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***The Hotline***  
***Outcomes Assessment Study***

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**Final Report - Phase III:**  
**Full-Scale Telephone Survey**

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November 2002

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# Acknowledgements

The Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study was commissioned by the Project for the Future of Equal Justice, with funding by the Law and Society Program of the Open Society Institute.

The Center for Policy Research gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following:

Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study Advisory Group: Jonathan Asher, Sandy DeMent, John Eidleman, Michael Genz, Wayne Moore, Susan Reif, MaryAnn Sarosi.

Managers and staff at participating Hotlines, especially Zina Hill, Center for Arkansas Legal Services; Bill Tanner, Crystal Sims, and Bob Cohen, Legal Aid Society of Orange County; Leslie Corbett, Al Schwartz, and Jim Brown, Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services, Chicago; Lynda Krupp, Legal Aid and Defender Association of Detroit; Joan Kleinberg, Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral, Washington.

Project for the Future of Equal Justice: Julia Gordon, Senior Staff Attorney; Robert Echols, Consultant.



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# Executive Summary

The Center for Policy Research (CPR) has worked with the project for the Future of Equal Justice (PFEJ) since June 1999 to conduct the Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study, an independent assessment of the effectiveness of using telephone Hotlines to provide brief legal advice and referrals to low-income people. This report describes the results of Phase III of the Study, which researched whether clients understand the advice they are given by Hotlines, whether they follow up on it, and whether they realize a satisfactory resolution of their problems.

The study methodology included:

- Generating samples of callers at five legal Hotlines that were representative of the total universe of clients served at legal services programs;
- Conducting telephone interviews with 2,034 callers three to six months after they contacted the Hotlines and eliciting their general reactions to the Hotlines, as well as the specific outcomes of their cases;
- Having experienced legal services lawyers generate both factual and evaluative assessments of outcomes, which were based on a review of case files and interview notes, including verbatim responses to questions about legal outcomes; and
- Analyzing the resulting data set to produce profiles of callers across the five sites and outcome patterns with special attention to the client, case, and advice characteristics of cases with favorable and unfavorable outcome patterns.

The key findings were:

- **Where an outcome could be determined, Hotline cases were almost evenly split between successful (48%) and unsuccessful (52%) outcomes.**
- **When callers understand what they are told to do and follow the advice they are given, they tend to prevail.** Only 6 percent of all clients received unfavorable results because they did not prevail after following the advice of Hotline workers. In contrast, 13 percent failed because they did not understand the advice that was given, and 9 percent because they lacked the time, initiative, or courage to try to do what the worker suggested.
- **Most clients who do not act fail to understand the advice they are given or are too intimidated or overwhelmed to attempt the recommended action.** Three to six months after phoning the Hotline, 21 percent of callers had not acted on the advice they received. About a quarter of the no action cases were attributed to clients not understanding what they were supposed to do, another 25 percent were too afraid to try or lacked the time or initiative, and an additional 10 percent were told to hire a private attorney and reported that they could not afford or find one.

- **Many Hotline cases result in outcomes that cannot readily be classified as successful or unsuccessful.** Success could not be gauged for many clients because they had a matter that was still pending three to six months after phoning the Hotline (19%) or their responses to questions about their cases were so unclear that PFEJ lawyers were unable to determine outcomes (9%).
- **Certain types of Hotline services are more apt to result in favorable outcomes.** Brief services yielded the highest favorable outcome ratings, followed in order by coaching clients on how to deal with a private party; providing written legal information, and coaching clients on how to proceed pro se in court. Favorable assessments were still lower when clients were instructed on dealing with a government agency or were referred to another agency.
- **Clients who were told to hire a private attorney had the worst outcomes and were the most dissatisfied.** Only 11 percent of clients who were told to hire an attorney achieved favorable case outcomes and 52 percent rated the Hotline as unhelpful. Of clients who were advised by Hotline workers to hire a private attorney, only 18 percent did so.
- **Outcomes for housing and consumer cases are most apt to be rated favorably, while family cases are most apt to be pending.** Housing and consumer cases had the highest rate of favorable outcomes, while family cases were lowest with many still pending when clients were interviewed. The findings for housing cases may reflect the fact that many unsuccessful housing clients had moved and were not reachable for an interview.
- **Hotline clients with the best and worst case results had distinct demographic characteristics.** Clients with outcomes that were rated most favorably were significantly more likely to be white, English-speaking, educated at least to the eighth-grade level, and have a marital status other than being separated from a spouse. Clients who received the least favorable outcomes were Spanish-speaking, Hispanic, individuals with the lowest education levels, those who reported no income, and those who were separated and lived apart from their spouse.
- **Many clients face barriers that may affect their ability to follow through on Hotline advice.** Many Hotline callers disclosed problems that may affect their ability to handle their legal problem such as: a family disability or a serious health problem; serious transportation problems; depression or fear of an ex-partner or current household member; inflexible work, school, or daycare schedules; or problems reading or speaking English well enough to complete forms and other legal paperwork. While clients with disabilities fared no worse than the average, the other barriers listed above were associated with outcomes that were significantly less favorable.
- **Some types of follow-up actions by the Hotline may boost the chances of callers experiencing favorable results.** Higher favorable outcomes were associated with getting a letter or other written material, a follow-up phone call from the Hotline, or help from someone other than the Hotline worker.



- **Clients rated their experiences with Hotlines favorably.** Nearly half (41%) characterized the Hotline as “very helpful” and 28 percent as “somewhat helpful.” Two-thirds of clients at every site credited the Hotline with helping them make better decisions, feel more confident about their abilities, and keep the problem from escalating.
- **Disappointed Hotline callers typically said there was nothing anyone could do or that they wanted a lawyer to do more for them, although a small fraction of callers complained about being treated rudely.** Approximately 2 percent of callers complained about disrespectful and uncaring treatment by Hotline workers.
- **User satisfaction ratings are associated with Hotline outcomes, but the relationship is not perfect.** While 63 percent of clients with favorable outcomes gave the Hotline a “very favorable” rating versus only 19 percent of clients with unfavorable outcomes, a third (32%) with unfavorable outcomes rated the Hotline as “somewhat helpful.” A quarter of the clients who did not follow the Hotline’s advice or did not prevail rated the Hotline as “very helpful.”

## Recommendations

To increase the ratio of favorable to unfavorable outcomes, Hotlines should adopt the following measures to enhance understanding and promote action:

- **Hotlines should recognize that certain demographic groups are particularly less likely to obtain favorable outcomes.** Hotlines should develop special protocols for dealing with non-English speakers, individuals at the lowest education levels, and those who report no income, possibly including increased support or more extended services.
- **Policymakers should take further steps to evaluate whether Hotlines are an appropriate method of delivering service to non-English speakers.** Although the non-English speaking clients in this study were provided services by the Hotline in Spanish, they had a particularly high rate of failure to act due to inability to understand the Hotline advice.
- **Hotlines should screen callers for certain barriers that are associated with unfavorable outcomes.** Hotlines should routinely question clients about a variety of barriers that affect their ability to address their legal problems and obtain successful outcomes. Screening for these problems is likely to require special attention during intake, since the PFEJ lawyers noted that most of these barriers could not be discerned from existing case files. Hotlines should develop protocols for dealing with these clients, possibly including increased support or more extended services.

- **Hotlines should institute or improve follow-up procedures.** Hotlines would do well to institute tickler systems flagging cases for a callback to check on the client’s progress. Cases that should be flagged are those in which one of the following factors is present:
  - The recommended action is one where clients are less likely to obtain a favorable outcome: representing self in court; dealing with a government agency; obtaining legal assistance from another provider.
  - The client falls into one of the demographic categories identified above that are less likely to obtain a favorable outcome.
  - The client reports one of the barriers described above as associated with a reduced likelihood of obtaining a favorable outcome.
  
- **Hotlines should develop or increase their capacity to provide brief services or institute a brief services unit.** Brief services are more likely to result in successful outcomes than advice or referral services. In cases where it may be possible to resolve the client’s problem with a letter, telephone call, or completion of a form or referral, it is likely to be a more effective use of resources for the Hotline or a related unit to perform the action than for the Hotline to advise the client how to do so.
  
- **Hotlines that do not routinely provide written information to clients should do so.** The provision of written information, whether a generic pamphlet on an issue or a letter detailing the advice provided, increases the likelihood of a successful outcome.
  
- **Hotlines should recognize that telling a caller that they should obtain a private attorney is unlikely to result in a successful outcome.** Most clients who are advised by the Hotline to retain a private attorney, particularly in divorce cases, will not be able to afford one willing to take their case. Hotlines should explore alternative services that are more likely to result in successful outcomes.
  
- **Hotlines should be aware of the limitations of client satisfaction data and analyze the data they get in ways that maximize their utility.** While user satisfaction is a legitimate and an important indicator, it is not a perfect measure of Hotline effectiveness. Clients are frequently more generous in their evaluations of Hotlines than their personal situations would suggest, which may reflect the fact that some clients who do not get what they want feel empowered by the information they receive.
  
- **Hotlines should conduct random follow-up telephone interviews with clients.** In order to more accurately assess performance, Hotlines would do well to institute random follow-up interviews to gauge the effectiveness of their services and to identify ways to improve them.

# Chapter I:

## Background

The Center for Policy Research (CPR) has worked with the Project for the Future of Equal Justice (PFEJ) since June 1999 to conduct an independent assessment of the effectiveness of using Hotlines to provide legal services to low-income populations. Hotlines are programs that allow eligible callers<sup>1</sup> to speak directly to a legal worker who can analyze the caller's problem and provide legal advice, information, referral, and, in some cases, brief services.

Pioneered by legal services programs providing legal services to the elderly, Hotlines have been adopted for use by a growing number of legal services programs that serve a general low-income population. Historically, more than two-thirds of the cases handled by Legal Services Corporation (LSC)-funded legal services programs are for advice and counsel, referral, or brief service. The theory behind Hotlines is that these tasks can be performed effectively through a telephone-based system, supported by appropriate computer software and staffed by advocates specially trained in the provision of advice and referral services.

As Hotlines have become more popular, legal services funders, managers, and staff have become increasingly interested in evaluating Hotline performance and in learning the effect of the establishment of Hotlines on the provision of more traditional extended representation. The Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study responds to that interest by evaluating Hotlines in several different ways.<sup>2</sup>

Phase I of the Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study used existing data to compare the number of brief service and extended representation cases handled both pre-Hotline and post-Hotline in 16 programs. In addition, CPR conducted telephone interviews with Hotline managers and Executive Directors of 44 legal services programs to determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of legal Hotlines and to document the various ways in which Hotlines are designed and implemented. Phase I found that Hotline managers believed the Hotlines expanded their program's capacity, productivity, and accessibility. It also found a mixed picture concerning the effects of a Hotline on extended representation, largely depending on the overall program budget and other factors.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the terms "callers" and "clients" are used interchangeably to represent eligible individuals who phone the Hotline and receive legal advice, information, or services.

<sup>2</sup> The Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study is funded through the Project for the Future of Equal Justice with grants from the Open Society Institute. The Project for the Future of Equal Justice is a joint initiative of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and the Center for Law and Social Policy.

Finally, the Phase I report concluded that more research was needed on client reactions to Hotlines and outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Because of data limitations, Phase I did not address whether clients (1) understand the advice they are given, (2) follow up on it, and (3) realize some satisfactory resolution of their problems.

Phase II of the study was conducted in the spring and summer of 2000 to explore the feasibility of answering these types of questions using survey research techniques. The specific objectives of Phase II were to develop and test a data collection procedure and instrument that would generate reliable information about Hotline outcomes. A draft data collection instrument was designed that could be administered over the telephone by non-lawyers to Hotline clients about their problems, their experience with the Hotline, and the outcomes of their calls; and it was tested at two Hotlines, Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut (SLS) and the Northwest Justice Project Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral (CLEAR). Phase II led to a number of conclusions about the feasibility of assessing outcomes to legal problems using survey research techniques. They included the following:

- **It is possible to generate a random sample of Hotline clients who are willing to be recontacted for evaluation purposes.** When asked, few clients objected to being contacted by telephone researchers; most readily supplied their phone number and secondary contact information.
- **It is possible for interviewers to reach 33 to 40 percent of clients three months after they phone the Hotline.** About a third of clients had disconnected numbers and were not reached. Programs can help to minimize the problems of bias introduced by phone disconnection by collecting secondary contact information for all clients.
- **It is possible to have interviewers write verbatim descriptions of case outcomes that can be subsequently classified by PFEJ lawyers.** Verbatim descriptions of outcomes provide the PFEJ consultant with the raw information needed to evaluate the appropriateness of the advice given by the Hotline, as well as to determine whether the outcome was favorable.
- **It is possible to identify client outcomes using survey research techniques.** The PFEJ consultant was able to classify outcomes as favorable or unfavorable in most cases. These assessments typically tracked with those offered by clients themselves and ratings provided by non-lawyer interviewers.

Based on the pre-test results gleaned in Phase II, PFEJ funded a full-scale survey of Hotline clients to learn more about whether clients understand the advice they are given, whether they follow up on it, and whether they realize a satisfactory resolution of their problems. This report describes the procedures used and the findings of Phase III of the Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study.

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<sup>3</sup> For the complete Phase I report and a summary of findings, see [www.nlada.org/Civil/Civil\\_EJN/EJN\\_Hotlines](http://www.nlada.org/Civil/Civil_EJN/EJN_Hotlines).

# Chapter II:

## Methodology

From July through November 2001, staff at five legal Hotlines recruited potential respondents from the pool of eligible cases. The participating Hotlines and how they are referred to in this report are the Center for Arkansas Legal Services (Arkansas); Legal Aid Society of Orange County (Orange County); Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services (Chicago); Legal Aid and Defender Association, Inc. (Detroit), and Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral (Washington).

The study chose these five Hotlines in an effort to obtain a diverse sample that included different geographic regions, different client demographics, and different types of Hotline systems. The legal rights and support systems available to low-income people also varied greatly from site to site. These differences among Hotlines make it difficult to compare one Hotline against another, and this study does not intend to serve that function. Although most of the charts break down the data by Hotline, which provides some useful comparative information, the major thrust of the study is the aggregate results obtained by all the clients interviewed

The study did not include cases in which the Hotline served an intake function for a full-service legal services program, as either a full-service component of the same program in which the Hotline was based or an independent program. Similarly, the study did not include cases in which the Hotline arranged for the client to be represented by a pro bono attorney who agreed to provide full and complete representation.

On the other hand, the sample did include cases in which the Hotline provided advice and also referred the caller to another source of assistance that provides less than full legal representation, for example a pro se class operated by a legal services program or a volunteer lawyer program that provides advice and support to pro se litigants. However, because of the extensive level of services provided by some pro se clinics in Orange County, we excluded from the sample clients who were referred there. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter III under the description of the individual sites.

At four of the five project sites, staff asked people who called the Hotlines whether they would give their consent for telephone researchers to contact them in a few months to ask a few questions about their experiences phoning the Hotline and what has happened since their call. Workers were instructed not to raise the consent request until after services were provided. The consent request was phrased as follows:

We want to provide the best services possible. To help us do that, we hired a research group to follow up with our clients to see how their cases turn out. We would like to know whether you would agree to participate in this study. If you agree, we'll provide the

research group with your name, phone number, and a copy of our written record of your case, and someone from the group will call you in about three months to see how your case turned out. The researchers will keep all information about your case confidential, and they will not show it to anyone outside the study. You don't have to take part in the study, and even if you agree now, you will still be able to change your mind about participating when the researcher calls you. Do you agree to participate in the study?

