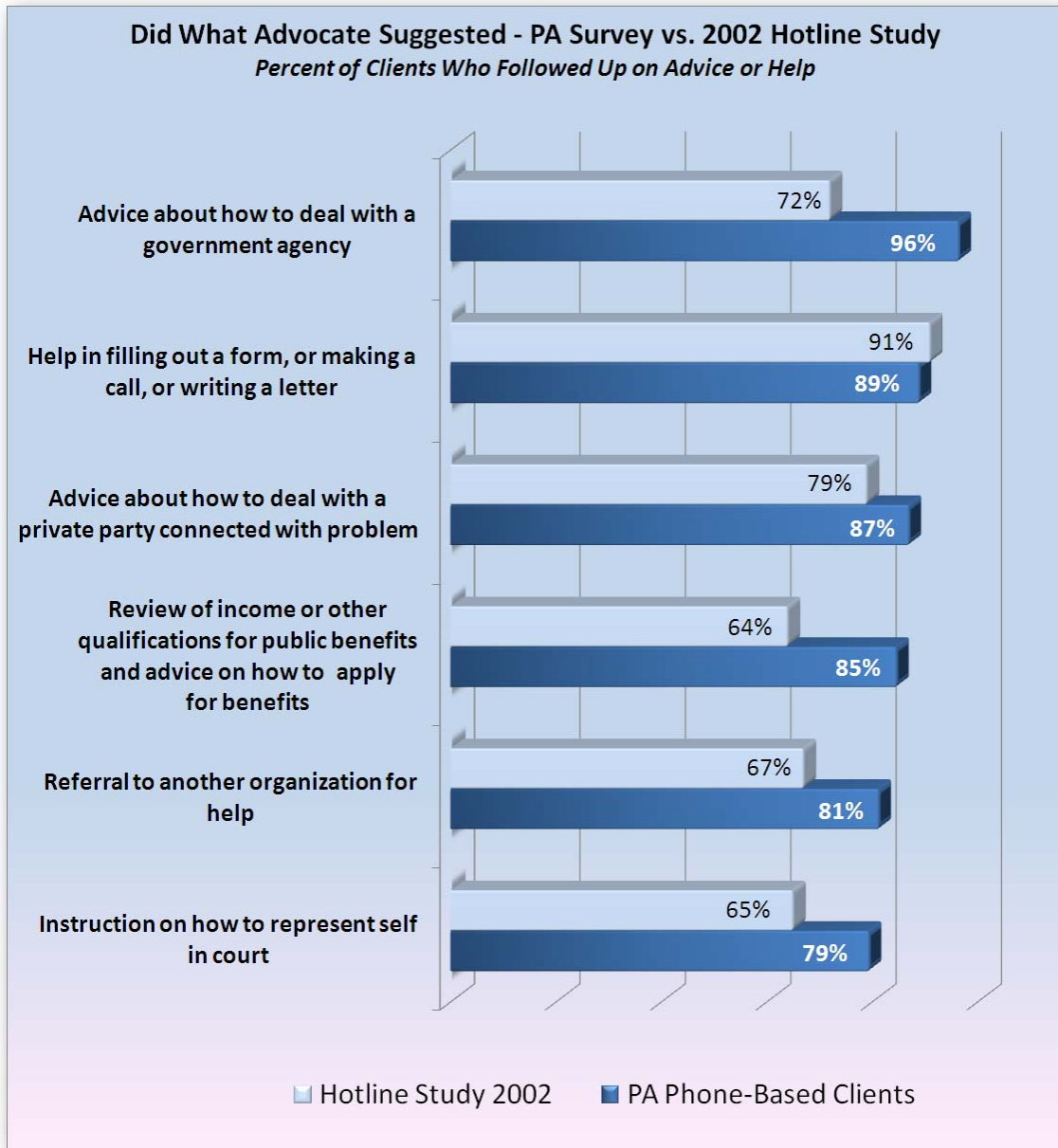


### **More Pennsylvania legal aid clients took action on the advice they were given than was reported a decade ago by the Hotline Study.**

Exhibit 15 on the next page compares the incidence of follow-up action indicated by survey respondents with that reported by the 2002 Hotline Study.<sup>23</sup> This provides further evidence that Pennsylvania clients have benefited from the best practices recommended by the research and supported by the technical assistance made available by the ABA, LSC and other sources since 2002 when the Hotline Study was completed.

<sup>23</sup> Pearson, Jessica and Lanae Davis, “The Hotlines Assessment Study: Final Report,” 2002, available at <http://www.nlada.org/DMS/Documents/1037903536.22/finalhlreport.pdf>, page 58.

