The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommended that law enforcement agencies partner with legal aid agencies to increase trust and keep communities safe (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Legal aid can work with law enforcement in several ways, from reducing domestic violence, to protecting consumers, reducing recidivism, and keeping children in school.

Page 1 of this research brief provides some research highlights; page 2 a narrative overview; page 3 a featured federal resource; page 4 other helpful resources; and pages 5-7 summaries of the curated studies. All endnotes are to sources not included in our summaries section.

**RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:**

- “The U.S. Department of Justice should support and encourage cross-discipline leadership training. This can be within the criminal justice system but also across governments, nonprofits, and the private sector, including social services, legal aid, businesses, community corrections, education, the courts, mental health organizations, civic and religious organizations, and others” (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).
- “Legal services for domestic violence victims reduce domestic violence rates and the associated law enforcement costs” (Abel & Vignola, 2010).
- Two researchers investigated some of the barriers older African American women face when deciding whether or not to go to the police. They recommend that “Law enforcement agencies could utilize relationships with personnel at domestic violence shelters for training and community outreach. This process should recognize that older African American women are particularly loath to report domestic violence because of stigma and age dependency” (Lichtenstein & Johnson, 2009).
- Receiving legal assistance, which can make one feel more independent and safe, can increase cooperation with the police. “Research indicates that women who have more experience with the criminal justice system — especially those with protective orders or who have experienced more severe abuse histories — are more likely to call police” (National Institute of Justice, 2009).
NARRATIVE OVERVIEW RE:
PARTNERING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommended that law enforcement agencies partner with legal aid agencies to increase trust and keep communities safe (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Legal aid can work with law enforcement in several ways, from reducing domestic violence, to protecting consumers, and keeping children in school.

DATA AND STUDIES SHOW LEGAL AID HELPS:

Studies show that police can work with legal aid service providers to protect domestic violence victims and that having access to legal services increases the likelihood of reporting a domestic violence incident. Legal aid can reduce domestic violence by increasing access to protective orders and assisting with child custody issues, ultimately decreasing calls to law enforcement, saving them money and resources (Abel & Vignola, 2010). Legal aid can also help promote trust and legitimacy of law enforcement. One study found that African American women in the rural south did not feel comfortable reporting domestic violence to law enforcement; but, that when they had access to legal services, they were more likely to feel independent (such as through accessing benefits and gaining financial independence) and then submit a report (Lichtenstein & Johnson, 2009). Victims of domestic violence are also more likely to report abuse to law enforcement agencies when they have a protective order because they are more comfortable with the justice system (National Institute of Justice, 2009).

Legal aid can assist law enforcement when it reduces barriers to employment, helps keep children in school, and protects people from consumer finance issues. Each of these is further elaborated in other research summaries in this series. Legal aid can reduce recidivism¹ and assist those returning to society from prison with re-integration.² It can also help with consumer finance issues. For example, legal aid services can help resolve debts and provide advice, especially for those vulnerable to exploitation, such as domestic violence survivors or low-income individuals, which prevents and thus reduces related law enforcement costs.³ Legal aid can also help disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline by helping children stay in school, by helping prevent suspensions and expulsion and assisting parents and families who are eligible for benefits, like free school meals.⁴ Legal aid can assist parents with receiving help for a child’s behavioral issues⁵ reducing the reliance on corporal punishment in schools, freeing up law enforcement resources and reducing potentially negative interactions between students and law enforcement officers.
FEATURED FEDERAL RESOURCE:
U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime Vision 21 Report

Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services (TVS) outlines a comprehensive and systematic approach to change how we meet victims’ needs. TVS grew out of a series of meetings that were sponsored by OVC. The discussion and research focused on the role of victim assistance, how to better serve victims, addressing issues in the field, and identify emerging issues in the field.

This report dedicates an entire chapter to meeting the holistic legal needs of crime victims. The TVS statement reads: “Every state will establish wraparound legal networks that will help ensure that crime victims’ rights are enforced and that victims of crime receive the broad range of legal services needed to help rebuild their lives in the aftermath of crime” (p. 9). This chapter summarized efforts made within the last decade to secure crime victims’ rights, the difficulties victims face in navigating the justice system, and ways that legal networks can better address crime victims’ needs.