At one Hotline, all callers were sent a letter informing them that they would be contacted by a telephone researcher unless they requested to be removed from the study by phoning the Hotline within ten business days. All potential respondents were told that their participation in the survey was totally voluntary, that their experiences would be conveyed in an anonymous fashion, and that their decision to participate would not affect the services they received from the Hotline. The written notice to callers included the following language:

You do not have to participate. If you agree to participate, we will provide the research group with your name, phone number, and a copy of our written record of your case, so that someone from the group can call you in about three months to see how your case turned out. . . . If you agree now to participate, you will still be able to change your mind about participating when the researcher calls you. The researchers will keep all information about your case confidential, and they will not show it to anyone outside of the study. Do you agree to participate in the study? If you are not interested in participating in the study, please call\_\_\_\_\_. If we do not hear from you within 10 business days, we will understand that you are willing to participate in the study.

The Hotlines gave the Center for Policy Research case information with identifiers for every caller who consented to be in the study. CPR filled out a Face Sheet on each caller that included contact information for the caller, some demographic information, and some information on the caller's legal problem and why he or she phoned the Hotline. A copy of the Face Sheet appears in Appendix A to this report.

Interviews were conducted by telephone researchers at Shulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a national, professional research firm. The interviews were done from November 2001 through February 2002. Callers were contacted approximately three to six months after they phoned the Hotline. The interview schedule is outlined in Table II-1.

<b>Table II-1. Schedule of Hotline Calls and Follow-up Interviews</b>	
<b>Months in Which Caller Phoned Hotline</b>	<b>Month of SRBI Follow-up Interview</b>
May, June, July, August 2001	November 2001
September 2001	December 2001
October 2001	January 2002
November 2001	February 2002

At the start of the interview process, CPR and PFEJ conducted a training program for SRBI interviewers. The program involved an explanation of the study objectives, a review of the questionnaire, and a description of the principal types of cases and outcomes handled by Hotlines. As part of the orientation session, interviewers received information on consumer issues, including debtor relief and bankruptcy; family law matters, including divorce, custody, and support issues; housing problems, including evictions, tenants rights, and cases involving public assistance; and other benefit programs. Telephone researchers were also coached on some of the more idiosyncratic responses they might expect at certain sites, such as referral to a court facilitator in Washington.

Interviewers were instructed to refer callers with continuing or new legal problems to their respective Hotlines for help. If the Face Sheet indicated that the caller was handled by a Spanish-speaking staff member when they phoned the Hotline, they were interviewed by a Spanish-speaking interviewer at SRBI.

After a brief introduction, callers were asked to briefly explain why they had called the Hotline, and their response was compared with the problem noted on the Face Sheet. This ensured that the callers talked about the legal problem noted on the Face Sheet and not another problem that had developed since they placed the call that brought them into the study. Next, the interviewer reviewed 12 different types of help that the Hotline worker might have provided and asked callers to note whether they recalled receiving each form of help and its utility. Callers were asked a series of general questions about the Hotlines and their overall experiences, including whether they would use the Hotline again if faced with another problem. The interview ended with a few demographic questions and personal situations that might make it difficult for individuals to follow up on the actions recommended by Hotline workers. A copy of the telephone interview appears in Appendix B to this report.

The most important question in the interview was the open-ended item about legal outcomes (“In your own words, what would you say happened with your legal problem?”) Telephone researchers were instructed to provide a verbatim response to this question in addition to coding the response as “favorable” or “unfavorable.” When a review of verbatim responses for approximately the first 250 respondents by CPR researchers and PFEJ lawyers revealed insufficient detail in some cases, SRBI researchers recontacted these individuals to obtain more information. Thereafter, interviewers provided more detailed verbatim responses, most of which were satisfactory for assessment purposes. The following are some examples of caller responses to the open-ended question about legal outcomes.

Client called Hotline to explain divorce papers. Went to court as Hotline advised. I’m getting divorced and that is what I wanted. Still working on custody of kids and child support but I expect to get what I want, custody and support. Hotline has been helpful.

Client called Hotline to help get refund from company that installed garage door wrong and won’t fix it. Hotline sent client a letter or someone sent her a paper to fill out. Memory fuzzy. Client threw paper out. Waste of time in her opinion. Door still broken.

Must open and close manually. Still calling company hoping to get it fixed. Frustrated that Hotline didn't take a more active role in helping her. She thought Hotline would make calls, complete forms. She didn't know she would have to do everything herself.

Client called Hotline to find out why alimony payment was stopped. Hotline made a call to someone and alimony payment resumed!

Next, two PFEJ lawyers<sup>4</sup> used the verbatim responses to the question on legal outcomes and the case record supplied by the legal services program to develop a coding system with which to note the type of actions taken by Hotline workers, the nature of the case and its outcome, and if an outcome could be determined, whether it was favorable or unfavorable. To construct their coding scheme, the PFEJ lawyers reviewed 20 cases from each site and consulted with one another on an appropriate classification system. A copy of the Legal Review Form appears in Appendix C to this report. A write-up by the PFEJ lawyers describing the process of reviewing, assessing and coding actions and outcomes appears in Appendix D to this report.

CPR sent completed Face Sheets to SRBI for all callers who consented to be contacted by telephone researchers. The Face Sheet provided the telephone researcher with all the information they needed to conduct the interview. Next, completed interviews and Face Sheets were sent with the Hotline's case records to PFEJ lawyers to do a legal review of outcomes. Finally, the completed Face Sheet, telephone interview, and legal review by PFEJ lawyers were keyed into a computer and readied for statistical analysis.

To reach the quota of approximately 400 completed interviews per site, SRBI researchers phoned every eligible client whose case record was provided by the five Hotlines. This consisted of 5,087 Hotline callers. Completed interviews required an average of three phone attempts, with the range of call attempts placed by SRBI researchers going from 1 to 25 calls. SRBI researchers recorded the disposition of each interview attempt. If secondary contact numbers were provided, interviewers used back-up numbers to obtain a working phone number for a Hotline caller. Callers also had the option of calling SRBI researchers at a 1-800 number. At the end of the study, the disposition for the full sample of Hotline callers was compiled. As Table II-2 shows, the biggest reason for non-response was when SRBI interviewers left a message or a 1-800 number, but the Hotline caller never placed a call back to be interviewed. The second biggest reason for non-response from Hotline callers was a phone disconnection, which was the case for 18 percent of all potential respondents. Across the five Hotlines, only 3 percent of targeted callers refused to be interviewed.

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<sup>4</sup> The two PFEJ lawyers were Robert Echols and Julia Gordon.



<b>Table II-2. Disposition of Attempts by Telephone Researchers to Interview Hotline Callers, by Site</b>						
	<b>Arkansas (N=907)</b>	<b>Orange Co. (N=1,063)</b>	<b>Chicago (N=1,005)</b>	<b>Detroit (N=968)</b>	<b>Washington (N=1,144)</b>	<b>Total (N=5,087)</b>
Completed interview	45% (405)	37% (396)	43% (433)	42% (402)	35% (398)	40% (2,034)
No answer/busy	.1% (9)	2% (19)	3% (27)	4% (39)	9% (106)	4% (200)
Left message	16% (144)	19% (199)	19% (186)	20% (198)	27% (313)	20% (1,040)
Not in service/disconnected	14% (130)	25% (271)	17% (174)	16% (157)	17% (192)	18% (924)
Wrong number	9% (79)	8% (86)	5% (50)	6% (59)	5% (58)	7% (332)
Language problem	.1% (1)	.9% (10)	.8% (8)	.3% (3)	.7% (8)	.6% (30)
Health problems/absent	.9% (8)	1% (13)	.9% (9)	2% (16)	.6% (7)	1% (53)
Call blocking	1% (11)	1% (11)	6% (60)	4% (42)	1% (11)	3% (135)
Refused to be interviewed	3% (29)	3% (27)	3% (29)	3% (29)	2% (26)	3% (140)
Other	10% (91)	3% (31)	3% (29)	2% (23)	2% (25)	4% (199)

SRBI researchers completed 2,034 interviews with callers to the five Hotlines, or 40 percent of all potential respondents. The response rate for the five sites tracks with the percent of callers providing secondary contact information. Seventy-three percent of callers to the Arkansas Hotline provided staffers with a back-up phone number to contact. Fewer than 15 percent of interviewed callers to the Washington, Detroit, and Chicago Hotlines provided secondary contact information, and the response rates at those sites were somewhat lower. The interviews ranged in length from 1 to 45 minutes, with the average interview taking 12.4 minutes. Table II-3 shows the number of completed interviews conducted at each site, the number of callers providing secondary contact information, and the average and median length of completed interviews in minutes.

<b>Table II-3. Secondary Contact Information, Completed Interviews, and Interview Length, by Site</b>						
	<b>Arkansas</b>	<b>Orange Co.</b>	<b>Chicago</b>	<b>Detroit</b>	<b>Washington</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of potential respondents	907	1,063	1,005	968	1,144	5,087
% (N) of completed interviews	45% (405)	37% (396)	43% (433)	42% (402)	35% (398)	40% (2,034)
% (N) providing secondary contact information	73% (661)	9% (100)	11% (109)	47% (460)	14% (159)	29% (1,489)
Length of interview in minutes						
Mean	11.4	13.6	13.7	11.4	11.9	12.4
Median	10.0	12.0	12.0	10.0	11.0	11.0
Range	3-33	1-45	4-42	5-33	5-35	1-45

To gauge the representativeness of the samples of callers ultimately interviewed at each program site, we compared some limited information on the characteristics of three groups: (1) callers who were interviewed; (2) callers who were not contacted or refused to participate in the interview; and (3) all clients served at the programs during calendar year 2001 based on data contained in case service reports (CSR) provided to the Legal Services Corporation. Since CARPLS in Chicago is not funded by LSC and uses a different system of compiling case and client data, staff at that site recorded some limited demographic and problem information for eligible callers who refused to participate in the study and/or those with whom staff neglected to discuss the study. Thus, in Chicago, we compared interviewed callers, those who could not be contacted by SRBI researchers and those who were never invited to participate in the study and/or refused to consent to participate. If the groups were dissimilar, it would limit the generalizability of the survey findings. If the groups were relatively comparable, we could feel confident about generalizing the sample to the full universe of cases handled by the Hotlines. The results of this comparison are discussed in the next chapter which is an overview of the programs in the study.

# Chapter III:

## Description of the Programs

The goal of the Phase III study was to generate samples of callers at five legal Hotlines, conduct telephone interviews with 400 callers at each site approximately three months after they contacted the Hotlines, compare patterns across the five sites, and use the full sample of 2,000 completed interviews across the five project sites to assess the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful cases.

Five legal Hotlines agreed to participate in Phase III. The five Hotlines participating in the study, their location, and the names they go by for the general public are presented in Table III-1.

<b>Table III-1. Hotlines Participating in Phase III of the Outcomes Assessment Study</b>		
<b>Hotline</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Recognized Name</b>
Center for Arkansas Legal Services	Little Rock, Arkansas	Legal Aid Legal Services Helpline
Legal Aid Society of Orange County	Santa Ana, California	Legal Aid The Legal Aid Hotline Community Legal Services
Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services	Chicago, Illinois	CARPLS (Pronounced CARPOLS)
Legal Aid and Defender Association, Inc.	Detroit, Michigan	Legal Aid and Defender Legal Aid
Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral	Seattle, Washington	CLEAR

Four of the five Hotlines (Detroit, Arkansas, Orange County, and Washington) are funded by the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which receives funding from Congress to provide civil legal assistance to low-income people. The four LSC Hotlines publicize their phone numbers. As a result, individuals phone these Hotlines directly. Based upon their conversation with a Hotline worker, they are often referred to other legal programs or agencies for additional help.

The Hotline in Chicago (CARPLS) is not sponsored by LSC and is privately funded. Unlike the other Hotlines, CARPLS does not publicize its number, and individuals are referred to CARPLS by other legal programs and agencies.

The following are brief descriptions of the legal services programs that participated in the study. We also compare selected characteristics of interviewed callers with Hotline callers who agreed to participate in the study but were not interviewed by SRBI researchers. Finally, we compare both of these groups with the total universe of clients served in calendar year 2001 based on CSR reports filed by the Hotlines with the Legal Services Corporation.

### **Arkansas: Center for Arkansas Legal Services (Helpline)**

In 1997, the Center for Arkansas Legal Services created a legal Hotline operating out of its Little Rock office, known as the Helpline. At the time the sample was collected, the program served residents of 32 counties, or approximately 50 percent of the state. (As a result of a merger with another program at the beginning of 2002, the service area expanded to 44 counties.) The Hotline is staffed by its managing attorney, seven staff attorneys (five of whom are part-time), and three intake specialists who determine whether callers are eligible to receive services. All the Hotline's attorneys have at least three years of legal experience. The Hotline receives about 250 to 300 calls per week and opens approximately 35 cases per day. The managing attorney estimates that about 45 percent of these are handled by the Hotline with advice and brief services, while the remainder receive extended services from the program's other units. Extended services cases typically involve divorce matters with spousal abuse, Social Security issues, and some bankruptcy matters. Services for elderly clients are offered at branch offices with volunteer attorneys. There are few referral options for clients handled at the Center for Arkansas Legal Services, and no cases other than those scheduled for extended services were eliminated from the study. In every case, Hotline staff mails clients a letter summarizing the advice they provided with standardized materials pursuant to their case type for further reference.

From July through November 2001, the Center for Arkansas Legal Services identified 907 callers to the Hotline with relevant cases who consented to participate in the study. Staff attorneys obtained oral consent from callers to participate. Ultimately, SRBI researchers interviewed 405 of these individuals and did not contact 502. A comparison of interviewed and non-interviewed callers shows few differences. Females were somewhat more apt to be contacted than males as were callers over the age of 60. The racial profile of interviewed and non-contacted callers was virtually identical with approximately half of each group classified as white and half as African-American. There were also few differences in the types of legal problems presented by those who were interviewed versus those who were not. Interviewed callers were somewhat more apt to have consumer problems and slightly less apt to have housing or family problems. The profile of interviewed callers more closely resembled the profile of all clients handled in 2001, with identical proportions of both groups being under the age of 18 and having problems that dealt with employment, family, income or miscellaneous matters. The three groups of clients are compared in Table III-2.