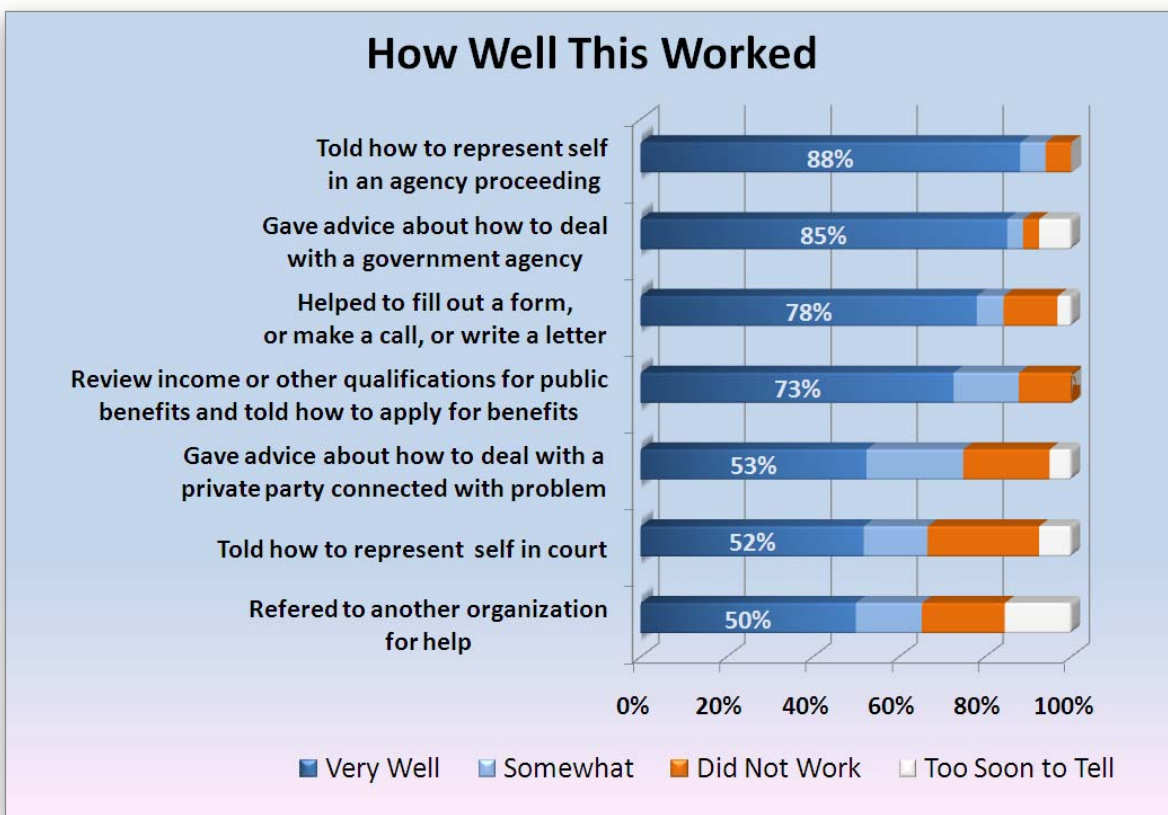
### Exhibit 15



**How Well Did the Action Work? “Very Well” Says a Majority.**

- As indicated in Exhibit 16 below, at least **50 percent** of the clients who followed up indicated their action worked “Very Well.” (That percentage was reported by people who were “Referred to another organization for help”).
- The percentage who indicated their action worked “very well” ranged between **50 percent** and **88 percent** for the other types of advice listed in Exhibit 16.
- For one category, “Told how to represent self in an agency proceeding,” the percentage of clients who said their action worked either “very well” or “somewhat” was **94 percent**.

**Exhibit 16**

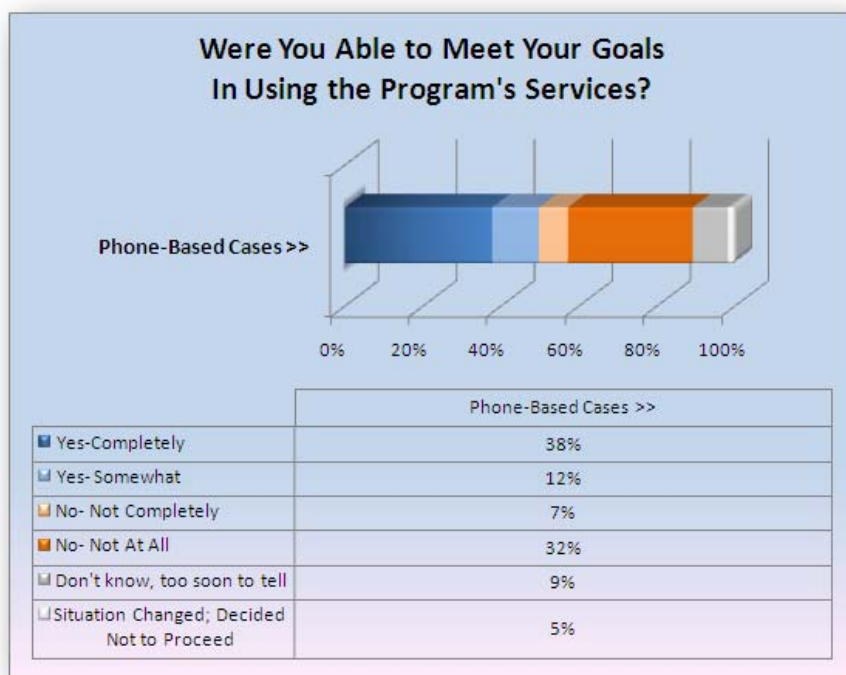


## E. Outcomes: Telephone-Based Services Achieved Significant Results for Clients.

### 1. One-Half of Clients Achieved Their Goals. (See Exhibit 17, below.)

- **50 percent** of clients achieved their goals “completely” or “somewhat.”
- **39 percent** said they achieved their goals “not completely” or “not at all.”
- **14 percent** responded, “don’t know, too soon to tell” or that their “situation changed; [and they] decided not to proceed.”

