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Understanding and Addressing the Legal Needs of Refugees

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Community Legal Aid

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Understanding and Addressing the Legal Needs of Refugees

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Disclosure

We have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program/presentation.

Background

- Community Legal Aid, non profit poverty law firm helps low income families and elders to access basic needs such as safety net benefits, safe and affordable housing, freedom from violence through legal care, and fairness. CLA fights housing and employment discrimination.
- Medical Legal Partnership Family Advocates of Central Massachusetts was founded in 2003 to address the negative social determinants of health that can be reduced through legal care. Medical partners are community health centers, UMass Medical School and UMass Memorial Pediatrics
- Spike in request for legal service from refugees led to this collaboration, hoping to better define areas of concern and identify interventions at population level

Goal = reduce barriers

impeding access to public benefits and housing for
Worcester's growing and diverse refugee population

Strategy = improve understanding

advocacy

- individual and
- systemic levels

training

- refugees and
- those who serve them

Project Methodology

Mixed methods:

Legal case review

Observation and outreach

Focus groups

Inter-professional engagement of learners:

Medical student summer assistant

Law student assistant

Community health coalition assistant

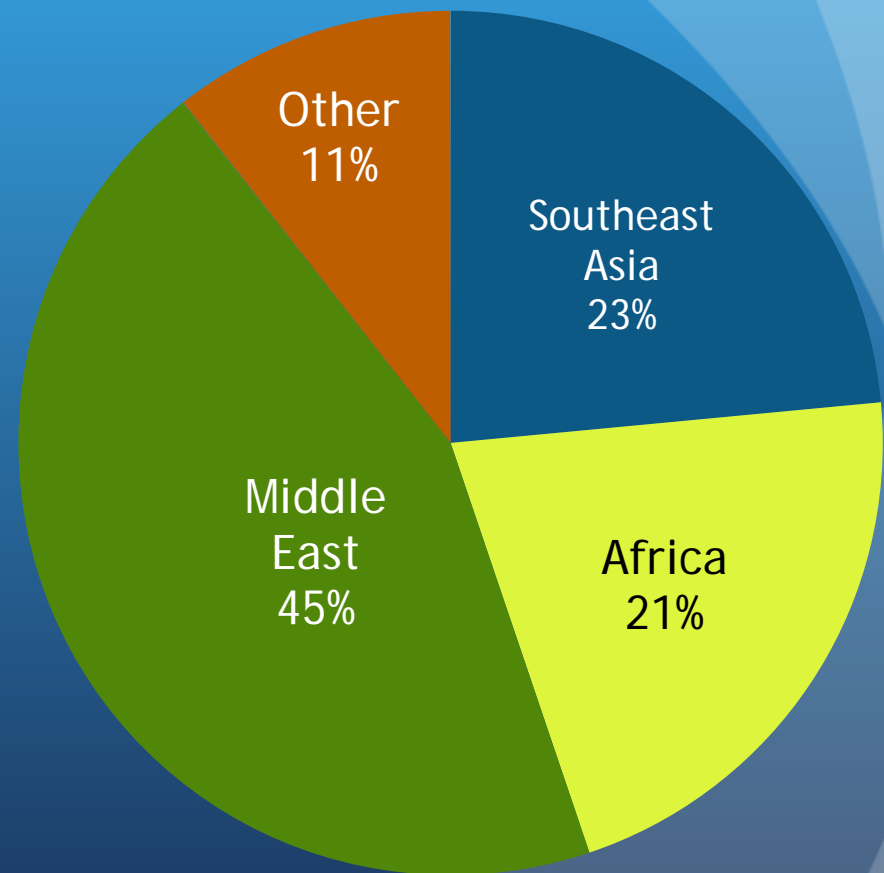


Case review: who is seeking service?

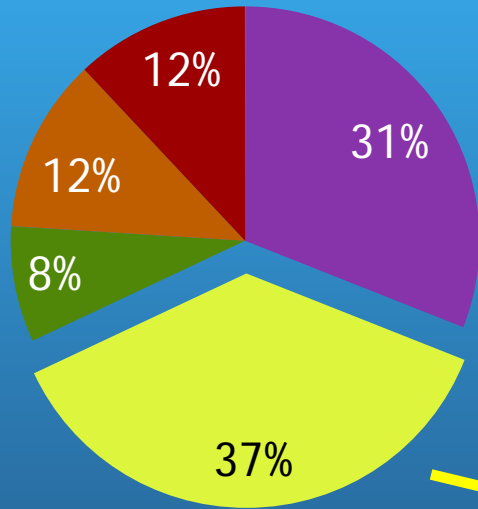
Refugee cases seen:

- Southeast Asian countries (n=9)
 - Bhutan
 - Burma
 - Cambodia
 - Vietnam
- Central African countries (n=9)
 - Chad
 - Congo
 - Ghana
 - Uganda/Kenya
- Middle Eastern countries (n=15)
 - Egypt
 - Iraq
 - Jordan
- Other (n=5)
 - Guatemala
 - Unknown

CLA seeing increasing numbers of refugees seeking services which could be addressed from systems level approach

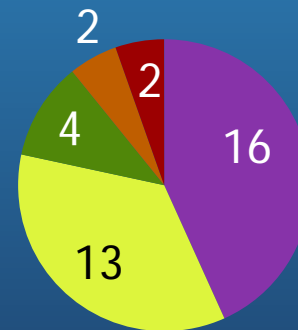


Legal issues presented



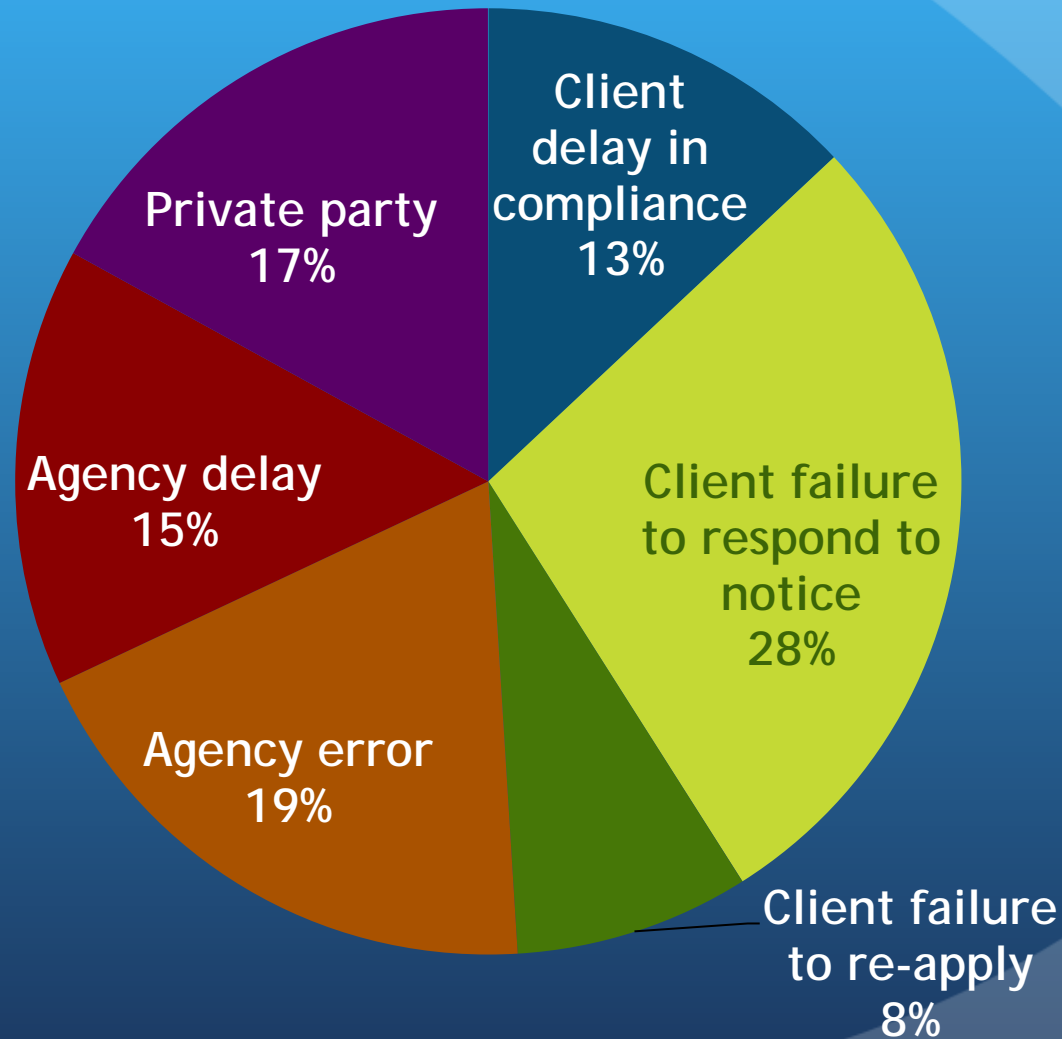
- MassHealth
- Financial assistance
- Domestic relations
- Housing
- Other