<b>Table III-2. Selected Characteristics of Interviewed Callers, Non-Contacts and All Clients Served at the Center for Arkansas Legal Services</b>			
	<b>Interviewed Callers (N=405)</b>	<b>Non-Contacts (N=502)</b>	<b>2001 CSR Data (N=2,314)</b>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>			
Sex			
Male	18%	25%	22%
Female	82%	75%	78%
Age			
Under 18	1%	1%	1%
18 to 59	91%	96%	94%
Over 60	8%	3%	5%
Race			
White/non-Hispanic	49%	47%	48%
African-American/non-Hispanic	49%	52%	50%
Hispanic	.5%	1%	.6%
Native American	0%	0%	.09%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.7%	0%	.2%
Other	.5%	.4%	.6%
<b>Case Problem Type</b>			
Consumer	22%	16%	19%
Education	.5%	.6%	.3%
Employment	7%	9%	7%
Family	47%	52%	47%
Juvenile	1%	2%	2%
Health	.7%	0	.5%
Housing	11%	13%	13%
Income Maintenance	4%	3%	4%
Individual Rights	.2%	.8%	1%
Miscellaneous	7%	5%	7%

## California: Legal Aid Society of Orange County

Begun in 1996, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County's Hotline receives 400 calls per day and logs approximately 80 to 100 intakes. Hotline callers speak with paralegals, who consult with attorneys about each case and relay the attorney's advice to the caller. Each case is assigned to one paralegal and one attorney; however, the attorney does not speak directly to the caller. This system differs from the practice at the other sites.

The Hotline operated by the Legal Aid Society of Orange County is part of a broad range of closely integrated services aimed at addressing callers with varying needs. There are three legal clinics for callers with cases dealing with bankruptcy, eviction matters, and family law problems. Since the family law and eviction clinics provide an extensive array of individualized services, callers referred to these clinics were excluded from the study of Hotline outcomes. Callers who attended the bankruptcy clinics, on the other hand, were retained in the Hotline study since the clinic intervention was less intensive and the caller only received brief services. Seniors and callers with SSI cases who were placed on callback lists and were contacted by a Hotline attorney for further intervention were retained in the study as long as they only received advice and brief services and did not get full representation.

As a result of these exclusions, the sample of callers from this Hotline is likely to have differed somewhat from those from the other sites. Callers who had been determined to have family and housing cases appropriate for self-representation and were thus referred to the family and housing clinics were excluded, while those who received advice or referral only from the Hotline were included. Many of the callers in the latter group may have been less likely to succeed with their cases — those who could not attend a clinic because of work or transportation difficulties, those who had been referred to a clinic but had not succeeded in attending one, and those whose cases involved some issue that made it problematic for them to represent themselves. The disparity in the sample from this site should be kept in mind when cross-site comparisons are made.

During August-November, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County identified 1,063 eligible callers to their Hotline who consented to participate in the study. Of those, 396 callers were interviewed and 667 were not. We compared these two groups of callers with the 2001 CSR report compiled by the Legal Aid Society of Orange County. The comparison reveals that the groups were very similar. Across all three groups, nearly three-fourths were female. Callers who were interviewed tended to be older than the comparison groups (*e.g.*, 28% were over 60, compared with 18% in the other two groups). Slightly fewer African-Americans were interviewed (10% versus 15% and 13%), and slightly more Hispanics were reached (40% versus 35% and 38%). The biggest difference between interviewed and non-interviewed Hotline callers was the proportion with housing problems. Only 21 percent of interviewed callers had housing problems, as compared with 47 percent of callers who were not interviewed. According to the CSR report for 2001, 31 percent of Hotline clients in Orange County had housing problems. It is likely that callers with unsuccessful housing cases are under-represented in the sample. Their lack of success may have resulted in their having to move, which would make them difficult to reach by telephone. The other differences between the two

groups were more consumer problems and fewer income maintenance problems among interviewed callers. (See Table III-3.)

<b>Table III-3. Selected Characteristics of Interviewed Callers, Non-Contacts, and All Clients Served at the Legal Aid Society of Orange County</b>			
	<b>Interviewed Callers(N=396)</b>	<b>Non-Contacts (N=667)</b>	<b>2001 CSR Data (N=6,519)</b>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>			
Sex			
Male	27%	26%	25%
Female	73%	74%	75%
Age			
Under 18	0%	0%	8%
18 to 59	72%	82%	82%
Over 60	28%	18%	18%
Race			
White/non-Hispanic	44%	42%	37%
African-American/non-Hispanic	10%	15%	13%
Hispanic	40%	35%	38%
Native American	.3%	.1%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	4%	4%
Other	1%	3%	7%
<b>Case Problem Type</b>			
Consumer	19%	12%	10%
Education	.3%	0	.3%
Employment	2%	2%	2%
Family	40%	27%	40%
Juvenile	0	0	.1%
Health	.5%	.8%	1%
Housing	21%	47%	31%
Income Maintenance	8%	4%	4%
Individual Rights	2%	2%	2%
Miscellaneous	7%	6%	10%

## **Illinois: Cook County's Legal Assistance Hotline (CARPLS)**

CARPLS was established in 1993 to serve as a referral service for Cook County's 30 legal aid organizations. The program grew out of a recommendation of a legal needs study that the Chicago metropolitan area develop a coordinating mechanism to prevent individuals being referred from one agency to another without ever receiving help. As a non-LSC program, CARPLS handles a broader range of issues and callers than those served by LSC-funded Hotlines. Thus, CARPLS accepts callers with criminal matters and serves callers with incomes that exceed 125 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). Those who have incomes between 125 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level receive assistance at no charge, while those who have incomes between 200 and 300 percent of FPL pay a fee of \$25. Unlike the LSC Hotlines, CARPLS does not publish its phone number. Most callers are referred to CARPLS by other legal aid organizations either because they have incomes that exceed 125 percent FPL or cannot be served due to capacity limitations.

CARPLS is staffed by 25 part-time attorneys who provide telephone assistance and/or refer callers to an appropriate government agency or community-based organization. CARPLS receives approximately 370 calls per week. About one-third are referred elsewhere for legal services. The rest are handled exclusively with phone assistance and referral to relevant community agencies and courts for pro se filings. CARPLS has informational packets available on over 150 problems.

CARPLS lawyers obtained oral consent from callers to participate in the study. To keep the case pool similar to those handled at the other four LSC sites, criminal problems were excluded from the study, as were most fee-for-service cases. To determine whether the sample of interviewed callers is representative of the individuals who phone CARPLS, we compared three groups of callers: the sample of interviewed callers, those who were not contacted by telephone researchers, and those who called CARPLS but were either not asked to participate in the study or refused to consent. The comparison reveals that the interviewed sample was more apt to consist of female callers and callers over the age of 60. The proportion of African-American and white callers in the interviewed sample reflected the proportion that called CARPLS and was not asked to participate or refused to participate. As to case type, it appears that the interviewed sample contained a somewhat higher proportion of consumer cases, but comparable proportions of callers with family and housing problems. (See Table III-4.)



<b>Table III-4. Selected Characteristics of Interviewed Callers, Non-Contacts, and Callers who Refused to Participate in the Study or Were Not Asked at Cook County's Legal Assistance Hotline (CARPLS)</b>			
	<b>Interviewed Clients (N=433)</b>	<b>Non-Contacts (N=572)</b>	<b>Refusals or Did Not Ask (N=507)</b>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>			
Sex			
Male	26%	30%	33%
Female	74%	70%	67%
Age			
Under 18	1%	.4%	.4%
18 to 59	86%	92%	90%
Over 60	13%	8%	10%
Race			
White/non-Hispanic	20%	17%	22%
African-American/non-Hispanic	59%	59%	56%
Hispanic	17%	17%	8%
Native American	.2%	.2%	.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.7%	1%	1%
Other	4%	6%	13%
<b>Case Problem Type</b>			
Consumer	22%	19%	17%
Education	.2%	.5%	1%
Employment	5%	5%	6%
Family	36%	36%	37%
Juvenile	1%	1%	3%
Health	.2%	.5%	0%
Housing	19%	24%	20%
Income Maintenance	2%	2%	2%
Individual Rights	.2%	.7%	.2%
Miscellaneous	14%	11%	15%

## Michigan: Legal Aid and Defender Association

The Legal Aid and Defender Association in Detroit began doing telephone intake in 1990 and expanded the system in 1999. During the study period, the Hotline opened approximately 250 cases per week. The program serves the Wayne County area, which includes Detroit. The Hotline serves as a centralized intake for the program. Approximately 40 percent of callers are handled using advice and brief service techniques. The remaining 60 percent are referred for full-service treatments.

During the study period, Legal Aid and Defender Association employed four paralegals and seven attorneys to handle callers to the Hotline. All cases that were referred for extended services were excluded from the study. Another group of excluded cases were clients who “walked-in” to the program and were assisted in a face-to-face manner rather than via telephone.

From July through November 2001, the Legal Aid and Defender Association identified 970 callers who were eligible to be in the study and did not object to participating. Since staff attorneys felt that reading the consent form to callers over the telephone was confusing, the program mailed most eligible callers a letter informing them they would be included in the study unless they phoned the Hotline (or sent a letter) within ten days and asked to be removed from the study. A total of 217 callers contacted the Hotline to request to be withdrawn.

SRBI interviewers interviewed 402 callers and did not interview another 568 potential respondents. The characteristics of these two groups of callers were compared with the 11,450 cases compiled from the 2001 CSR report provided by the Legal Aid and Defender Association. A comparison of these three groups shows few differences. Interviewed callers were somewhat more likely to be over the age of 60 and African-American than the other two groups. Approximately 30 percent of interviewed and non-interviewed callers were male. The racial profiles of the three groups were nearly identical, with almost 80 percent African-American, nearly 20 percent white, and less than 1 percent comprising Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and other races. There were few differences in the types of legal problems that these three groups presented. Interviewed callers were somewhat more likely to have consumer problems than callers in the other two groups (*e.g.*, 25% versus 17% and 18%). Based on the 2001 CSR data, it appeared that the program served a higher percentage of clients with family problems (41%) than those in the group of interviewed callers (31%) and callers who were not contacted by SRBI (33%). In other respects, the three groups were virtually identical. (See Table III-5.)

<b>Table III-5. Selected Characteristics of Interviewed Callers, Non-Contacts, and All Clients Served at the Legal Aid and Defender Association</b>			
	<b>Interviewed Callers (N=402)</b>	<b>Non-Contacts (N=568)</b>	<b>2001 CSR Data (N=11,450)</b>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>			
Sex			
Male	27%	30%	27%
Female	73%	70%	73%
Age			
Under 18	.2%	0%	.07%
18 to 59	73%	87%	82%
Over 60	27%	13%	18%
Race			
White/non-Hispanic	19%	19%	20%
African-American/non-Hispanic	79%	78%	76%
Hispanic	2%	2%	2%
Native American	.2%	.2%	.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.2%	0%	.4%
Other	.5%	.4%	1%
<b>Case Problem Type</b>			
Consumer	25%	18%	17%
Education	0	.2%	.3%
Employment	3%	2%	1%
Family	31%	33%	41%
Juvenile	.2%	0%	0%
Health	0%	.7%	1%
Housing	23%	28%	23%
Income Maintenance	8%	7%	7%
Individual Rights	1%	.7%	2%
Miscellaneous	9%	11%	7%

## **Washington: Northwest Justice Project Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral (CLEAR)**

CLEAR is based in Seattle and began operating as a Hotline in 1996. CLEAR serves the entire state of Washington with the exception of King County (Seattle), which has one-quarter of the state's poverty population. A high-volume Hotline, CLEAR receives about 100 to 130 calls each day. Phones are answered automatically and callers wait to speak with one of the 16 attorneys and three paralegals who staff the Hotline. Most of CLEAR's Hotline staff are generalists, with a few specialists who handle housing and family matters, the two problem areas that have the highest call volume. CLEAR does not use screeners. Staff attorneys, paralegals and the volunteer attorneys who work on the Hotline screen for eligibility and check for conflicts. CLEAR has a library of 200 publications it can send to callers, material that can also be accessed on its Web site. To prevent staff burn-out and ensure that there is time for staff to provide brief services and follow-up on cases, the Hotline is only open three hours per day. Follow-up letters are only sent to callers if advocates feel that they need further clarification of the oral advice they are given and are customized to reflect the needs of the individual caller.

Callers referred for full representation by the Northwest Justice Project, Columbia Legal Services, Volunteer Lawyer Programs, and Law School Clinics were excluded from the study. The study also excluded unemployment compensation matters and immigration matters referred to independent clinics and service providers. Callers who were referred to the court facilitators were retained in the study. These are individuals who provide pro se litigants with assistance in completing court filings and other legal documents. Family law cases referred to Volunteer Lawyer Clinics for support in pro se representation were also included in the sample, since the clinics do not provide extensive services.

Callers who were interviewed were slightly more apt to be female, white, and over the age of 60 than those who were not interviewed and those served by CLEAR in 2001. The distribution of callers by problem type in the interviewed sample mirrors patterns for the CLEAR population as a whole with family, housing, and consumer problems being the top three. Relative to the total population of clients, the study sample had a slight over-representation of callers with consumer and housing problems and an under-representation of callers with family problems. (See Table III-6.)

<b>Table III-6. Selected Characteristics of Interviewed Callers, Non-Contacts, and All Clients Served at the Northwest Justice Project Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral (CLEAR)</b>			
	<b>Interviewed Callers (N=398)</b>	<b>Non-Contacts (N=746)</b>	<b>2001 CSR Data (N=14,207)</b>
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>			
Sex			
Male	24%	28%	N/A
Female	76%	72%	N/A
Age			
Under 18	0%	.3%	.5%
18 to 59	89%	90%	94%
Over 60	11%	9%	6%
Race			
White/non-Hispanic	83%	74%	75%
African-American/non-Hispanic	2%	5%	4%
Hispanic	7%	11%	10%
Native American	4%	3%	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.8%	1%	2%
Other	3%	6%	6%
<b>Case Problem Type</b>			
Consumer	16%	18%	13%
Education	0%	.1%	.4%
Employment	3%	3%	3%
Family	42%	35%	50%
Juvenile	.3%	.5%	.8%
Health	.8%	2%	1%
Housing	25%	30%	20%
Income Maintenance	4%	5%	5%
Individual Rights	.8%	.9%	1%
Miscellaneous	8%	7%	6%

## **Summary**

With the exception of being somewhat more apt to consist of females at some sites, callers over the age of 60, and callers with consumer problems across the five sites, the samples of callers interviewed by telephone researchers closely resembled those who were not interviewed and the general profile of clients served by the programs. This suggests that patterns gleaned from the interviewed samples can be safely generalized to the population served by legal services programs as a whole.

# Chapter IV:

## Hotline Callers and Their Legal Problems

### Client Characteristics

Below is a snapshot of client characteristics, some of which is derived from the Hotline's own records and some of which is derived from questions asked of clients in the telephone interview. These characteristics are summarized below and presented in Table IV-1.<sup>5</sup>

- Approximately 75 percent of each Hotline's clients were female, with Arkansas having a sample that was 82 percent female.
- With the exception of the Orange County Hotline, where 19 percent of interviewed clients spoke Spanish, nearly all Hotline clients were English-language speakers.
- The average age of clients across the sites was between 37 and 46, with the cross-site mean standing at 42 and the median being 39.
- The percentage of interviewed clients over the age of 60 varied widely across the sites and ranged from a low of 8 percent in Arkansas to 28 percent in Orange County.
- A majority of clients had children under the age of 18, with the incidence highest in Arkansas, where 72 percent reported this type of household.
- Clients were divided across four marital status categories: Nearly a third (30%) were single and did not live with a partner, a fifth were divorced, a fifth were married and living with a spouse, and 17 percent were married but separated from their spouse. The percentage of cohabiting and widowed respondents stood at 5 and 8 percent, respectively.
- On average, clients lived in households with 1.4 adults and 1.2 children.
- Clients were fairly evenly divided between white (43%) and African-American (40%) categories, with 13 percent classifying themselves as Hispanic. There were obvious differences by site, with Washington having the highest proportion of white callers (83%); Detroit, Chicago, and Arkansas having the highest proportions of African-Americans (79%, 59% and 49%, respectively); and Orange County having the highest proportion of Hispanics (40%).
- This sample was comprised of low-income individuals who reported an average income of 101 percent FPL.