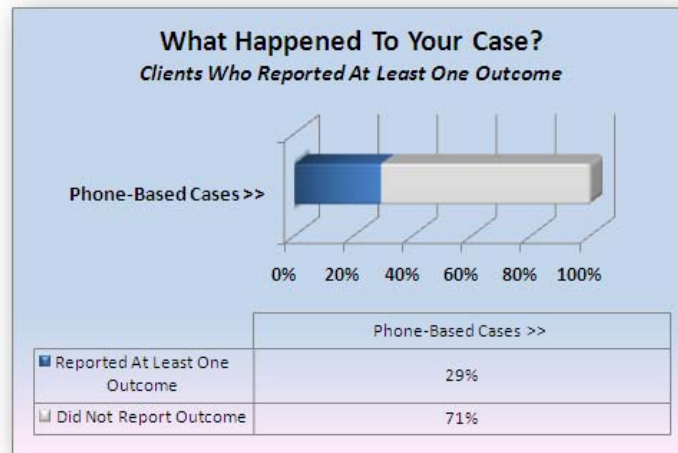
**Exhibit 17**



### 2. Twenty-nine percent of clients provided with telephone-based services reported positive outcomes beyond receipt of advice-only and brief services. (See Exhibit 18, next page).

These outcomes were reported in response to an open-ended question in the survey interview: “*What happened to your case?*” Clients who said their case was resolved then were asked a series of follow-up questions leading to the client’s selecting a specific outcome from the list of specific categories in Attachment C. Examples of the kinds of outcomes achieved by clients are provided on page 10.

## Exhibit 18

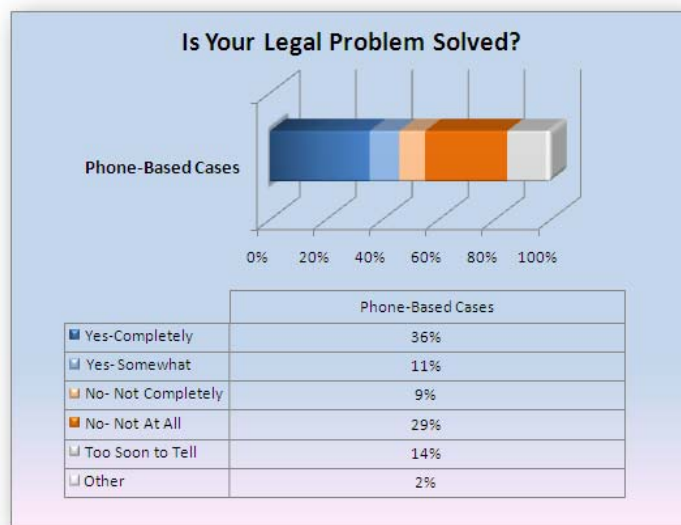


A comparison of the “29 percent” figure from Exhibit 18 with Exhibit 3 on page 9 indicates that marginally fewer clients of phone-based services reported positive outcomes than did advice-only/brief services clients as a whole (34 percent). This suggests that a higher percentage of clients achieved positive outcomes when served in-person rather than by phone, as discussed later in this section (see page 32).

### 3. Solutions: *Almost half of the cases produced complete or partial solutions to clients’ legal problems.* (See Exhibit 19 below.)

- **47 percent** of clients considered their problems to be “completely” or “somewhat” solved.
- **38 percent** reported their problems were solved “not completely” or “not at all.”
- **16 percent** indicated it was “too soon to tell” (14 percent) or they had “other” results (2 percent).

## Exhibit 19

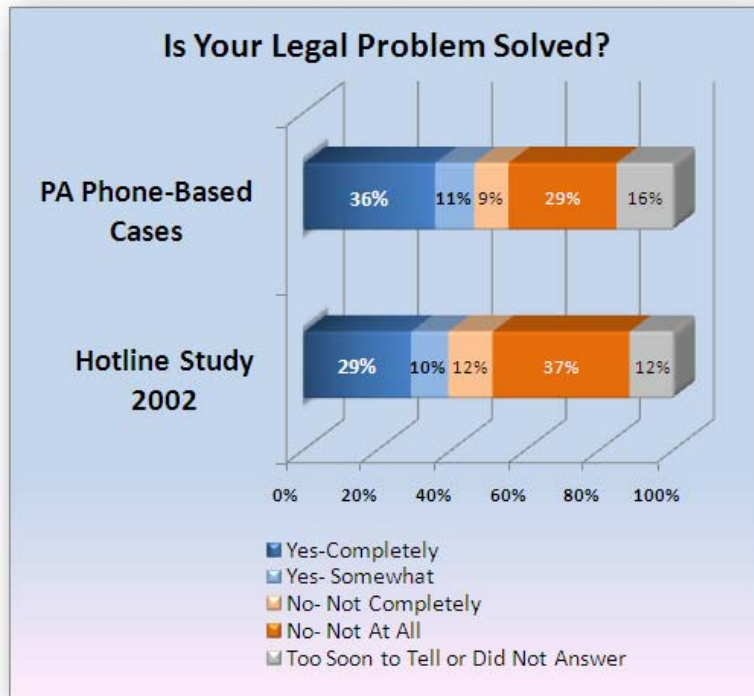




*This result was comparable to, or slightly better than, that recorded by the 2002 Hotline Study.*

As Exhibit 20 below indicates, legal aid clients were more likely than 2002 Hotline Survey respondents to indicate their problems were “completely” or “somewhat” solved.