Highlights:
- “A staggering 42 percent of victims never report serious violent crime to law enforcement. We need to know why. Stakeholders described a maze of overlapping, complex legal issues facing victims; for example, a single victimization can involve immigration status, civil legal assistance, administrative law remedies, and rights enforcement” (p. vi).
- “Victims of crime all too often face a perplexing maze of coexisting, overlapping, and complex legal issues after their victimization. They must navigate multiple systems (i.e., the criminal, civil, and administrative justice systems), each with its own requirements and processes. One case of victimization may produce myriad legal issues for the victim, including orders of protection, victims’ rights enforcement, compensation, employment, housing, home foreclosure, spousal support, and child custody, visitation, and dependency” (p. 12).
- “Serving crime victims in indigenous communities presents a special challenge to all members of the victim service community, particularly providers of legal services. American Indian and Alaska Native populations suffer significantly higher crime rates than the rest of the Nation—a fact that underscores the urgency of finding ways to deliver services more successfully or, in the case of legal assistance, to deliver services at all” (p. 12).
- “Compounding the lack of legal representation for crime victims is the absence of a single point of entry through which victims of all types of crime may access services to address the wide range of legal needs they may have as the result of their victimization” (p. 14).
- “A coordinated, collaborative, and holistic legal response has the potential to serve victims far better through an inherent capacity to provide the type of legal assistance needed at any given time. A network approach would also ensure that victims are connected to community legal resources that can help them address their administrative, civil, and other legal issues” (p. 14).

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (May 2015) offers best practices for law enforcement. The report suggests legal aid as a potential partner.6
- The White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable toolkit presents a case study in how civil legal aid supports law enforcement and promotes public safety. It includes examples of the federal response, the need, and stories of how partnerships help vulnerable Americans, like domestic violence survivors and children.7
- Legal Services Corporation has collected client success stories here.8
- For more information about civil legal aid messaging, communications, and story-telling, go to the Voices for Civil Justice and All Rise for Civil Justice websites.9
- For a more comprehensive repository of legal aid related research, go to the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's LegalAidResearch website.10

Endnotes

3 Sarah Dranoff et al., Identity Theft: A Low-Income Issue. 17 Dialogue: News and Perspectives from the ABA Division for Legal Services (2014).
6 http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finareport.pdf
9 See https://voicesforciviljustice.org/ and https://www.allriseforciviljustice.org/
10 https://legalaidresearch.org/
SUMMARIES OF KEY STUDIES


This report analyzes how law enforcement agencies can improve public trust and perceived legitimacy, establish policies that reflect community values, use technology to improve policing practices and trust, reduce crime through community policing, expand training and evaluation, and improve officer wellness and safety. In the Task Force’s report, they emphasize how law enforcement should partner with legal aid programs and academic institutions to improve evaluations and practices.

**Methodology:**
The President’s Task Force held multiple public listening sessions throughout the country and accepted written testimony from any individual or organization.

**Highlights:**
- “The Federal Government should encourage and support partnerships between law enforcement and academic institutions to support a culture that values ongoing education and the integration of current research into the development of training, policies, and practices” (p. 55).
- “The U.S. Department of Justice should support and encourage cross-discipline leadership training. This can be within the criminal justice system but also across governments, nonprofits, and the private sector, including social services, legal aid, businesses, community corrections, education, the courts, mental health organizations, civic and religious organizations, and others” (p. 55).
  - “By interacting with a more diverse group of professionals, police can establish a valuable network of contacts whose knowledge and skills differ from but complement their own” (p. 55).


This study quantifies the financial and other societal benefits of civil legal aid programs. They conduct a comprehensive literature review of studies that have assessed the financial impact of legal aid programs. Among their findings, Abel and Vignola find that legal aid reduces costs associated with law enforcement by lowering re-arrest rates and reducing domestic violence.

**Methodology:**
Abel and Vignola, who are lawyers and legal scholars, conduct a comprehensive literature review of cost benefit analyses of providing civil legal aid services.