Within Financial assistance

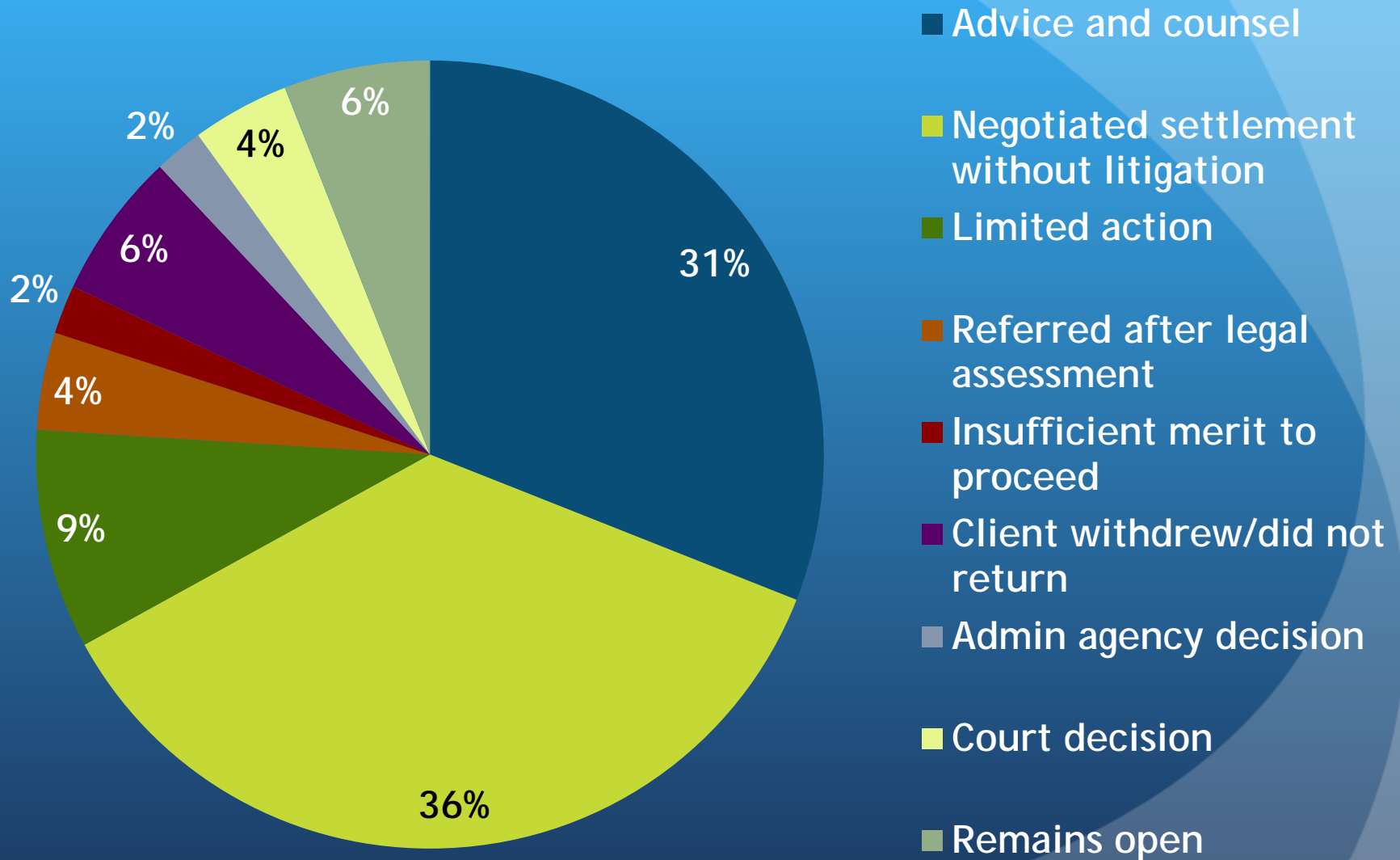


- TAFDC
- SNAP
- SSI
- EAEDC
- General

Source of problem



Service provided/ closing of case



Issues discovered in outreach

- Legal needs often appear in community group settings post-resettlement period
- Lack of awareness in refugee community about language access rights and resources available at CLA
- Lack of awareness in provider communities about medical-legal partnership and resources available at CLA
- CLA concerned that its intervention is not reaching target population and that its community education programs were not effectively supporting refugee community

Focus groups in progress

- Two of three completed
- Data confirm what we learned in case review
- Details being obtained about where flaws appear in which systems
- Needs for training and coalition building among providers are being identified and explored

Change in Practice at CLA

- Training models modified
- Systemic advocacy priorities identified
 - Housing
 - Safety Net Benefits
 - Need to coordinate with other refugee service providers (health and social needs)
- Deepened relationship with UMass Medical School
- Advocacy enhanced through stronger understanding of issues facing each refugee community

Next Steps

- Coalition building to expand MLP presence in health centers and relationships with providers of refugee services, including resettlement agencies, nonprofits and community health centers
- Better integration of medical-legal education for health-care and legal learners through multi-disciplinary methodology