**Exhibit 20**



**F. Clients’ Perspective on Results: *A strong majority of clients considered the results of their cases to be “favorable.”***

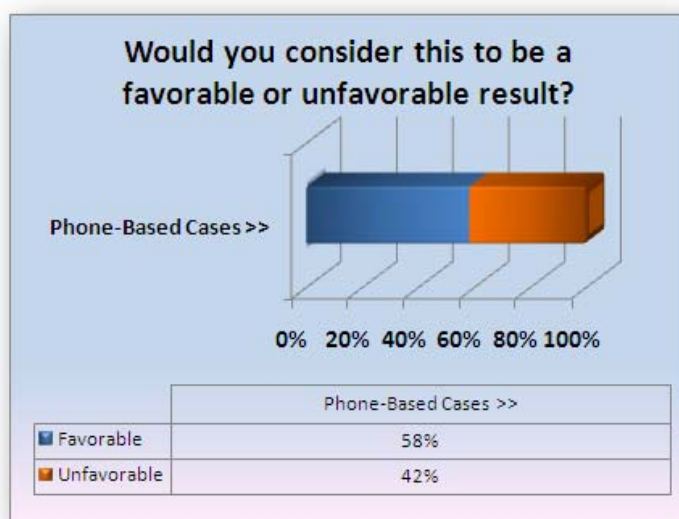
Responses to the question, “*Would you consider this to be a favorable or unfavorable result*” were as follows:

- 52 percent of clients deemed their results to be “favorable.”
- 23 percent thought their results were “unfavorable.”
- 10 percent were “not sure” or did not answer.

The responses by those expressing an opinion (that is, excluding the 10 percent who responded “not sure” or did not answer the question) are shown in Exhibit 21 on the next page:

- **58 percent** said their results were “favorable.”
- **42 percent** deemed their results to be “unfavorable.”

## Exhibit 21



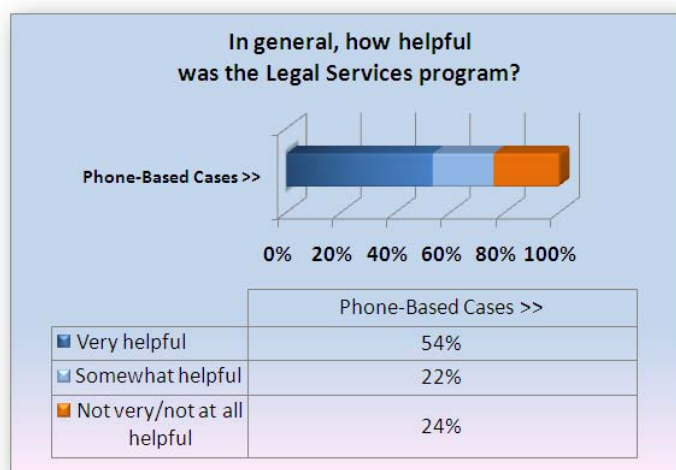
### G. Client Experience: *Three out of four clients felt their experience with the legal services program was positive.*

- 72 percent of clients thought the program was “very” or “somewhat” helpful.
- 23 percent thought the program was “not very” or “not at all” helpful.
- Five percent were “not sure” or did not answer.

The responses by those expressing an opinion (that is, excluding the five percent who responded “not sure” or did not answer the question) are shown in Exhibit 22 below:

- **76 percent** said the program was “very” or “somewhat” helpful.”
- **24 percent** thought the program was “not very” or “not at all” helpful.”

## Exhibit 22

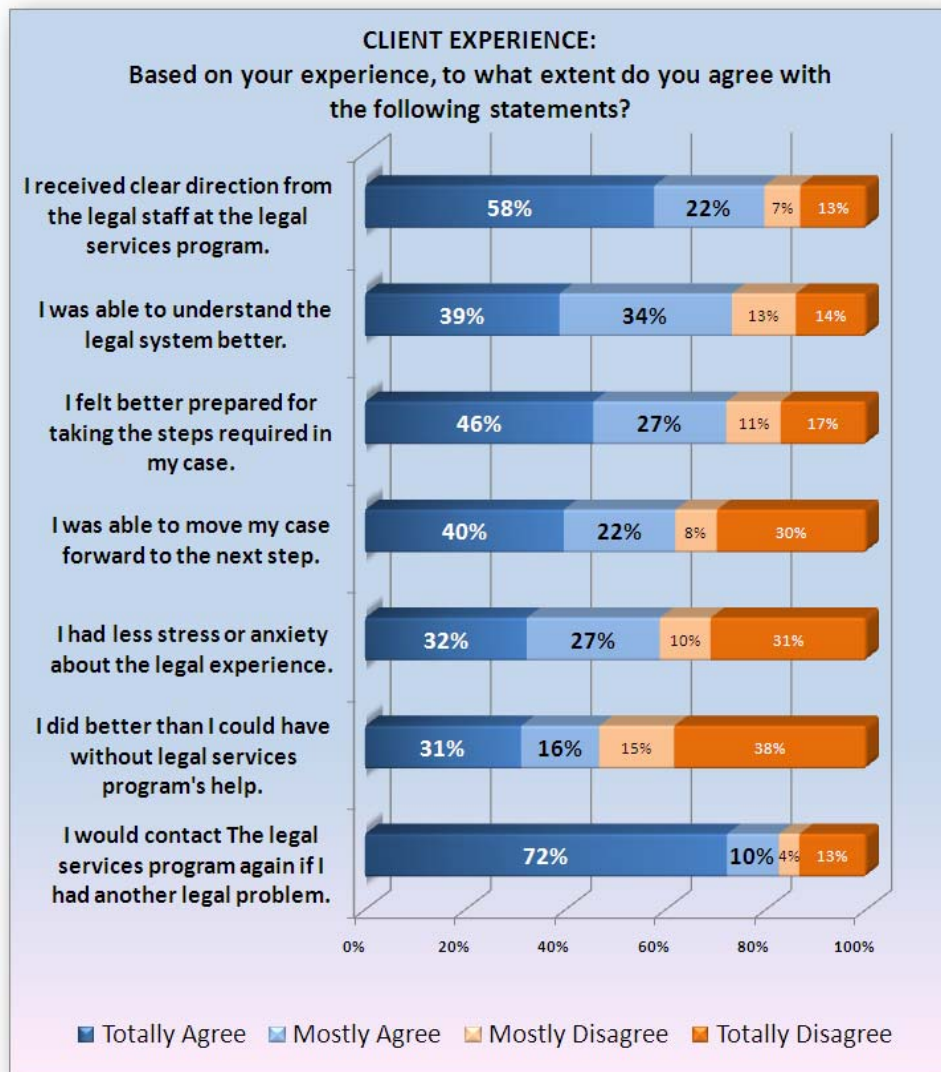


*The majority of clients were positive about specific aspects of their case.*

As indicated in Exhibit 23 below, a series of positive statements about clients’ experiences elicited total agreement from between **31 and 72 percent** of respondents.