**Highlights:**
- “Legal services for domestic violence victims reduce domestic violence rates and the associated law enforcement costs” (p. 140).
- “When civil legal aid programs prevent domestic violence, they avoid the need for society to spend money on medical care for injured victims, special education and counseling for affected children, [and] police resources and prison for perpetrators” (p. 148, also quoting Memorandum from Lonnie Powers, Exec. Director, Mass. Legal Assistance Corp., to Ben Clements, 4 [Dec. 10, 2007])
This study investigates some of the barriers that older African American women report experiencing when deciding whether to go to the police regarding domestic violence. The main reasons for not going to law enforcement when experiencing abuse was fear of being stigmatized by their church, family, and community. The researchers reviewed data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System and conducted fieldwork in four rural counties in the Black Belt of Alabama. They find that when women feel more independent, which can be furthered by legal services such as assisting with benefits and outreach, they were more likely to come forward to seek out law enforcement. Both authors are criminologists at the University of Alabama.

Methodology:
They reviewed data from the FBI’s National Incident-Based Reporting System and conducted fieldwork in four rural counties in Alabama. They also interviewed individuals who worked law enforcement, domestic violence shelters, adult protective services, directors of legal clinics, and ministers. They recruited older African American women from these conversations.

Highlights:
- A legal director says: “Older women are afraid of the abuser discovering they are seeking help. They will say, ‘Don’t call me I will call you, and don’t send me a letter.’ I may only hear about the abuse if she approaches me after I give a talk or if she comes to the clinic seeking legal help for something else. They are really an invisible population” (p. 296).
- “As a long-suffering victim at the hands of her now deceased husband, Ernestine (80) explained, ‘A younger woman isn’t as afraid as an older woman, and she is more likely to call the police. An older woman is more easily intimidated. It’s the fear of him getting you, and it’s the fear of losing everything.’ In this case, legal protections such as warrantless arrests, protection orders, restraining orders, legal aid, and enhanced penalties for first, second, and third degree assault in domestic violence cases were rarely sought, and gaining access to older victims to explain these protections was virtually impossible” (p. 297).
- “There were also reports about court officials ignoring the physical dangers of leaving an abuser, such as when circuit judges refused to sign protection orders unless victims left home and sued for divorce. Thus, the barriers to reporting domestic violence among older women included mistrust of law enforcement and legal systems that were perceived to be negligent or biased against domestic violence victims” (p. 299).
- “The key informants who provided legal advice to abused women did refer to an old boys’ network in describing a rural matrix in which the gender rules were clear—abused women feared the consequences of reporting domestic violence because of systemic protection for male abusers” (p. 302).
- “Law enforcement agencies could utilize relationships with personnel at domestic violence shelters for training and community outreach. This process should recognize that older African American women are particularly loath to report domestic violence because of stigma and age dependency. Such levels of support would make sense in terms of building a sense of trust among older women of color and empowering any woman who needs safe, legal help in ending domestic violence” (p. 303).
This document examines the extent to which domestic violence is reported to law enforcement, victim and perpetrator characteristics, judicial responses, and intervention programs. Klein writes that several factors make an individual more likely to contact law enforcement over domestic violence, such as having a previous protective order (which can be obtained through legal aid services) and feeling confident that law enforcement will be able to assist them. Klein is a criminal justice research analyst.

**Methodology:**
This report conducts a systematic review of domestic violence research for practitioners. It also offers implications for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges.

**Highlights:**
- “Some victims are more likely to report their victimization or revictimization than others. Research indicates that women who have more experience with the criminal justice system — especially those with protective orders or who have experienced more severe abuse histories — are more likely to call police” (p. 7).
- “Civil protective order files offer law enforcement and prosecutors an essential tool in identifying domestic violence victims and perpetrators, gauging victim risk, and correctly calibrating appropriate charges and sentences. They may also indicate prior uncharged crimes that may be prosecuted along with more recent charges, particularly if the same victim and/or witnesses are involved in both sets of charges” (p. 9).
- “Victim cooperation can be enhanced if prosecutors can address victim fear of their abusers as well as their fear around being involved in subsequent legal proceedings” (p. 41).