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<sup>5</sup> Data on sex, income source, percentage of poverty level, language, race, and age was obtained from the Hotline case record; information on household composition, marital status, and education was elicited in the telephone interview.

- Clients reported income from many different sources, with 41 percent citing wages, 18 percent reporting Social Security, 13 percent reporting receiving SSI, and 10 percent report receiving public assistance. Nine percent stated that they had no source of income or assistance when they phoned the Hotline. There were some site differences in income source. Detroit callers were least apt to report having wages (32%) and most apt to report receiving SSI (22%). Arkansas callers were most likely to report having wages (50%). Detroit and Orange County callers were most apt to report receiving Social Security. Washington callers reported the highest rate of public assistance (15%) and no source of income (14%).
- There was a wide range in client education levels. Across the sites, 21 percent had less than a high-school education, while 45 percent had at least some college. Orange County had the greatest proportion of callers at the lowest and highest education levels, with 12 percent reporting less than an eighth-grade education and 18 percent reporting a college degree. Respondents in Arkansas were most apt to have stopped their education at the high-school level, with only 35 percent reporting some college experience. Chicago and Washington respondents had the highest levels of educational attainment, with 51 and 52 percent, respectively reporting at least some college.

Table IV-1. Selected Characteristics of Hotline Clients, by Site						
	Arkansas (N=405)	Orange Co. (N=396)	Chicago (N=433)	Detroit (N=402)	Washington (N=398)	Total (N=2,034)
Sex						
Male	18%	28%	26%	27%	24%	24%
Female	82%	73%	74%	73%	76%	76%
Income Source						
Work	50%	37%	46%	32%	41%	41%
Alimony/support	7%	8%	N/A	3%	12%	6%
Welfare/TANF	9%	14%	N/A	12%	15%	10%
SSI	17%	15%	N/A	22%	11%	13%
Social Security	17%	26%	N/A	31%	17%	18%
Other *	11%	29%	14%	18%	13%	25%
None	5%	4%	12%	11%	14%	9%
Benefit **	N/A	N/A	42%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Language						
English	100%	79%	92%	99.7%	98%	94%
Spanish	0%	19%	8%	.3%	2%	6%
Other	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	.3%
Race						
White/non-Hispanic	49%	44%	20%	19%	83%	43%
African-American/non-Hispanic	49%	10%	59%	79%	2%	40%
Hispanic	.5%	40%	17%	2%	7%	13%
Native American	0%	.3%	.2%	.2%	4%	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.7%	4%	.7%	.2%	.8%	1%
Other	.5%	1%	4%	.5%	3%	2%



Table IV-1. Selected Characteristics of Hotline Clients, by Site						
	Arkansas (N=405)	Orange Co. (N=396)	Chicago (N=433)	Detroit (N=402)	Washington (N=398)	Total (N=2,034)
Age						
Mean	37	46	41	46	40	42
Median	35	42	41	44	38	39
Under 18	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
38-60	91%	72%	86%	73%	89%	82%
Over 18	8%	28%	13%	28%	11%	17%
Average number of adults in home	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.4
Average number of kids in home	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.9	1.2
Have children under the age of 18	72%	58%	59%	52%	69%	62%
Marital status						
Married-living with spouse	21%	24%	21%	12%	25%	20%
Married-living apart (separated)	19%	23%	16%	10%	16%	17%
Divorced	24%	18%	15%	22%	23%	20%
Unmarried, living with partner	3%	4%	3%	4%	9%	5%
Single, not living with partner	28%	22%	37%	40%	22%	30%
Widowed	6%	8%	9%	11%	6%	8%
Education						
Up to grade 8	5%	12%	7%	4%	4%	6%
Completed grades 9-11	18%	9%	13%	19%	14%	15%
Completed high school	42%	32%	30%	37%	31%	34%
Some college	26%	30%	34%	31%	37%	31%
Completed college	9%	18%	17%	10%	15%	14%
* Includes pensions, unemployment insurance, and worker's compensation.						
** CARPLS case records do not distinguish among different benefits in determining client income.						

## Barriers to Legal Assistance

At the conclusion of the interview, clients were asked whether they faced a variety of circumstances that might prevent them from being able to execute the advice they were given by Hotline workers. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they or another member of their household had a disability or a serious health problem; problems with transportation, including limited bus service or a vehicle that breaks down; problems reading or speaking English that would make it difficult for them to fill out paperwork; a work, school, or daycare schedule that would make it hard for them to take time off to handle their legal problems; or other circumstances that would make it hard to handle a legal problem, such as depression or fear of an ex-partner.

The responses suggest that disabilities and serious health problems were extremely common, with approximately 40 percent of the clients at every site reporting that they or someone in their household had such a problem. Transportation problems were also very common, with about one-

third of interviewed clients reporting transportation difficulties. While language problems were less common, this was an issue for 23 percent of Orange County respondents and about 10 percent of respondents at every other site. Between 10 and 20 percent of respondents at every site reported having inflexible schedules that would preclude their ability to take time off to handle their legal problems.<sup>6</sup> Finally, 44 percent of respondents said they had “other” issues that would make it hard for them to handle their legal problems. This includes feeling stressed, nervous, or depressed, or being afraid of an ex-partner or current household member. The significance of these barriers is described further in Chapter V. (See Table IV-2.)

	<b>Arkansas (N=405)</b>	<b>Orange Co. (N=396)</b>	<b>Chicago (N=433)</b>	<b>Detroit (N=402)</b>	<b>Washington (N=398)</b>	<b>Total (N=2,034)</b>
You/member of household has a disability or serious health problem	44%	41%	38%	45%	44%	42%
Have problems with transportation	32%	30%	32%	35%	38%	33%
Have problems reading or speaking English	11%	23%	12%	9%	8%	12%
Work, school, or daycare schedule makes it hard to handle the legal problem you have	13%	19%	18%	9%	18%	16%
Other things make it hard to handle your legal problem, such as feeling stressed, nervous, or depressed; worrying about getting into trouble; or being afraid of an ex-partner or current partner or household member	42%	51%	44%	34%	51%	44%

## **Types of Legal Problems**

Family, housing, and consumer cases were the most common case types represented in the sample. All problems were identified by the Hotlines in the case records using standard CSR codes established by LSC. Across the sites, 39 percent of interviewed clients phoned with family problems,

<sup>6</sup> The PFEJ lawyers also identified characteristics that might pose barriers for clients (disability, mental illness, illiteracy, limited English comprehension, difficulty in comprehension, or a general perception that the client may be “difficult”) when they appeared in the case record. (See Appendix D, Report of the PFEJ Lawyers.) The number of cases in which one of these characteristics appeared in the case record proved to be small – only 13 percent of all cases – which contrasts with the higher levels reported by clients when they were specifically asked about some of these issues. For example, 12 percent of clients answered that they had problems reading or speaking English, while the PFEJ lawyers found written references to limited English comprehension in only 4 percent of the case records.

21 percent had consumer issues, and 20 percent had housing issues. Income maintenance cases, which historically have been considered a major category of legal services, made up only 5 percent of the sample overall.

There were some differences by site. Family was the largest problem category for the heavily female sample in Arkansas, which was most apt to have children under the age of 18. Nearly half of all interviewed clients in Arkansas had a family problem. Employment problems were also most common in Arkansas, where half of all interviewed clients reported earnings from work. Housing matters were most common among Washington callers. Detroit callers had the highest incidence of consumer problems. Few interviews were conducted with callers with other types of legal problems, although the larger number of Arkansas respondents with employment problems probably reflects the high rate of work among Arkansas callers and the higher rates of Orange County and Detroit respondents with income maintenance and benefit problems reflects the lower rates of work among callers at those sites and their reliance on benefits and other non-work sources of income. (See Table IV-3.)

Table IV-3. Types of Legal Problems, by Site						
	Arkansas	Orange Co.	Chicago	Detroit	Washington	Total
Consumer	22% (89)	19% (75)	22% (96)	25% (101)	16% (64)	21% (425)
Education	.5% (2)	.3% (1)	.2% (1)	0%	0%	.2% (4)
Employment	7% (29)	2% (8)	5% (23)	3% (11)	3% (13)	4% (84)
Family	47% (190)	40% (159)	36% (156)	31% (125)	42% (165)	39% (795)
Juvenile	1% (4)	0%	1% (5)	.2% (1)	.3% (1)	.5% (11)
Health	.7% (3)	.5% (2)	.2% (1)	0%	.8% (3)	.4% (9)
Housing	11% (43)	21% (84)	19% (80)	23% (94)	25% (101)	20% (402)
Income Maintenance/Benefit	4% (14)	8% (30)	2% (10)	8% (31)	4% (17)	5% (102)
Individual Rights	.2% (1)	2% (9)	.2% (1)	1% (5)	.8% (3)	.9% (19)
Miscellaneous	7% (30)	7% (28)	14% (60)	9% (34)	8% (31)	9% (183)

## Summary

Hotline clients have a variety of demographic characteristics. Although the most typical interviewed client was a middle-aged, English-speaking, female, single parent with at least one minor-aged child, the study included callers of all ages and racial and ethnic groups. The sample was almost evenly split between white and African-American respondents. Callers had varying educational backgrounds, although the proportion with at least some college (45%) was twice as high as the proportion reporting never having graduated from high school (21%). The most common type of legal problem experienced by interviewed callers was family issues, with the incidence (39%) nearly twice as high as the next most frequently mentioned problem types in the consumer (21%) and housing (20%) areas. Across the sites, a substantial proportion of callers (40%) reported serious health problems/disabilities or transportation difficulties (33%). There were substantial racial/ethnic, language, and education differences among respondents across the sites that track with the demographic characteristics of the communities that each Hotline serves.

# Chapter V:

## Case Outcomes

### Methods of Assessing Legal Outcomes

We used several different strategies to characterize and assess legal outcomes for Hotline clients.

- ***Direct client responses to a fixed choice question.*** Clients were asked a fixed choice question dealing with legal outcomes. In response to the question, **“Is your legal problem solved?”** clients could indicate that their problem was “completely” or “somewhat solved,” “not really” or “not at all” solved or that the situation had changed, they had dropped the matter, or changed their mind.
- ***Verbatim transcript of open-ended description of legal outcomes.*** Clients were asked an open-ended question about what had transpired following their call to the Hotline and interviewers recorded their responses in a verbatim manner. The open-ended question was phrased as follows: **“In your own words, what would you say happened with your legal problem?”** Interviewers were instructed to probe for details and to try to obtain the problem resolution or outcome. These narratives were used by both the telephone interviewers and by the PFEJ lawyers to code case outcomes.
- ***Coding of outcomes by telephone interviewers.*** The telephone interview form listed several of the most common outcomes likely to occur in major case types, and the interviewers were asked to classify the responses according to whether clients had or had not obtained what they had wanted when they called the Hotline. Interviewers were instructed to treat outcomes that fell outside these major case categories as unknown.
- ***Legal review and assessment of client case records and telephone interviews.*** Two PFEJ lawyers reviewed case files and interviews for all 2,034 interviewed clients. They classified the types of advice provided by the Hotline and analyzed outcomes from two perspectives: first on what they termed to be a “purely factual basis with no assessment of whether the outcome was favorable or unfavorable”; and second, with “an assessment of whether the outcomes were favorable or unfavorable, whether they had resulted from the client’s interaction with the Hotline, and if they were not favorable, why not.” In making their determinations, the PFEJ lawyers considered the client’s description of the outcome, as well as other information in the interview and the original case record. A description of the coding process that the PFEJ lawyers used appears in Appendix D.

## Client Reports of Outcome

Thirty-nine percent of interviewed clients reported that their legal problem was “completely” or “somewhat solved.” At the other end of the spectrum, about half (49%) of clients reported that their problem was “not really” or “not at all” resolved. The remaining 12 percent reported either that it was “too soon to tell” (8%) or that their situation had changed and/or they had dropped the matter (4%). Most clients who said that their legal problems were not resolved reported that their situation was unchanged (72%). The remainder said that they had experienced either improvement (10%) or deterioration (18%) in their legal situation.

Reported rates of problem resolution varied somewhat across the site. Clients in Washington and Arkansas reported the highest rates of resolution (46% and 43%, respectively). Detroit, Orange County, and Chicago reported lower levels of resolution (39%, 36% and 34%, respectively). Clients in Washington also reported the lowest level of unresolved cases (43%), while those in the other states were higher and relatively similar to one another, ranging from 48 to 51 percent.

Table V-1. Client Assessment of Outcome, by Site						
Percent Reporting	Arkansas (N=405)	Orange Co. (N=396)	Chicago (N=433)	Detroit (N=402)	Washington (N=398)	Total (N=2,034)
Legal problem solved	(N=403)	(N=395)	(N=430)	(N=399)	(N=396)	(N=2,023)
Yes, completely	34%	26%	24%	30%	32%	29%
Yes, somewhat	9%	10%	10%	9%	14%	10%
Don't know-too soon	6%	8%	11%	7%	8%	8%
Situation changed, dropped matter	4%	5%	4%	2%	3%	4%
No, not really	12%	13%	14%	11%	11%	12%
No, not at all	35%	37%	37%	41%	32%	37%
If not solved, since you called the Hotline, is your problem	(N=168)	(N=189)	(N=214)	(N=178)	(N=158)	(N=907)
Better?	9%	10%	9%	10%	13%	10%
Worse?	17%	24%	13%	17%	20%	18%
Same?	74%	66%	78%	74%	67%	72%

## Outcome Rating by Clients, SRBI Interviewers, and PFEJ Lawyers

Table V-2 compares case outcome ratings provided by clients, SRBI telephone interviewers, and PFEJ lawyers. Since the coding scheme used by the three groups of raters was somewhat different, we regrouped some of the response categories to maximize their comparability.

Cases in which clients, SRBI interviewers, or PFEJ lawyers noted that the problem was completely or somewhat resolved and/or that the client had got what she or he wanted when she contacted the Hotline, in whole or in part (including only information), were all grouped in the first line of the table. The second line of the table combines three client responses: “No, problem not at all solved,”

“No, problem not really solved,” and “Too soon to tell.” For SRBI interviewers and PFEJ lawyers, it includes cases in which it was determined that the client did not obtain what she or he wanted when she contacted the Hotline. For the lawyers, it also includes “Client has not acted” and “Pending” outcomes. For SRBI interviewers this line includes “Don’t Know” cases, which consisted of pending cases, as well as others that were not clearly successful or unsuccessful and were difficult to classify. The third row of the table identifies cases where the client indicated that the situation had changed and PFEJ lawyers noted that circumstances changed and the Hotline’s advice was no longer relevant. The last row sets out cases for which the PFEJ lawyers could not determine the outcome.

