



OHIO STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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Law You Can Use: Consumer Information Column

Student Legal Services: Lawyers for Students

By Molly Hegarty

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Like many Americans, undergraduate, graduate and professional students often have difficulty accessing affordable legal services. Recognizing that legal issues can greatly impact a student's overall success, more than 90 U.S. colleges and universities provide high-quality, low-cost legal services for students. The offices have assorted titles and the services they provide can vary from full-service law office to brief consultation and referral only. In Ohio, six universities have full-service programs including The Ohio State University, Bowling Green State University, Kent State University, Wright State University, Ohio University and the University of Toledo.

Student Legal Services at The Ohio State University (SLS) is a nonprofit law office that contracts with Ohio State to provide legal advice, representation, education and resources to eligible Ohio State students. In order to be eligible, students must be enrolled at the Columbus main campus in a degree-seeking program. Students automatically opt in to an SLS fee of \$40.00, but if a student chooses to waive that fee, they are no longer eligible for legal assistance from SLS.

Since opening in 2011, SLS has provided direct legal services to more than 25,000 students. Students involved in civil matters have received economic benefits totaling more than \$2.3 million dollars. Additionally, students have saved millions more in attorneys' fees due to the low cost legal help provided by SLS.

The SLS program covers legal matters commonly encountered by students including criminal misdemeanors, traffic citations, landlord-tenant disputes, consumer protection issues, uncontested domestic disputes and more. Legal issues can have an impact on a student's life in many ways. Prior to seeking SLS services, 78 percent of clients stated that their legal issue was causing them stress. Twenty-three percent of clients reported that without legal help, they would have considered leaving school.

A typical scenario may include a student who lives off-campus and suddenly finds themselves without heat in the middle of winter. In this case, dealing with an unreasonable landlord, city code officials and the court system can be overwhelming. An SLS attorney can guide this student so that they can focus on academic studies.

Another common legal issue faced by students are citations for drinking underage. Having an SLS attorney means the student receives legal representation from a highly qualified criminal defense attorney who has connections with university resources that provide advice and education about high-risk drinking and evidence-based alcohol diversion programs.

Intimate partner stalking and violence is another issue commonly addressed by SLS. An SLS attorney can advise students about university resources including counseling, walk the student through filing criminal charges and represent them in obtaining a civil stalking protection order.



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In addition to delivering legal advice and representation, SLS provides outreach, education and resources. Each year, thousands of students attend SLS's programming intended to prevent legal issues from occurring. For example, through the University's First Year Experience Success Series, students learn about their criminal rights and responsibilities in SLS's "Under 21? Don't Be Dumb...and Other Lessons From Your Lawyer."

In "Leases, Landlords and the Law" second-year students considering moving off-campus in their third year learn about finding housing, signing leases, security deposits and more from SLS staff and from OSU's Off-Campus and Commuter Students. Students are advised to have leases reviewed by SLS before they sign and become legally obligated. SLS provides these lease reviews to hundreds of students each year and, in turn, students become better prepared and more knowledgeable consumers.

SLS staff exclusively assists students and understand that the student's legal issue may not be the only difficulty they are facing. The program regards the student holistically, assisting with corresponding problems like finances, food and housing insecurity, trauma and lack of familial support. Students are regularly connected with resources at the university and in the community. In fact, 96 percent of students reported that as a result of their experience with SLS, they were more aware of resources available at their school.

Because SLS serves only students, one of the program's primary goals is to educate clients and ensure that they are resourceful, able to confront similar situations after they graduate and learn the importance of connecting with an attorney. SLS has been successful in reaching this goal. As a result of their experience with SLS, 97 percent of clients report feeling better equipped to handle a similar situation in the future.

For more information about The Ohio State University's Student Legal Services program, services and eligibility, visit <http://studentlegal.osu.edu>.

To learn more about the other Ohio Student Legal Services programs, visit:

- Bowling Green State University: <https://www.bgsu.edu/student-legal-services>
- Wright State University: <https://www.wright.edu/student-legal-services>
- Kent State University: <https://www.kent.edu/sls>
- Ohio University: <https://www.studentlegalrights.org>
- University of Toledo: <http://www.utoledo.edu/studentaffairs/studentlegalservices>

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About the Author

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This "Law You Can Use" consumer legal information column was provided by the Ohio State Bar Association (OSBA). Articles appearing in this column are intended to provide broad, general information about the law. This article is not intended to be legal advice. Before applying this information to a specific legal problem, readers are urged to seek advice from a licensed attorney.