- The statement receiving the lowest response, “*I did better than I could have without [the legal services program’s] help*” received total agreement from **31 percent** and a rating of “Mostly Agree” from **16 percent**, for a total positive response of **47 percent**.<sup>24</sup>
- The overwhelming majority agreed that, “*I would contact [the legal services program] again if I had another legal problem.*” **72 percent** agreed “totally” and another **10 percent** agreed “mostly,” for a total positive response of **82 percent**.

**Exhibit 23**



<sup>24</sup> Reviewers of these findings expressed surprise that fewer than half the respondents agreed with this statement, yet overwhelmingly agreed with the next statement, “*I would contact the program again if I had another legal problem.*” One found the wording of the question to be confusing, and proposed that some respondents may have chose the opposite of what they intended.

Comparison with the 2002 Hotline Study: *Pennsylvania clients were more likely to rate the legal services program as “very helpful” than 2002 Hotline Study respondents.* (See Exhibit 24).<sup>25</sup>

Exhibit 24



## H. Summary of Overall Findings on Telephone-Based Legal Assistance.

In addition to clarifying the results being achieved through advice-only and brief services generally, the Client Survey shed light on the effectiveness of those services when delivered via one of the telephone-based intake and legal assistance systems that have come into wide use by Pennsylvania legal aid programs since 2000. The Client Survey revealed that:

1. ***Legal aid programs’ telephone-based legal assistance systems are more than “hotlines”*** (page 18). They are serving as the “front door” of a sophisticated, multi-faceted service delivery approach that performs intake, triage and assignment by telephone for the whole of array of legal services offered by the program, including advice-only and brief services (over the telephone or at a program office), appointments at legal clinics or with pro bono attorneys, or assignment to program advocates for extended service if the situation and available resources warrant it.
2. ***The majority of clients of telephone-based assistance receive follow-up from the program after having been served*** (page 19). In this respect, clients have affirmed that the Pennsylvania telephone-based legal assistance systems are in alignment with one of the best practices recommended by the 2002 Hotline Study.
3. ***Pennsylvania legal aid clients are benefiting from best practices developed through a decade of research and technical assistance by the legal aid community on telephone-based legal assistance*** (page 20).

<sup>25</sup> See Pearson, Jessica and Lanae Davis, “*The Hotlines Assessment Study: Final Report;*” 2002, available at <http://www.nlada.org/DMS/Documents/1037903536.22/finalhlreport.pdf>.

4. *The vast majority – between 79 and 96 percent - of clients served by telephone took follow-up action on the advice they were given* (page 21).
5. *Between 50 and 88 percent of those who took action said it worked “very well” for them* (page 23).
6. *Telephone-based services achieved significant results for clients* (page 24).  
Approximately half of clients achieved their goals “completely” or “somewhat.” Twenty nine percent achieved positive outcomes beyond receipt of advice-only or brief services.
7. *One-half of the clients served by telephone achieved complete or partial solutions to their legal problems* (page 25). This was comparable to, or slightly better than, the results found by the 2002 Hotline Study (page 26).
8. *Six out of ten clients considered the results of their cases to be “favorable”* (page 26).
9. *Three out of four clients of telephone-based assistance said their experience was positive* (page 27).

These findings provide strong evidence that from a clients’ perspective, telephone-based advice and brief services are providing not only broader and more convenient access to services but real solutions to legal problems and outcomes clients deem favorable, even in some cases where the facts of the situation are not favorable to the client’s preferred outcome. Taken as a whole, they indicate that telephone-based legal assistance is a legitimate vehicle for effective, high-quality assistance to clients.

## **VI. FINDINGS REGARDING IMPACTS OF THREE MAJOR VARIABLES ON RESULTS ACHIEVED FOR CLIENTS OF TELEPHONE-BASED LEGAL ASSISTANCE**

In addition to addressing the threshold questions posed by the Performance Audit Report,<sup>26</sup> the Client Survey provided an opportunity to learn more about the factors that affect the results achieved for clients through telephone-based legal assistance. Clients’ responses to questions about what happened in their cases were applied in an analysis that explored the following questions:

- Did the recipients of telephone-based legal assistance whose cases were closed by “*advice and counsel*” achieve different results than those whose cases were closed by “*brief services*”?
- Did clients served *primarily by telephone* achieve different results than those served *in-person*?
- Did results differ depending on the *legal problems* of the clients?

These questions were explored by comparing results on the basis of the following measures:

- The extent to which clients considered their legal problems solved.
- Whether or not clients achieved specific, positive outcomes.
- Whether clients considered their results to be favorable or unfavorable.