**Table V-2. Comparison of Case Outcomes Provided by Clients, SRBI Interviewers, and PFEJ Lawyers**

Outcome	Arkansas (N=405)			Orange County (N=396)			Chicago (N=433)			Detroit (N=402)			Washington (N=398)			Total (N=2,034)		
	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers	Client	SRBI	PFEJ Lawyers
Completely or somewhat solved*	43%	37%	32%	36%	32%	29%	34%	31%	34%	39%	30%	36%	46%	38%	39%	39%	33%	34%
Not at all solved/not really solved/ too soon to tell**	53%	63%	59%	59%	68%	61%	62%	69%	57%	59%	70%	53%	51%	62%	55%	57%	67%	57%
Situation changed	4%	N/A	2%	5%	N/A	2%	4%	N/A	3%	2%	N/A	2%	3%	N/A	1%	4%	N/A	2%
Other cannot determine***	N/A	NA	7%	N/A	NA	8%	N/A	NA	6%	N/A	NA	9%	N/A	NA	5%	N/A	NA	7%

\* For PFEJ Lawyers, includes all categories in which client obtained most all of what she wanted or needed information only. (See V-3).

\*\* For SRBI, includes all others; for PFEJ Lawyers, includes all categories in which client did not obtain what she or he wanted; client has not acted; pending.

\*\*\*For PFEJ Lawyers, includes all "cannot determine" except "situation changed."



Table V-2 shows a high degree of consistency in case outcomes recorded by clients, SRBI interviewers, and PFEJ lawyers. Clients were more likely than either the SRBI interviewers or the PFEJ lawyers to believe that their case had been resolved successfully.<sup>7</sup> The figures in the second line were close for the clients and the PFEJ lawyers, while consistently higher for the SRBI interviewers, reflecting the fact that their “don’t know” category would have led to some over-inclusiveness in relation to the other methods. The “situation changed” figures were also very close for clients and PFEJ lawyers.

Given the high level of agreement in outcome assessments generated by clients, SRBI interviewers and PFEJ lawyers, and the greater reliability and detail of lawyer assessments, we relied exclusively on assessments by PFEJ lawyers for the remaining discussion of outcomes and the factors associated with favorable and unfavorable outcomes.

### **Outcomes Determined by PFEJ Lawyers**

Based on client comments in the interview and the original case notes from the Hotline, the PFEJ lawyers categorized the outcome of each case. The coding scheme is presented in Section D of the Legal Review Form in Appendix C. In this aspect of the review process, the PFEJ lawyers rendered a “factual determination” of case outcome. Their determinations were based on the clients’ comments in the interview, read in the context of the original case notes from the Hotline. The PFEJ lawyers used the following major categories to classify outcomes.

- ***Cannot determine outcome:*** These were cases in which the PFEJ lawyer could not determine the outcome of the case because (1) there was insufficient information in the interview notes; (2) the outcome described by the client related to a different case or was otherwise inconsistent with the problem described in the case notes; (3) the circumstances had changed and the advice or service provided was no longer relevant to the current situation as described by the client; and (4) the client reported that the problem was resolved but the PFEJ lawyer was unable to confirm that it was resolved or to determine an outcome based on the interview.
- ***Client needed information only:*** These were cases in which the clients sought or needed only legal information, as distinct from advice about particular courses of action to take to resolve their problem. As part of this coding process, the PFEJ lawyers did not take into consideration whether the client understood the information provided by the Hotline.
- ***Client acted successfully:*** These were cases in which the client took action based on the Hotline’s advice and obtained all or most of what she or he sought when the client called the Hotline. Cases classified as successful included common favorable resolutions for major case types (*e.g.*, stopped debt collection harassment; obtained, maintained, or improved

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<sup>7</sup> Client responses and PFEJ lawyer ratings line up even more closely when lawyer ratings are compared with the percent of clients who agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “As a result of calling the Hotline, I was able to resolve the problem and get what I wanted.” Across the sites, 34 percent of clients reacted to this statement affirmatively, 58 percent disagreed, and 9 percent said this was somewhat true. See Chapter VI, Table VI-2 for site-specific responses to this item.

custody/paternity/support; not evicted/foreclosed; evicted/foreclosed but obtained additional time to move; obtained or retained benefits).

- **Client acted unsuccessfully:** These were cases in which the client took action but did not obtain all or most of what she or he sought when contacting the Hotline. Cases classified as unsuccessful included common unfavorable resolutions for major case types (e.g., did not obtain federal bankruptcy protection; failed to obtain divorce; had to pay all of rent increase or other charges/did not recover security deposit; did not obtain/retain benefits).
- **Pending:** These were cases in which the client took action, but some process relating to the problem was still ongoing such as a decision by a court or administrative agency.
- **Client has not acted:** These were cases in which the Hotline had advised some action and the client reported that she or he had not yet taken any action.

Table V-3 summarizes case outcomes according to the review and coding process conducted by PFEJ lawyers. The three-part table presents the overall distribution, as well as breakdowns by site and case type.

<b>Table V-3. Summary of Case Outcomes Determined by PFEJ Lawyers</b>						
<b>Overall Outcome Patterns</b>						
Total cases	100% (2,018)					
Cannot determine outcome	9% (184)					
Needed information only	9% (188)					
Acted successfully	25% (500)					
Acted unsuccessfully	17% (340)					
Pending	19% (388)					
Has not acted	21% (418)					
<b>Patterns by Site</b>						
	<b>Arkansas (404)</b>	<b>Orange Co. (392)</b>	<b>Chicago (428)</b>	<b>Detroit (400)</b>	<b>Washington (394)</b>	<b>Total (2,018)</b>
Cannot determine	10% (37)	10% (40)	9% (38)	11% (45)	6% (24)	9% (184)
Needed information only	9% (38)	8% (29)	8% (36)	13% (53)	8% (32)	9% (188)
Acted successfully	23% (93)	22% (85)	26% (110)	23% (92)	30% (120)	25% (500)
Acted unsuccessfully	23% (93)	14% (56)	16% (69)	15% (60)	16% (62)	17% (340)
Pending	15% (62)	22% (87)	21% (89)	15% (57)	24% (93)	19% (388)
Client has not acted	20% (81)	24% (95)	20% (86)	23% (93)	16% (63)	21% (418)

Table V-3. Summary of Case Outcomes Determined by PFEJ Lawyers						
Patterns by Case Type						
	Consumer (424)	Family (788)	Housing (396)	Income Maintenance (102)	Other (308)	Total (2,018)
Cannot determine	7% (30)	8% (66)	9% (37)	14% (14)	12% (37)	9% (184)
Needed information only	10% (40)	9% (67)	11% (44)	7% (7)	10% (30)	9% (188)
Acted successfully	30% (125)	19% (150)	37% (146)	20% (21)	19% (58)	25% (500)
Acted unsuccessfully	20% (86)	13% (101)	18% (73)	17% (17)	20% (63)	17% (340)
Pending	13% (57)	26% (205)	11% (43)	28% (29)	18% (54)	19% (388)
Has not acted	20% (86)	25% (199)	14% (53)	14% (14)	21% (66)	21% (418)

**Cannot Determine:** According to PFEJ lawyers, it was impossible to determine an outcome for 9 percent of the cases. They were fairly evenly distributed across the five Hotlines (ranging from 6% in Washington to 11% in Detroit) and the different case types (ranging from 7% for consumer cases to 14% for income maintenance cases), suggesting that they were randomly distributed. The inability to determine an outcome was the result of either insufficiencies in the interview, changed client circumstances, recall problems on the part of clients, or confusion between different cases for clients who called the Hotline on several occasions about different problems. Obviously, the analysis of outcomes must be restricted to the remaining 91 percent of cases for which a factual posture could be determined.

**Needed Information Only:** The 9 percent of cases in which the client needed information only reflect the fact that not all Hotline services involve advice for the client to take a particular action. Some clients seek or need only legal information. Information-only cases were distributed relatively equally across the sites.

**Acted Successfully/Unsuccessfully:** Successful outcomes exceeded unsuccessful outcomes at four of five sites and were equal at the fifth site. The ratio of successful to unsuccessful ranged from 1:1 (23% to 23%) in Arkansas to almost 2:1 (31% to 16%) in Washington.

Successful outcomes exceeded unsuccessful ones for consumer, family, housing, and income maintenance cases, but not for the “other” category, where they were roughly equal. The high ratio of successful to unsuccessful outcomes for housing cases undoubtedly reflects the fact that many people with unsuccessful housing cases had moved, did not provide back-up phone numbers and were not interviewed.

**Pending:** Given that many cases involved legal or administrative procedures, it is not surprising that almost 20 percent of the cases had to be categorized as still pending. The fact that this percentage was highest in family cases (many of which involve court proceedings) and income

maintenance cases (many of which involve administrative proceedings relating to Social Security or other benefits) is consistent with this explanation.

PFEJ lawyers classified pending cases four different ways. The most common type of pending matters involved clients who were proceeding pro se with no known assistance. These cases comprised 40 percent of all pending matters, or 8 percent of the total sample. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of pending matters were those in which the client had retained a private attorney (5% of the total sample of cases). A fraction of pending matters (13%) involved pro se clients who were proceeding with support from a clinic or family law facilitator (3% of the total sample of cases in the study). Finally, 20 percent of pending matters were classified as “other” by the PFEJ lawyers and consisted of cases awaiting action by government agencies or other entities.

Although the coding process suggested that clients who did not obtain an attorney and were proceeding pro se typically had no support from a clinic, facilitator, or other source, it should be kept in mind that Orange County cases in which the client had been referred by the Hotline to family or housing pro se clinics were excluded from the sample (see page 12). Of the remaining sites, only Washington has a well-established system of support for self-represented litigants, specifically for family law litigants.

**Has Not Acted:** The most striking figure in this group of tables is the 21 percent of clients who did not take the action advised by the Hotline. Family cases were highest in this category, and housing and income maintenance cases were the lowest. Washington had the lowest level of clients who failed to act (16%), while Orange County (24%) and Detroit (23%) had the highest levels.

Table V-4 presents the distribution of outcomes determined by PFEJ lawyers for 1,464 cases after indeterminate cases were excluded. This table eliminates 554 cases where no outcome could be determined and/or pending matters that lacked an outcome at the time of the interview.

<b>Table V-4. Summary of Case Outcomes Determined by PFEJ Lawyers, Excluding Indeterminate Cases</b>	
Total cases	100% (1,446)
Needed information only	13% (188)
Acted successfully	35% (500)
Acted unsuccessfully	23% (340)
Client has not acted	29% (418)

The analysis of outcome patterns for cases with conclusive outcomes shows that just under half of interviewed clients either received the information they needed or acted successfully to resolve their problem. Roughly one in four of this group of clients acted but failed to obtain a successful outcome. A somewhat larger group did not act at all. The number of clients who acted unsuccessfully combined with the number of clients who did not (52%) act exceeded the combined categories of those who got the information they needed or acted successfully (48%).

These outcome patterns raise a variety of questions: What role did the Hotlines play in enabling successful clients to obtain what they wanted? What insights can be gained regarding those clients who did not obtain what they wanted? Why did so many clients fail to take action? Did the clients who needed “information only” understand the information they obtained? To answer these types of questions, the PFEJ lawyers engaged in a second level of analysis that involved looking beyond the purely factual outcome of the case.

## **Methods of Assessing the Favorability of Outcomes**

The assessment of favorability was restricted to cases with determinate outcomes and eliminated pending matters as well as cases where an outcome could not be determined. The PFEJ lawyers coded each case outcome as favorable or unfavorable in relation to the services provided by the Hotline. Specifically, they looked at whether it appeared the client had understood the information or advice she or he received; whether clients who had not acted had made an informed decision not to do so; whether the resolution of the case seemed to be appropriate based on the facts; and whether the client had been represented by a private attorney. The coding scheme developed by the PFEJ lawyers appears in Section E of the Legal Review Form in Appendix C and is discussed at greater length in Appendix D. The coding system has the following categories:

- ***Miscellaneous outcomes.*** This category included cases in which it was possible to determine the outcome on a factual level but lacked enough information to categorize the outcome as favorable or unfavorable. For example, it might have been unclear whether the client fully understood the implications and potential consequences of the factual outcome of the case. Other cases considered to be miscellaneous were those judged to have little merit and a low likelihood of prevailing from the beginning, cases in which the client had been represented by a private attorney, and cases in which the problem was resolved but not as a result of Hotline action.
- ***Favorable outcomes.*** This category included those cases in which the client had taken action and had resolved the case to her complete or partial satisfaction and in which the PFEJ lawyers determined that the reported resolution appeared to be appropriate based on the facts.
- ***Favorable information outcomes.*** The PFEJ lawyers included in this category those cases in which the client had needed information only and, based on the interview, appeared to be satisfied with and understood the information. They also included cases in which the client had not acted on the Hotline’s advice, but only if that decision seemed reasonably appropriate to the lawyers based on the circumstances revealed in the case record and interview form.
- ***Unfavorable outcomes.*** This category included those cases in which the client acted and did not prevail (with the exception, as noted above, of those cases that the lawyers felt had little merit from the beginning). The lawyers also included several other types of cases in this category, all of which represented some form of failure. They include:
  - Client did not understand the advice or information provided by the Hotline.

- Client was not able to follow the Hotline’s advice because of the complexity of the actions required.
- Hotline had provided the client with information or advice, but the client reported that she or he was still waiting for information or advice.
- Client reported that she or he had not taken action as advised by the Hotline due to fear, discouragement, lack of time, lack of initiative, or a similar reason. (These were cases that the reviewers distinguished from those in which they felt that the client’s decision not to act was appropriate.)
- Client reported that the Hotline advised that she or he needed to hire a private attorney to resolve the case and that she or he was unable to afford to do so or had been unable to find a private attorney willing to take the case.

### Overall Assessment Patterns

Table V-5 provides an overview of the PFEJ lawyers’ assessments of outcomes using the above noted coding system.

<b>Table V-5. Assessment of Case Outcomes by PFEJ Lawyers</b>	
<b>Total Cases</b>	100% (1,464)
<b>Favorable Assessment</b>	40% (585)
Favorable outcome: Client acted and got what she or he wanted, in part or all	24% (347)
Favorable information: Client needed information only or made reasonably appropriate choice not to follow advice	16% (238)
<b>Unfavorable Assessment</b>	36% (527)
Client did not understand/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/mistakenly expected callback	13% (193)
Client did not follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.	9% (126)
Client acted and did not prevail	6% (90)
Client was advised to get private attorney and reports that she or he could not find or could not afford one	5% (69)
Other unfavorable	3% (49)
<b>Miscellaneous — neither favorable nor unfavorable</b>	24% (352)
Cannot assess outcome as favorable nor unfavorable	13% (185)
Case had little likelihood of success	4% (56)
Client resolved case with representation by private attorney	4% (56)
Client resolved case but appears Hotline played no role	4% (55)

When all favorable and unfavorable categories were combined and compared, the percentage of cases with favorable outcomes was only slightly higher than those with unfavorable outcomes (40% versus 36%). Interestingly, most unfavorable cases appeared to be due to a failure to act rather than a failure to prevail. Thus, the number of cases in which the client understood and followed the Hotline's advice and did not obtain what she or he had wanted when contacting the Hotline was extremely small (6%). Far larger was the group of cases in which the client had not understood or had not acted on the Hotline's advice. Taken together, cases in these two categories represented 22 percent of the total cases in the sample, which was roughly equal to the number of clients who acted and got what they wanted. In 5 percent of the cases, the client was advised to hire a private attorney but reported being unable to do so.

The fact that unfavorable outcomes appear to be largely due to client failure to understand or to act means that if Hotlines can find ways to enhance client understanding and action, they should be able to increase substantially the ratio of favorable to unfavorable outcomes. This premise is supported by an analysis of "Client has not acted" cases, which showed that 52 percent neglected to do so because of a failure to understand the advice that was given or a failure to act due to fear or lack of time and initiative.

Since our objective was to focus on the characteristics and correlates of favorable versus unfavorable outcomes, we eliminated 352 cases with miscellaneous outcomes from subsequent analyses. Thus, tables V-6, V-7, and V-8 present information for 1,112 cases that received favorable or unfavorable rating by PFEJ lawyers. This represents 55 percent of the 2,034 cases in the full study.

### **Assessment Patterns by Site**

Table V-6 compares the assessment of favorable and unfavorable case outcomes by PFEJ lawyers for the five sites. Washington had the highest level of favorable assessments and the lowest level of unfavorable assessments. Chicago and Detroit had favorable ratings that were similar to those observed in Washington but higher levels of unfavorable assessments. At all three sites, the percentage of cases with favorable assessments exceeded the percentage with unfavorable assessments. Arkansas and Orange County had the opposite pattern, with unfavorable assessments exceeding favorable ones. One reason for the pattern was that 13 percent of clients in Arkansas were advised to obtain a private attorney and reported that they could not afford or find one. This was twice as high as the incidence at any other project site. Washington, which had the lowest percentage of clients who did not understand or failed to act, had a higher percentage of clients who acted and failed to prevail. Both the higher percent of clients who acted and achieved favorable results and the higher percent of clients who acted and failed to prevail reflected the higher rate of client action in Washington. The high level of clients who failed to act in Orange County probably reflects the fact that clients who were successfully referred for support to eviction and family clinics had to be excluded from the sample (see page 12).

<b>Table V-6. Assessments of Outcomes by PFEJ Lawyers, by Site *</b>						
	<b>Arkansas (N=223)</b>	<b>Orange Co. (N=201)</b>	<b>Chicago (N=228)</b>	<b>Detroit (N=248)</b>	<b>Washington (N=212)</b>	<b>Total (N=1,112)</b>
<b>Cases with Favorable Assessments</b>	<b>48% (108)</b>	<b>46% (92)</b>	<b>55% (126)</b>	<b>53% (132)</b>	<b>60% (127)</b>	<b>53% (585)</b>
Client acted and got what she or he wanted, in part or all	26% (58)	27% (55)	33% (75)	30% (74)	40% (85)	31% (347)
Client needed information only or made reasonably appropriate choice not to follow advice	22% (50)	18% (37)	22% (51)	23% (58)	20% (42)	21% (233)
<b>Cases with Unfavorable Assessments</b>	<b>52% (115)</b>	<b>54% (109)</b>	<b>45% (102)</b>	<b>47% (116)</b>	<b>40% (85)</b>	<b>47% (527)</b>
Client did not understand/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/ mistakenly expected callback	18% (40)	18% (37)	17% (39)	19% (46)	15% (31)	17% (193)
Client did not follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.	9% (20)	15% (31)	11% (26)	13% (33)	8% (16)	11% (126)
Client acted and did not prevail	5% (12)	7% (14)	8% (18)	8% (20)	12% (26)	8% (90)
Client was advised to get private attorney and report that she or he could not find or could not afford one	13% (30)	6% (13)	4% (9)	4% (11)	3% (6)	6% (69)
Other unfavorable	6% (13)	7% (14)	4% (10)	2% (6)	3% (6)	4% (49)
* Treating Arkansas and Orange County as one site and Chicago, Detroit, and Washington as a second site produces a chi square between site and outcome of 8.12, which is statistically significant at .004.						

## Assessment Patterns by Case Type

Table V-7 shows outcome assessments by PFEJ lawyers for cases with different legal problems. There were no statistically significant differences in assessments for various case types. The high proportion of favorable assessment ratings for housing cases may reflect the fact that many clients who were evicted were not contacted and interviewed by SRBI researchers. Thus, the sample of interviewed clients with housing problems may be disproportionately successful. Overall, 63 percent of housing cases were assessed by PFEJ lawyers as being favorable. To contrast, only 45 percent of family matters were rated as having favorable outcomes and 55 percent were judged to be unfavorable. Resolving family problems frequently requires going to court, and in a substantial proportion of family cases, PFEJ lawyers determined that the client did not understand what she or he was supposed to do (20%) or was advised to get a private attorney and reported that she or he could not find or afford one (12%). Consumer cases were rated more positively than family matters, with 55 percent receiving a favorable rating. Clients with other types of cases frequently only needed information (28%). This would include employment, income maintenance/benefit cases, education, and health matters. Although these clients rarely appeared to fail when they attempted to



implement the Hotline’s advice, substantial proportions may not have understood what they were told to do (20%).

<b>Table V-7. Assessments of Outcomes by PFEJ Lawyers, by Case Type</b>					
	<b>Consumer (N=265)</b>	<b>Family (N=408)</b>	<b>Housing (N=243)</b>	<b>All Other (N=196)</b>	<b>Total (N=1,112)</b>
<b>Cases with Favorable Assessments</b>	<b>55% (147)</b>	<b>45% (184)</b>	<b>63% (154)</b>	<b>51% (100)</b>	<b>53% (585)</b>
Client acted and got what she or he wanted, in part or all	38% (100)	23% (94)	44% (107)	23% (46)	31% (347)
Client needed information only or made reasonably appropriate choice not to follow advice	18% (47)	22% (90)	19% (47)	28% (54)	21% (238)
<b>Cases with Unfavorable Assessments</b>	<b>45% (118)</b>	<b>55% (224)</b>	<b>37% (89)</b>	<b>49% (96)</b>	<b>47% (527)</b>
Client did not understand/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/mistakenly expected callback	16% (43)	20% (83)	11% (27)	20% (40)	17% (193)
Client did not follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.	11% (29)	13% (53)	12% (28)	8% (16)	11% (126)
Client acted and did not prevail	9% (23)	5% (21)	11% (26)	10% (20)	8% (90)
Client was advised to get private attorney and report that she or he could not find or could not afford one	2% (6)	12% (47)	1% (2)	7% (14)	6% (69)
Other unfavorable	6% (17)	5% (20)	2% (6)	3% (6)	4% (49)

### Assessment Patterns by Case Type and Site

Table V-8 presents favorable and unfavorable outcome assessments for different case types and Hotline sites. The only statistically significant difference was the less favorable rating for Orange County clients with consumer cases. Only 23 percent of callers with consumer problems in Orange County experienced outcomes that were classified as favorable. In contrast, this was the case for 71 percent of callers to CLEAR in Washington and 57 to 62 percent of callers at every other Hotline. The disparity in Orange County is likely due to the way the Hotline functions in consumer cases: Clients with debt problems are referred to the bankruptcy clinic for counseling without receiving immediate advice from the Hotline about how to respond to debt collection harassment. Thus, clients who do not follow through and attend the bankruptcy clinic receive no information about how to deal with their problem.

Although the difference was not statistically significant, it appeared that Washington clients with family problems fared somewhat better than their counterparts at the other sites, with 55 percent obtaining outcomes that were rated by the PFEJ lawyers as favorable. It will be recalled that in

Washington there are court facilitators and volunteer lawyer clinics to help litigants with pro se filings, and this may help to explain the better outcomes for clients at that site.

Callers to the Arkansas and CARPLS Hotline in Chicago fared somewhat better than their counterparts at the other sites with respect to a variety of problems not captured by the consumer, family, and housing categories.

Table V-8. Assessments of Outcomes by PFEJ Lawyers, by Case Type and Site							
	Arkansas (N=223)	Orange Co. (N=201)	Chicago (N=228)	Detroit (N=248)	Washington (N=212)	Total (N=1,112)	
<b>Consumer *</b>	Favorable	62% (36)	23% (9)	57% (35)	58% (42)	71% (25)	56% (147)
	Unfavorable	38% (22)	77% (30)	43% (26)	42% (30)	29% (10)	45% (118)
<b>Family</b>	Favorable	38% (42)	43% (36)	42% (30)	51% (34)	55% (42)	45% (184)
	Unfavorable	62% (68)	57% (47)	58% (41)	49% (33)	46% (35)	55% (224)
<b>Housing</b>	Favorable	50% (10)	70% (33)	64% (28)	61% (39)	65% (44)	63% (154)
	Unfavorable	50% (10)	30% (14)	36% (16)	39% (25)	35% (24)	37% (89)
<b>All other problems</b>	Favorable	57% (20)	44% (14)	64% (33)	38% (17)	50% (16)	51% (100)
	Unfavorable	43% (15)	56% (18)	37% (19)	62% (28)	50% (16)	49% (96)
* Differences are significant at .05.							

## Explaining Favorable and Selected Unfavorable Outcomes

In order to better understand the correlates of favorable and unfavorable legal outcomes, we conducted a series of analyses designed to isolate the factors associated with various outcomes. Our analysis was restricted to cases that resulted in unambiguous outcomes that the PFEJ lawyers classified as distinctly favorable or unfavorable in relation to the Hotline service. For purposes of this analysis, *favorable outcomes* include cases where:

- Client followed advice and resolved situation to her or his satisfaction. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts;
- Client followed advice and resolved situation to her or his satisfaction, although not getting everything the client wanted when contacting the Hotline. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts.

For purposes of this analysis, *selected unfavorable outcomes* include cases with the following outcome scenarios:

- Client did not understand advice; was not able to follow advice due to complexity; mistakenly expected callback;
- Client chose not to follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.;
- Client followed advice and did not prevail; result may not have been appropriate based on facts.

In some more detailed analyses, we also examined the characteristics of cases that resulted in unfavorable outcomes due to client failure to obtain legal representation. In these cases, PFEJ lawyers noted:

- Client was advised to retain a private attorney but reports she or he could not afford one.

**Hotline Services:** Certain types of Hotline services, as determined by the PFEJ lawyers based on the case records, resulted in greater or lesser likelihood of obtaining a favorable result. Table V-9 shows favorable and selected unfavorable outcomes broken out according to the Hotline services as identified by the PFEJ lawyers.<sup>8</sup>

Cases in which the Hotline performed a brief service (typically, writing a letter, completing a form, or making phone calls on behalf of the client) were most likely to result in a positive outcome, with 69 percent of these cases classified as favorable.

Cases in which the Hotline gave the client advice about dealing with a private party, as compared to self-representation in court or dealing with a government agency, were the next most effective with 59 percent winding up with favorable ratings. Favorable assessments were much lower in cases where clients were coached on how to deal with a government agency (33%) or told how to represent themselves in court (46%). Cases in which written information was provided in addition to information over the telephone were more likely to have a favorable outcome (48%).<sup>9</sup> Since Washington was the only site to routinely refer clients to its web site, this is not included in the analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> Originally, we had intended to analyze relationships between outcomes and the type of Hotline worker who served the client: whether attorney, paralegal, or other; and whether more or less experienced. However, the five Hotline sites included in the study did not have a sufficient variety in their staffing patterns to permit such an analysis. In Arkansas, all case handlers were attorneys with more than two years experience; in Orange County, all cases were handled by a combination of paralegals (who interacted with the client) and attorneys (who consulted with the paralegal, but did not speak directly to the client); at CARPLS in Chicago, only attorneys provided service; in Detroit, there were only four paralegals and over a dozen attorneys; and at CLEAR in Washington, there were only two paralegals and many more attorneys.

<sup>9</sup> When cases in which the client was advised to hire a private attorney and could not do so were removed from the group of selected unfavorable cases, the level of cases with written information that were judged to be favorable rose to 52 percent. Only 42 percent of cases with no written information were judged to be favorable — a difference that is statistically significant.

Referrals of all kinds resulted in a generally lower level of successful outcome; lowest of all were those cases in which the Hotline told the client that she or he needed a private attorney. Only 11 percent of clients who were instructed to hire a private attorney received a favorable outcome assessment. A comparison of cases where clients were told that they needed to find a private attorney with cases where the client reported having hired a private attorney showed little overlap. Only 18 percent of those advised to hire a private attorney did so. Conversely, of those who hired a private attorney, only 35 percent were advised to do so by the Hotline. Most of the clients (65%) who hired a private attorney were not advised to do so by the Hotline.

Cases in which clients were rated by PFEJ lawyers as least likely to act on the advice of the Hotline were those in which clients were advised to represent themselves in court or with government agencies and/or were referred to either social service agencies or other legal resources.

**Table V-9. Favorable and Selected Unfavorable Outcomes for Various Hotline Actions as Determined by PFEJ Lawyers**

	Provided written information (N=311)	Provided advice on dealing with a landlord, creditor, ex-spouse or partner, or other private party (N=263)	Provided advice about representing self with a government agency (N=83)	Provided advice about representing self in a court procedure (N=303)	Referred to a social service agency (N=40)	Referred to another legal service program, free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic in state or out of state (N=48)	Referred to government agency to file complaint/request investigation (N=98)	Advised client to hire private attorney (N=128)	Provided brief service (N=49)
Favorable	48% (150)	59% (156)	33% (27)	46% (139)	30% (12)	42% (20)	36% (35)	11% (14)	69% (34)
Unfavorable-Did not understand	19% (59)	16% (42)	23% (19)	18% (54)	33% (13)	17% (8)	28% (27)	26% (33)	10% (5)
Unfavorable-Did not follow advice	15% (46)	11% (28)	24% (20)	19% (58)	23% (9)	21% (10)	12% (12)	10% (13)	10% (5)
Unfavorable-Did not prevail	10% (31)	12% (32)	13% (11)	10% (31)	8% (3)	17% (8)	14% (14)	10% (13)	6% (3)
Unfavorable-Did not hire an attorney	8% (25)	2% (5)	7% (6)	7% (21)	8% (3)	4% (2)	10% (10)	43% (55)	4% (2)

**Follow-up Actions and Assistance from Other Sources:** Clients were asked a group of questions concerning their contacts with the Hotline and whether they had received help from another source. (See Table V-10.) Few Hotline clients said they had received help with their problem from another source, such as a free attorney or legal clinic, with 78 percent reporting only receiving help from a Hotline worker.

The proportion of clients who reported receiving a letter or other written material from the Hotline varied by site. In Arkansas, where the Hotline sends a follow-up letter reciting the advice or information provided by the Hotline in all cases, 68 percent of interviewed clients recalled receiving written material. In Detroit, where the Hotline sent a letter requesting the client’s consent to participation in this study to all clients, 50 percent reported receiving additional information. In Orange County, where follow-up mailings are only done in selected cases, only 15 percent recalled receiving written material.

Approximately 15 percent of respondents at every site recalled receiving a follow-up phone call from the Hotline to see how they were doing or if they needed more help. About one-fifth to one-third of all respondents said that they called the Hotline a second or third time to get additional help over the phone about their case, with the incidence of repeat phone calls highest in Orange County and Chicago. Only about 8 percent recalled going to the Hotline office for an in-person meeting with a worker, although this was the case for 20 percent of Orange County respondents.