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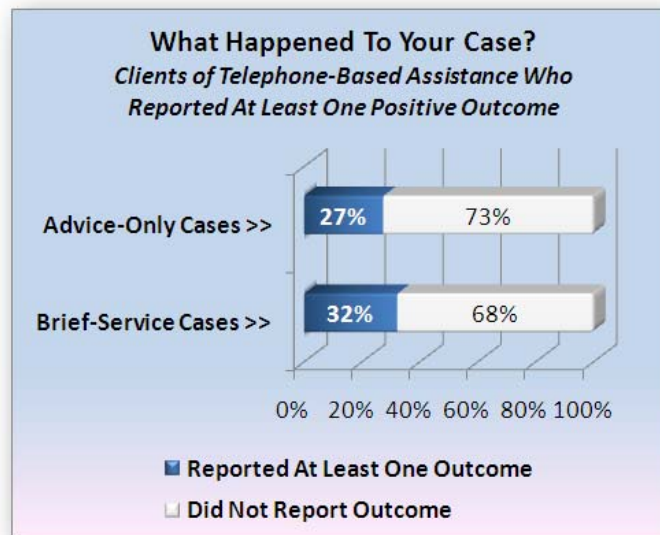
<sup>26</sup> Section IV presents findings on the first question – what results are achieved by clients who have received advice-only or brief services from a Pennsylvania legal aid program? Section V presents findings on the second question – how effective is the legal assistance being provided primarily by telephone?

- Whether or not clients felt their goals were met.

**A. Advice-Only Versus Brief Services Cases Handled By Telephone: *No large differences in results for clients were observed.***

- **Outcomes (see Exhibit 25):** Among *advice-only* recipients of phone-based services, **27 percent** were able to report that they achieved at least one positive outcome. Among phone-based *brief services* recipients served by phone, the percentage was **32 percent**. This slight difference was *not* statistically significant.<sup>27</sup>

**Exhibit 25**

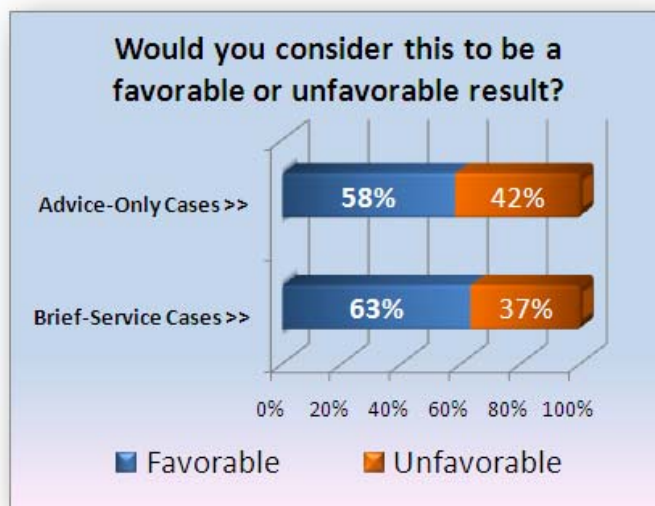


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<sup>27</sup> Statistical tests indicated that in samples of the size studied in this survey, the amount of difference in results seen here could have occurred through chance alone.

- **Favorable versus unfavorable results.** The percentage of clients served by telephone that expressed an opinion and considered their results “favorable” was almost the same for advice-only recipients (58 percent) as for brief services recipients (63 percent). (See Exhibit 26). The difference was *not* statistically significant.

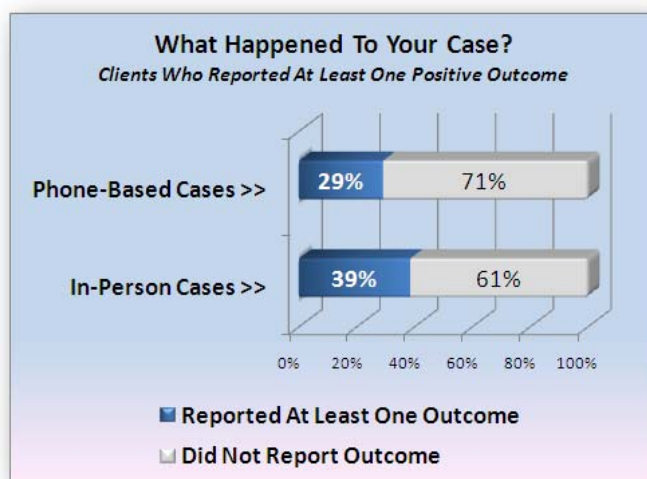
**Exhibit 26**



**B. Telephone-Based Services versus In-Person Services: *Marginal differences favored clients who were served in-person.***

- **Outcomes** (see Exhibit 27): Among clients who were served by telephone, **29 percent** reported at least one positive outcome. Among clients served in-person, the percentage was **39 percent**. This difference was statistically significant.<sup>28</sup>

**Exhibit 27**



<sup>28</sup> Statistical tests indicated that for samples of the size studied in this survey this amount of difference was significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

- **Problem solutions** (see Exhibit 28): Among clients served by telephone, **36 percent** considered their problems to be “completely” solved. Among clients served in person, the corresponding percentage was **45 percent**. This difference was *not* statistically significant.

**Exhibit 28**

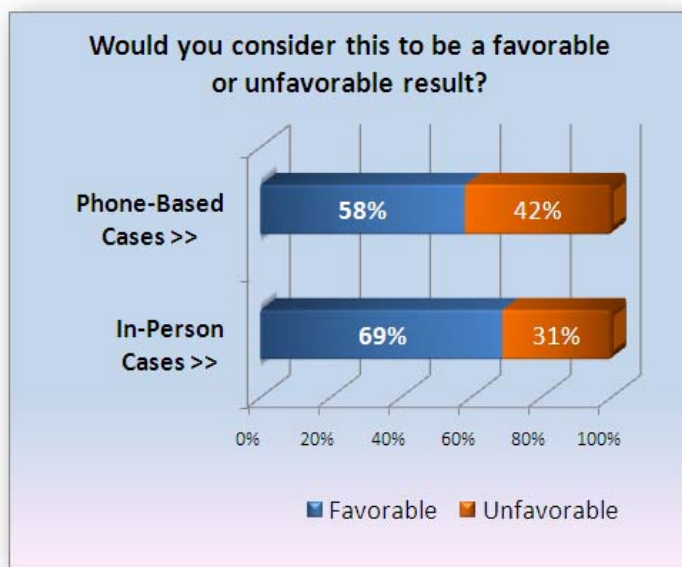


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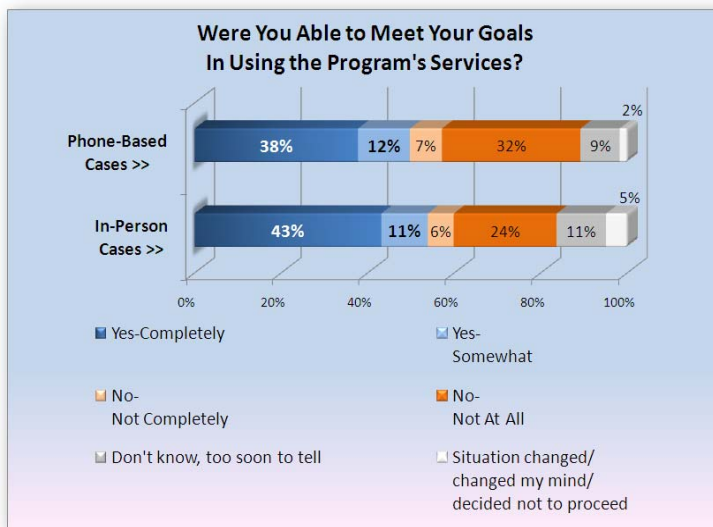
- **Favorable results** (see Exhibit 29): Among clients served by telephone, **58 percent** of those who expressed an opinion considered their results to be “favorable.” Among clients served in person, the corresponding percentage was **69 percent**. This difference was statistically significant.<sup>29</sup>

**Exhibit 29**



- **Met goals** (see Exhibit 30): Among clients served by telephone, **38 percent** indicated they had met their goals “completely.” Among clients served in person, the corresponding percentage was **44 percent**. This difference was *not* statistically significant.

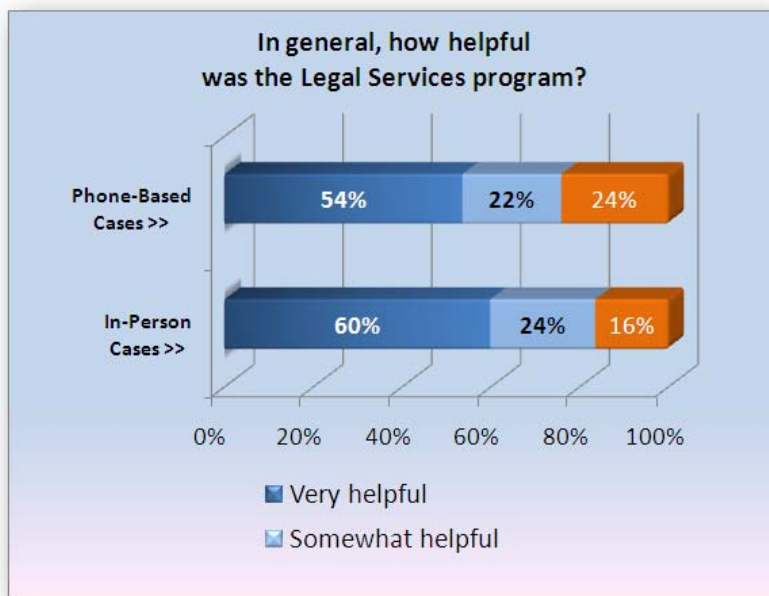
**Exhibit 30**



<sup>29</sup> Statistical tests indicated that for samples of the size studied in this survey this amount of difference was significant at the 93 percent confidence level.

- **Client satisfaction** (see Exhibit 31): Among clients served by telephone who expressed an opinion, **54 percent** rated the legal services programs as “very helpful.” Among clients served in person, the corresponding percentage was **60 percent**. This difference was statistically significant.

**Exhibit 31**



**In combination, exhibits 27 through 31 suggest that results for clients are marginally better for clients served in-person than those provided with telephone-based assistance.** The reasons for the differences are not discernible from the information produced by this study. Potential explanations could include any or both of the following:

- **The cases might not have been strictly comparable.** The cases flagged as in-person matters might reflect the selection decisions of intake staff as much as differences in the way services were provided. Based on initial screening, intake workers sometimes direct clients having difficult problems (for example, eviction) or needing special attention (for example, having limited English language skills) to a program office for in-person service. Consequently, clients flagged for special treatment and served in-person might have responded more positively to the Client Survey than clients served entirely by telephone.
- **Face-to-face services might be more effective under these circumstances.** The ratings of clients served in-person might reflect the perception they were heard clearly by their legal advisor, understood the advice they received, and achieved a good result.

Again, the differences between the two modes of service were not large. The percentage of clients reporting good results from telephone-based service is only slightly lower than those reported by clients served in person. From a practical, service delivery standpoint, the difference is not enormously significant. Vastly more clients can be served by telephone than in person with the same resources. Moreover, telephone-based services provide much greater convenience for

clients, considering the logistical challenges posed by jobs, school, transportation and child care in obtaining legal assistance by visiting a program office rather than by calling on the phone.