<b>Table V-10. Other Types of Assistance Reported by Clients, by Site</b>						
	<b>Arkansas (N=404)</b>	<b>Orange Co. (N=389)</b>	<b>Chicago (N=427)</b>	<b>Detroit (N=398)</b>	<b>Washington (N=396)</b>	<b>Total (N=2,014)</b>
Got help from someone other than the Hotline worker:						
No	81%	76%	78%	84%	72%	78%
Yes, legal clinic	0.2%	4%	5%	3%	5%	3%
Yes, free attorney	4%	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%
Yes, attorney client hired	10%	7%	7%	5%	6%	7%
Yes, a court worker	0.2%	0.8%	0%	0.5%	2%	0.6%
Yes, a worker in another agency	4%	2%	0.9%	1%	2%	1%
Other	0%	6%	6%	2%	8%	5%
Received a letter or other written material from the Hotline	68% (260)	15% (57)	31% (128)	50% (193)	47% (171)	42% (809)
Someone from the Hotline phoned to see how you were doing or if you needed more help with your problem	15% (59)	11% (42)	17% (71)	15% (59)	14% (53)	15% (284)
Went to Hotline office and met with a worker for help on your case	3% (12)	20% (78)	3% (11)	8% (31)	5% (19)	8% (151)
Called the Hotline back a second/third time to get more help over the phone about your case	24% (94)	36% (140)	33% (138)	18% (70)	20% (76)	26% (518)

We analyzed the relationship between client responses to these questions and favorable and selected unfavorable outcomes. The analysis that appears in Table V-11 shows that some, but not all, of these factors were associated with more favorable outcomes. Clients who went to the office and met with Hotline workers in person did not appear to have a higher rate of favorable outcomes than those who just used the telephone, which may be of interest to programs making decisions regarding whether to handle brief advice cases in the office or over the telephone. Moreover, multiple calls initiated by the client to the Hotline (as opposed to additional calls to the client initiated by the Hotline) did not appear to produce higher rates of favorable outcomes either.

The measures that did seem to be associated with more favorable results were getting a letter or written material from the Hotline, receiving a follow-up phone call from the Hotline worker to see if more help was needed, and/or getting legal help from someone other than a Hotline worker.<sup>10</sup> Clients who reported receiving these forms of assistance were more likely to be assessed by PFEJ lawyers as having favorable outcomes.

<b>Table V-11. Favorable<sup>1</sup> and Selected Unfavorable<sup>2</sup> Outcomes for Clients Who Report Receiving Various Types of Follow-up Actions by Hotlines</b>		
<b>Get legal help from someone other than Hotline worker</b>	No	Yes
Favorable	44% (284)	57% (59)
Selected Unfavorable	56% (357)	43% (45)
<b>Received a letter or written material from Hotline</b>	No	Yes
Favorable	39% (151)	53% (165)
Selected Unfavorable	61% (235)	48% (149)
<b>Hotline worker phoned to see how you were doing</b>	No	Yes
Favorable	42% (248)	60% (67)
Selected Unfavorable	58% (344)	40% (45)
<b>Went to the Hotline and met with a Hotline worker</b>	No	Yes
Favorable	46% (314)	42% (27)
Selected Unfavorable	54% (369)	58% (37)

<sup>10</sup> Outcomes patterns for cases with and without written information based on reviews of case files by PFEJ lawyers mirrored patterns based on client reports. (See note on page 41.)

<b>Table V-11. Favorable<sup>1</sup> and Selected Unfavorable<sup>2</sup> Outcomes for Clients Who Report Receiving Various Types of Follow-up Actions by Hotlines</b>		
<b>Called the Hotline back a second or third time for more help</b>	No	Yes
Favorable	47% (263)	43% (75)
Selected Unfavorable	53% (292)	57% (99)
<sup>1</sup> <i>Favorable outcomes</i> includes cases where the outcome was “Resolved to complete satisfaction” or “Resolved but did not get everything.” <sup>2</sup> <i>Selected unfavorable outcomes</i> includes cases where the outcome was “Did not understand,” “Did not follow through,” or “Did not prevail.” Statistically significant at .05 level.		

**Demographic Factors:** As table VI-12 shows, there were several demographic variables that were associated with significant outcome differences. Indeed, the only demographic factors that were not associated with a difference were the sex and age of the client. Male and female clients obtained comparable rates of favorable and selected unfavorable outcomes, as did clients of various ages.

<b>Table V-12. Selected Demographic Correlates of Favorable<sup>1</sup> and Selected Unfavorable<sup>2</sup> Outcomes</b>					
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>			
Favorable	43% (77)	47% (270)			
Selected Unfavorable	58% (104)	53% (303)			
<b>Language</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Spanish</b>			
Favorable	47% (330)	31% (14)			
Selected Unfavorable	53% (370)	69% (31)			
<b>Race</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>African-American</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Other</b>	
Favorable	50% (158)	45% (142)	35% (34)	39% (11)	
Selected Unfavorable	50% (157)	55% (171)	65% (62)	61% (17)	
<b>Income</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Welfare/SSI</b>	<b>Social Security</b>	<b>Other support</b>	<b>No income</b>
Favorable	51% (159)	42% (75)	50% (75)	48% (64)	28% (17)
Selected Unfavorable	49% (151)	58% (104)	50% (75)	52% (70)	72% (44)



Table V-12. Selected Demographic Correlates of Favorable <sup>1</sup> and Selected Unfavorable <sup>2</sup> Outcomes					
Education	Up to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Completed 9 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Completed high school	Some college	Completed college
Favorable	26% (13)	44% (41)	48% (124)	48% (109)	53% (53)
Selected Unfavorable	75% (38)	56% (52)	53% (137)	52% (119)	47% (47)
Marital Status	Married, living with spouse	Separated, married, living apart	Divorced	Single	Unmarried, living apart, widowed
Favorable	44% (72)	37% (33)	43% (68)	48% (108)	56% (60)
Selected Unfavorable	56% (91)	63% (56)	57% (89)	52% (117)	44% (48)
Age	30 and under	31-60	61 and over		
Favorable	49% (87)	43% (187)	50% (70)		
Selected Unfavorable	51% (89)	57% (247)	50% (70)		
<p><sup>1</sup> <i>Favorable outcomes</i> includes cases where the outcome was “Resolved to complete satisfaction” or “Resolved but did not get everything.”</p> <p><sup>2</sup> <i>Selected unfavorable outcomes</i> includes cases where the outcome was “Did not understand,” “Did not follow through,” or “Did not prevail.”</p> <p>Statistically significant at .05 level.</p> <p>* Because case records at CARPLS do not differentiate among different categories of benefits in determining client income, CARPLS cases were not included here or in the Social Security analysis.</p>					

**Language:** Not surprisingly, English-speaking clients had more successful experiences than Spanish-speaking clients.<sup>11</sup> A more detailed comparison of outcome patterns for English- and Spanish-speaking clients shows that Spanish-speaking clients were significantly more likely to be rated by the PFEJ lawyers as unsuccessful because the “client did not understand advice/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/mistakenly expected callback.” While 22 percent of English-speaking clients received this assessment, this was the case for 47 percent of Spanish-speaking clients. The two language groups were more comparable in other ratings, suggesting that those who understood the advice were able to follow through with it as successfully as others.

**Race:** Whites performed more favorably on the Hotlines than other racial/ethnic groups, although the differences were greatest with respect to Hispanics, suggesting the disparity was due to language factors and comprehension issues. A factor that may have boosted the higher performance level for whites is that Washington, which had the highest percentage of whites, also has the highest level of support services and the most favorable overall outcomes according to all the methods of analysis used.

<sup>11</sup> Although some of the Hotlines serve other non-English-speakers, Spanish-speakers were the only category of non-English speakers interviewed.

**Education:** Education affected client performance, too, with those educated only up to the eighth grade showing the poorest outcomes. Fully 47 percent of these individuals were rated as receiving unfavorable outcomes because of a failure to understand the advice they were given. The incidence of favorable outcomes increased with education level, with college graduates having twice the success rate as those with the lowest education levels (50% versus 25%).

**Income:** Those with no income had significantly lower rates of success than their counterparts with earnings and/or those who received benefits or Social Security payments. Like clients with extremely low levels of education, these individuals were most apt to experience failure on the Hotline because they did not understand the advice they were given.

**Marital Status:** Finally, one marital status group — separated clients who were legally married but living apart from their spouse — fared significantly worse than their divorced, single, and married counterparts with intact relationships. A more detailed analysis of these clients showed that they were significantly more likely to be assessed by the PFEJ lawyers as having been advised to retain a private attorney but were unable to afford one. (These were likely to have been clients who wanted divorces but whose circumstances did not place them in legal services “priority” categories.) Nearly a quarter (23%) of separated clients were assessed as having this outcome, as compared with approximately 7 percent of married, divorced, and single clients. This finding reflects the lack of free or affordable attorneys to handle domestic relations matters in many settings.

**Special Barriers:** In addition to exploring the demographic correlates of successful versus unsuccessful outcomes, we examined outcome patterns for clients who reported circumstances that might pose particular barriers to effective Hotline use. These circumstances included disclosures about the client or someone in her family having a disability or serious health problem; transportation problems; problems understanding English; and/or inflexible work schedules, day care arrangements or school schedules that would make addressing legal problems particularly difficult and a variety of other problems, such as depression or fear of a current or an ex-partner. The results of this analysis appear in Table V-13.

<b>Table V-13. Favorable<sup>1</sup> and Selected Unfavorable<sup>2</sup> Outcomes for Clients Reporting Certain Barriers</b>		
<b>Disability/Serious Health Problem</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Favorable	46% (144)	47% (199)
Selected Unfavorable	54% (169)	54% (229)
<b>Transportation problems</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Favorable	39% (102)	50% (240)
Selected Unfavorable	61% (159)	50% (244)
<b>Language or literacy problems</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Favorable	36% (34)	48% (310)
Selected Unfavorable	64% (60)	52% (340)
<b>Scheduling problems</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Favorable	34% (39)	49% (305)
Selected Unfavorable	66% (76)	52% (324)
<b>Other things such as feeling nervous or depressed or being afraid of an ex-partner</b>		
Favorable	42% (133)	50% (209)
Selected Unfavorable	58% (185)	50% (212)
<sup>1</sup> <i>Favorable outcomes</i> includes cases where the outcome was “Resolved to complete satisfaction” or “Resolved but did not get everything.” <sup>2</sup> <i>Selected Unfavorable</i> outcomes includes cases where the outcome was “Did not understand,” “Did not follow through,” or “Did not prevail.” Statistically significant at .05 level.		

While the disclosure of a disability or a serious health problem did not appear to affect client outcomes, the other barriers did make a significant difference.<sup>12</sup> Clients with transportation problems were significantly less likely to experience favorable results. A more detailed analysis of the reasons for their unfavorable outcomes showed that they were significantly more likely to fail because they neglected to follow the advice they were given due to “fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.” More than a fifth (21%) of Hotline clients who disclosed transportation problems were rated by PFEJ lawyers as failing to follow the advice of Hotline workers, compared with 12 percent of Hotline clients with no transportation problems.

Clients who said “yes” to the question “Do you have problems reading or speaking English that make it hard for you to fill out forms or do paperwork?” were significantly less likely to receive

<sup>12</sup> The patterns were similar in disability cases that the PFEJ lawyers were able to flag based on case file reviews.

favorable results and more likely to receive unfavorable outcomes due to an inability to understand the advice they were given.

Clients who stated that they had scheduling problems fared less favorably than those who reported no such problems. PFEJ lawyers were more apt to assess these clients as winding up with unfavorable outcomes due to a failure to follow through with the advice given by Hotline workers as well as failing to prevail.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, clients who disclosed a variety of other problems such as stress, depression, or fear of a current or ex-partner also achieved results that were significantly less favorable than their counterparts who did not report having these types of problems.

## Summary

Our treatment of case outcomes was based on two types of classifications provided by PFEJ lawyers: a factual assessment aimed at determining what happened in each case and an evaluative assessment aimed at gauging its favorableness. The analysis yielded a great number of findings, the most important of which are summarized as follows:

- Less than half (42%) of Hotline cases resulted in an outcome that PFEJ lawyers could classify according to traditional categories that denote success or lack of success in resolving legal problems, such as stopping debt collection harassment or failing to achieve federal bankruptcy protection. In the majority of cases, PFEJ lawyers could not classify case outcomes as successful or unsuccessful because the client failed to act on the advice that the Hotline provided (21%); had a matter that was still pending three to six months after phoning the Hotline (19%); only required information rather than a specific action (9%); or provided responses to interviewers that were so unclear, lawyers were unable to classify them (9%).
- About a quarter of the clients who did not act on the Hotline's advice did not understand what they were supposed to do. Another 25 percent were too afraid to try or lacked the time or initiative. An additional 10 percent who did not act were told to hire a private attorney and reported that they could not afford one. Taken together, these three factors accounted for 60 percent of the no-action cases in the sample.
- With the removal of indeterminate cases, Hotline cases were almost evenly split between successful and unsuccessful outcomes. After all indeterminate cases were eliminated, such as pending matters or cases where no outcome could be determined, the percent of cases with unsuccessful outcomes (52%) slightly exceeded the percent of cases where clients got the information they needed or acted successfully (48%).
- In most of the cases that resulted in unfavorable outcomes, the client appeared not to have understood the Hotline's advice or not to have acted due to lack of understanding, fear, or lack of time or initiative. Relatively few clients (6%) failed to prevail after following the

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<sup>13</sup> PFEJ lawyers also found that only 5 of the 38 clients they identified as being "difficult to serve" had favorable outcomes. No outcome could be determined for 18 of these "difficult clients," and unfavorable outcomes were recorded for 13.

Hotline's advice. This suggests that Hotlines may improve their ratio of favorable to unfavorable cases by taking steps to improve client understanding of Hotline advice and follow through.

- Certain types of Hotline services were more apt to have resulted in favorable versus unfavorable outcomes. Brief services yielded the highest proportion of cases that were classified as favorable. Coaching clients on how to deal with a landlord, creditor, or other private party was next. Favorable assessments were much lower in cases where clients were instructed on how to deal with a government agency or how to represent themselves in court. They were similarly low for referrals to other legal providers or social service agencies. Clients who were told to hire a private attorney had the worst outcomes, with only 11 percent rated as favorable. Few (18%) of the clients advised to hire a private attorney reported that they were able to do so.
- Certain types of clients were also more apt to achieve favorable versus unfavorable outcomes. Case outcomes for Spanish-speaking clients were significantly more likely to be rated as unsuccessful because of a lack of understanding. Clients with less than an eighth-grade education and/or those with no income also had the poorest outcomes, with nearly half rated as failing to understand the advice they were given and three-quarters experiencing unfavorable outcomes. Separated clients also fared significantly worse than other marital status groups, in large part because they were frequently advised to retain a private attorney but reported that they were unable to afford one.
- Clients who said yes to a question about transportation problems were significantly less apt to follow the advice of Hotline workers, as were clients who responded affirmatively to a question about inflexible work, school, or daycare schedules that made it difficult for them to take off time to tend to their legal problems. Clients who disclosed problems with stress or depression and/or fear of a current or former partner also fared significantly worse than their counterparts who did not reveal these types of problems.
- Clients who reported receiving a letter or written material from the Hotline and/or those who reported getting a follow-up telephone call from a Hotline worker to see if they needed more help were more apt to have favorable case outcomes. Those who met with Hotline staff in person in addition to receiving telephone advice were not more apt to have favorable outcomes than those who received only telephone advice.
- Although clients and PFEJ lawyers used different coding schemes, there was a high degree of consistency in case outcomes recorded by both. While clients were somewhat more apt than lawyers to characterize their cases as successfully resolved (39% versus 34%), an identical 57 percent of both groups characterized cases as not solved or pending.