However, in consideration of the fact that a slight difference was found in the Client Survey, a conservative application of the findings would be to follow these guidelines:

- **Clients with difficult legal problems or facing unusual challenges should continue to be provided with in-person services** where they can benefit from the extra attention and enhanced communication that can result. Intake procedures should be applied that provide screening for difficult problems or special client challenges, such as limited English proficiency, physical or emotional disabilities or low literacy.
- **Clients who do not have difficult problems or unusual challenges can effectively be served by telephone.** The benefits of easier access, greater efficiency – both for clients and for the program – and comparable outcomes make the telephone-based services of Pennsylvania programs a vital component of a modern, full range, mixed-service delivery system.

### C. Impact of Legal Problem Type on Results Achieved by Clients

A comparison of the results achieved by clients of telephone-based legal assistance across the top 10 legal problems faced by clients found *no* statistically significant association between the legal problems faced by clients and the results they achieved as a result of the legal assistance they received.<sup>30</sup>

That is not to say that legal problem doesn't matter. Rather, these findings only indicate that the sample sizes for the Client Survey were not large enough for us to say with confidence that particular problems are more amenable to telephone-based assistance than others.

Exhibit 32 below indicates the legal problems and associated sample sizes included in this analysis.

**Exhibit 32**

Legal Problem	Cases
Custody/Visitation	23
Private Landlord/Tenant	20
Medicaid	15
Mortgage Foreclosures	13
Unemployment Compensation	13
Bankruptcy/Debtor Relief	7
Federally Subsidized Housing	7
SSI	7
Collection	6
Homeownership/Real Property	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>

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<sup>30</sup> Statistical tests indicated that the differences in results for various legal problems of clients were statistically significant only at the 60-70 percent confidence level. Most researchers consider confidence levels below 90 percent NOT to be significant.

Differences might have been found to be statistically significant had the sample sizes been larger. The impact of legal problem type, if any, could easily have been masked by other sources of variation in a survey of this size. For example, the 23 “custody/visitation” cases in the sample were spread across ten legal aid programs, each with different helpline policies, operations and staff capabilities. Moreover, these samples were further subdivided into advice-only and brief service cases. With only a few cases per program of a specific type (such as custody/visitation) and a specific service type (advice-only versus brief services), any variation in results due to legal problem types would likely have been masked by variation due to these other factors.

## D. Summary of Findings Regarding Impacts of Major Variables on Effectiveness of Telephone-Based Legal Assistance

In summary, the Client Survey found that:

1. *There were no large differences in results between advice-only cases and brief services cases* (page 31).
2. *Marginally better results were reported for in-person services than for services provided primarily by telephone* (beginning at page 32). The results of our analysis this factor are summarized in Exhibit 33 below:

### Exhibit 33: Summary of Findings Regarding Telephone-based versus In-Person Assistance

All "Advice" Cases (Including "Advice-Only" and "Brief Services")	TELEPHONE-BASED			IN-PERSON			Significant Difference (See Note *)
	Advice-Only and Brief Services			Advice-Only and Brief Services			
	Yes	Some- what	Total YES	Yes	Some- what	Total YES	
<i>Achieved At Least One Positive Outcome</i>	29%	(NA)	29%	39%	(NA)	39%	✓
<i>Met Goals Completely or Somewhat</i>	38%	12%	50%	43%	11%	54%	
<i>Had Legal Problem Solved Completely or Somewhat</i>	36%	11%	46%	45%	6%	51%	
<i>Considered Result to Be Favorable</i>	58%	(NA)	58%	69%	(NA)	69%	✓
<i>Thought Legal Services Program was Very or Somewhat Helpful</i>	54%	22%	76%	60%	24%	84%	✓

\*NOTE: The differences in results indicated with "✓" were found to be statistically significant at a 93 percent or higher confidence level.

- The slight advantage of in-person assistance suggests that programs should continue to assign difficult cases or clients with extra challenges to program offices for in-person services. Special screening procedures should be applied at intake to ensure that these cases are flagged for in-person service.
  - The fact that the advantage of in-person assistance is so slight suggests that telephone-based assistance can produce good results for the majority of clients whose situations do not pose special challenges calling for in-person services.
3. *The legal problems of clients were found not to be correlated with the results they achieved through telephone-based legal assistance* (page 36). Differences in results might indeed exist, but the sample sizes for the Client Survey were not large enough to say with confidence that some problems are more amenable to telephone-based legal assistance than others.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Client Survey sheds light on the question raised by the Performance Audit Report: what results are achieved by clients in the 50 percent of the total cases handled by AJA-funded legal aid programs that are resolved by advice – either advice-only or brief services cases?

For a strong majority of clients, the Client Survey indicates the services are effective – for example, six out of ten achieve results they deem “favorable,” and eight out of ten obtain services they find “helpful.” The advice-only and brief services provided by Pennsylvania legal aid programs are enabling many thousands of people a year to address simple legal problems quickly, with much better results than they would have if left to deal with these problems without access to any legal assistance.

Advice-only and brief services are legal aid’s “emergency room” cases. The evidence shows that these services are not only effective; they are essential. Without them, thousands of low-income families a year would be forced to confront their legal problems without any legal help at all, with consequences that in some circumstances would be devastating.

Another issue on which the Client Survey provides additional insight concerns the results achieved by clients when the advice-only or brief services are delivered by telephone. The Client Survey provides strong evidence that from a client perspective, telephone-based advice and brief services are not only effective but provide more convenient access to services and enable vastly more people to get legal help than would be possible through only traditional face-to-face methods with the same amount of resources.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that telephone-based legal assistance is a legitimate vehicle for delivery of effective, high-quality assistance to clients. Regardless of where they go from here, Pennsylvania programs can take satisfaction in having achieved something remarkable – that is, establishing and operating service delivery systems that are providing real benefits day in and day out to thousands of clients who otherwise would be unable to get the legal help they sorely need.



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