# **Chapter VI:**

## **Client Assessments of Legal Hotlines**

The client interviews on which this study is based contained a variety of questions about the clients' experiences with the Hotline and their feelings and attitudes toward the Hotline and its services.

### **Client Assessment of Overall Hotline Helpfulness**

Asked to rate the general helpfulness of the Hotline they called, 41 percent of interviewed clients across the sites characterized it as “very helpful,” while 28 percent said it was “somewhat helpful.” Only 29 percent judged the Hotline to be “not very or not at all helpful.” Helpfulness ratings were highest in Washington, where 49 percent said the Hotline was “very helpful.” Ratings were least favorable in Orange County and Detroit, where more than one-third of interviewed clients rated the Hotlines as unhelpful.

In a fixed-choice question aimed at providing more specific information on client disaffection with the Hotline, the most common reason clients chose for assessing the Hotline as unhelpful was that “there was nothing anyone could do.” Across the sites, 18 percent of interviewed clients opted for this explanation for their negative Hotline ratings. The second most common reason was wanting “a lawyer or someone at Legal Aid to do more for me.” Eleven percent of interviewed clients gave this reason for their disaffection with the Hotline, although the incidence was higher in Arkansas and Detroit, where 17 percent and 15 percent of interviewed clients, respectively, agreed with this statement. Twenty percent of clients rejected the fixed-choice options to give “other” as the response to why the Hotline had not been helpful. The reasons given by these clients were transcribed and reviewed by the PFEJ lawyers and are discussed in the next section. Very few clients acknowledged that they had not understood the advice, had tried to follow it but failed, or had not had time to follow it, despite the high level of these problems reported in the narratives and identified by the lawyers.

In a fixed-choice question asking whether the Hotline worker had appropriate expectations of the client, 86 percent of interviewed clients said they thought the Hotline worker had treated them appropriately. Only 6 percent reported they had been asked to do things that were too hard, and 8 percent said they had been “talked down to.” (See Table VI-1.) Again, this information did not correlate with the high percentage of clients that the lawyers perceived did not understand the advice given.

There were no major differences among the five sites' client assessments of Hotlines, except that a slightly higher (though still low) percentage of Orange County clients felt that the Hotline worker had underestimated their capacities (“the Hotline worker treated me as if I couldn't do anything for myself”).

Table VI-1. Client Assessment of Hotline Helpfulness, by Site						
Percent Reporting	Arkansas (N=405)	Orange Co. (N=396)	Chicago (N=432)	Detroit (N=402)	Washington (N=398)	Total (N=2,034)
How helpful was the Hotline:						
Very helpful	37%	36%	43%	38%	49%	41%
Somewhat helpful	30%	27%	32%	24%	27%	28%
Not very or not at all helpful	31%	37%	23%	35%	22%	29%
Not sure/refused	2%	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%
If not helpful, why not?						
Couldn't understand what was told	0.4% (1)	0.8% (2)	0.8% (2)	2% (5)	2% (4)	1% (14)
Didn't understand how to do it	0%	0.4% (1)	0.8% (2)	0.8% (2)	3% (6)	0.9% (11)
Didn't have time to do it	0%	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)	0.4% (1)	2% (3)	0.6% (7)
Things changed and didn't need it	0.8% (2)	0.8% (2)	0%	0.8% (2)	0.5% (1)	0.6% (7)
Tried, but couldn't get to people	0.8% (2)	3% (8)	2% (5)	3% (6)	2% (4)	2% (25)
Tried, but made mistakes	0.4% (1)	0%	0.4% (1)	0%	0.5% (1)	0.3% (3)
Tried, but it was too difficult/hard	2% (4)	2% (4)	0.4% (1)	0.4% (1)	0.5% (1)	1% (11)
Tried, but court didn't take papers	0.4% (1)	0.8% (2)	0	0.4% (1)	1% (2)	0.5% (6)
Wanted a lawyer to do more	17% (41)	12% (30)	6% (14)	15% (35)	6% (11)	11% (131)
There was nothing anyone could do	24% (58)	18% (45)	14% (32)	19% (44)	15% (30)	18% (209)
Other	14% (34)	26% (64)	19% (46)	22% (53)	20% (40)	20% (237)
Refused	2% (4)	2% (5)	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)	2% (3)	1% (15)
Hotline worker's expectations:						
Too high	6%	4%	7%	5%	8%	6%
About right	85%	81%	86%	88%	89%	86%
Too low	8%	15%	7%	7%	4%	8%

## Perceived Benefits of Calling the Hotline

Clients were also asked a set of fixed-choice questions regarding a list of various benefits that they might have obtained from calling the Hotline. Nearly half (48%) of callers said they were able to understand the legal system better and more than half (57%) stated that they had a better understanding of their own problems. Approximately two-thirds of all interviewed clients felt as though they were able to make better decisions after talking to the Hotline; were more confident about their ability to handle similar situations in the future; felt heard by people in the system; and believed that they had kept the problem from escalating.

However, only 34 percent agreed that they were able to resolve their problem and get what they wanted,<sup>14</sup> and only 45 percent felt that they had accomplished more than they would have on their own. Asked if they would call the Hotline again if they had another legal problem, 53 percent answered “definitely,” and 24 percent said “maybe.” Only 8 and 9 percent, respectively, responded that they “probably” or “definitely” would not call again. (See Table VI-2.)

<sup>14</sup> This was identical to the percentage of successful cases determined by PFEJ lawyers. (See Table V-2.)



Table VI-2. Client Experiences with the Hotline, by Site						
As a result of calling the Hotline, I was:	Arkansas (N=398)	Orange Co. (N=379)	Chicago (N=424)	Detroit (N=391)	Washington (N=389)	Total (N=1,981)
Able to understand the legal system better						
Yes	49%	44%	51%	46%	51%	48%
Somewhat	19%	17%	24%	21%	21%	21%
No	32%	39%	26%	33%	28%	31%
Able to understand my problem better						
Yes	57%	53%	63%	54%	59%	57%
Somewhat	11%	10%	12%	13%	13%	12%
No	32%	38%	25%	34%	29%	31%
Able to make better decisions						
Yes	55%	54%	65%	53%	62%	58%
Somewhat	10%	9%	10%	11%	9%	10%
No	35%	3%	26%	37%	29%	33%
More confident that I will be able to handle a problem like this in the future						
Yes	68%	61%	68%	65%	70%	66%
Somewhat	7%	8%	8%	11%	7%	8%
No	26%	32%	24%	24%	23%	26%
Heard by the people in the system						
Yes	64%	63%	61%	54%	71%	63%
Somewhat	8%	6%	8%	10%	8%	8%
No	29%	30%	31%	36%	22%	30%
Able to keep a problem from growing into something bigger						
Yes	61%	56%	63%	57%	65%	60%
Somewhat	8%	3%	5%	7%	6%	6%
No	31%	40%	32%	36%	29%	34%
Able to resolve the problem and get what I wanted						
Yes	36%	33%	34%	29%	38%	34%
Somewhat	9%	8%	8%	10%	9%	9%
No	56%	59%	58%	61%	54%	58%
Able to do more than I could have done on my own						
Yes	44%	41%	47%	43%	52%	45%
Somewhat	7%	7%	6%	9%	8%	7%
No	49%	52%	47%	48%	40%	48%
If I have another legal problem, I will call the Hotline again						
Definitely	50%	46%	59%	53%	56%	53%
Maybe	28%	25%	20%	20%	24%	24%
Not sure/Refused	7%	7%	6%	11%	4%	7%
Probably not	6%	8%	7%	7%	9%	8%
Definitely not/never again	8%	14%	8%	9%	7%	9%

## “Other” Reasons for Client Dissatisfaction

Most of the 20 percent of clients (N=237) who indicated “other” reasons for their dissatisfaction with the Hotline provided additional explanations. The vast majority of these indicated in some way that the Hotline “did not help.” However, there were some noteworthy subcategories of complaints. Forty-one clients made a point of noting that the Hotline worker did not appear to care about the client. Examples of such responses were, “Need more compassionate people,” “Worker was rude,” “I think they need to have a little more interest in the clients,” “Felt worse afterward,” “Need to have more people who are courteous and respectful,” and “People could be more pleasant, more professional, and a little more empathetic toward people.”

The other main reasons for dissatisfaction were that the client expected a callback or a letter that they did not receive, that the client felt that the worker did not explain the advice sufficiently, and that the client felt that the Hotline’s promotional materials misrepresented the extent of the assistance it could provide.

## Problems Reaching the Hotline

Clients reported a variety of experiences getting services from the Hotlines. Across the sites, a quarter of respondents recalled having trouble reaching a Hotline worker, with the incidence ranging from a low of 14 percent in Arkansas to a high of 39 percent in Washington. The chief difficulty was having to wait on hold a long time. About half the clients who recalled difficulties cited this as a problem. Another common problem was getting a busy signal or no answer, which was mentioned by 37 percent of Hotline respondents who had trouble reaching a Hotline worker.

	Arkansas	Orange Co.	Chicago	Detroit	Washington	Total
Did you have trouble reaching the Hotline worker?	(N=403)	(N=389)	(N=430)	(N=392)	(N=393)	(N=2,007)
No	85%	74%	69%	76%	58%	72%
Do not remember	0.7%	3%	1%	3%	3%	2%
Yes	14%	23%	30%	21%	39%	26%
Of those who had trouble, what was the problem?	(N=58)	(N=89)	(N=129)	(N=84)	(N=155)	(N=515)
Got busy signal or no answer	22%	32%	25%	39%	56%	37%
Had to wait on hold for a long time	26%	62%	43%	49%	51%	48%
Was told someone would call back, but						
There was a long delay	36%	5%	26%	20%	5%	16%
Do not have a phone	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.2%
Other	29%	17%	19%	21%	9%	17%

## Client Perceptions of Usefulness of Particular Hotline Services

Clients were asked to select from a fixed-choice list of 12 items the specific types of services they received from the Hotline so they could be questioned further about the usefulness of the particular service. Those who reported having received an informational service (being told how the law works regarding a problem, being sent more information, being told where to get more information, being referred to a Web site) were asked how helpful the service was. Those who reported having received advice or referrals were asked whether they had done what the worker suggested; if so, how helpful the service was; and if not, why not. These ratings provide a subjective view on how clients rate the utility of Hotlines and their ability to follow through with the advice they receive. Their responses to these questions are set out in Table VI-3.

Overall, clients tended to rate all forms of advice given by Hotline workers favorably. When asked if they followed the advice given, at least 60 percent of interviewed clients at every site responded affirmatively. The reported follow-through rate was highest for those who said that Hotline workers had helped them fill out a form, make a phone call, or write a letter. Fully 91 percent of clients receiving this type of assistance reported doing what the worker had suggested.

Among those who reported doing what the worker suggested, a majority of respondents in most advice categories said that what they had tried had worked “very well” or “sort of well.” The exception to this was clients who reported being referred to another legal services program, a free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic. Across the sites, only 39 percent of clients who received this form of assistance and tried to implement it reported success. Ratings were lowest in Arkansas and Chicago. Client ratings were highest in Orange County, Detroit, and Washington, where about 45 percent of respondents referred to other legal services resources reported at least some success.

The types of assistance that received the highest utility ratings by clients were informational: having a Hotline worker explain the law, being sent additional information, and being told where to get more information. Nearly 90 percent of all clients who had their problem explained to them or were sent more information reported that these actions were “very” or “sort of” helpful. Similarly, over 75 percent of all clients who reported being told where they could get more information, rated this advice as “very” or “sort of” helpful.

About half the clients who recalled being coached on taking more activist measures to resolve their problems and said that they had followed through characterized the advice as working “very” or “somewhat” well. Thus, 55 percent of those who reported being told to get help from a non-legal community organization; 59 percent of those who reported being told how to deal with a landlord, creditor, or other private party; 57 percent of those who reported being told how to deal with a government agency; and 58 percent of those who reported being told how to file or respond to a legal action said that the advice they had received had worked “very” or “sort of” well. (See Table VI-4.)

**Table VI-4. Client Assessments of the Usefulness of the Particular Hotline Services they Reported Receiving**

	Arkansas (N=405)		Orange County (N=396)		Chicago (N=433)		Detroit (N=402)		Washington (N=398)		Total (N=2,039)	
Clients reporting receiving various types of assistance by Hotline workers	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well	% Did what worker suggested	Of those, % worked very/sort of well
Sent you more information (N)	N/A	89% (179)	N/A	87% (55)	N/A	90% (120)	N/A	85% (99)	N/A	84% (186)	N/A	87% (639)
Told you where you could get more information (N)	N/A	81% (108)	N/A	74% (128)	N/A	75% (160)	N/A	74% (91)	N/A	77% (175)	N/A	76% (662)
Referred you to another legal service program, free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic (N)	66% (47)	26% (31)	63% (103)	46% (63)	67% (153)	32% (100)	63% (67)	44% (41)	76% (112)	45% (85)	67% (482)	39% (320)
Told you how to get help from a social service or non-legal community organization (N)	74% (46)	50% (34)	60% (62)	65% (37)	65% (54)	47% (36)	67% (27)	39% (18)	79% (72)	61% (57)	69% (261)	55% (182)
Told you how to deal with your landlord, creditor, or other private party (N)	77% (62)	73% (48)	80% (54)	74% (42)	70% (84)	48% (59)	78% (51)	53% (40)	86% (117)	56% (100)	79% (368)	59% (289)
Told you how to deal with a government agency (N)	73% (22)	69% (16)	70% (23)	65% (17)	73% (26)	47% (19)	77% (13)	40% (10)	70% (37)	58% (26)	72% (121)	57% (88)
Told you how to get help from a worker at the court or told you how to represent yourself in court, or how to file or respond to a legal action (N)	60% (75)	69% (45)	67% (92)	74% (62)	62% (108)	58% (67)	73% (59)	72% (43)	65% (138)	66% (90)	65% (472)	67% (307)
Reviewed your income or other qualifications for public benefits and told you how to apply for benefits (N)	68% (57)	61% (38)	75% (63)	64% (47)	46% (55)	55% (22)	57% (30)	41% (17)	68% (57)	69% (39)	64% (262)	61% (163)
Helped you fill out a form, make a call, or write a letter (N)	87% (23)	65% (17)	88% (41)	71% (35)	87% (30)	69% (26)	97% (30)	66% (29)	97% (32)	68% (31)	91% (156)	68% (138)

## Helpfulness of Hotline Actions Determined by PFEJ Lawyers

The client assessments of the usefulness of particular services set out in Table VI-4 were keyed to which services the client reported receiving (clients were only asked the follow-up questions when they had identified receiving a particular service). As discussed in Chapter V, the PFEJ lawyers also listed the services that the Hotline had provided to the client in each case, based on their review of the case record. We compared the services identified by the clients to those identified by the lawyers. As table VI-5 shows, the overlap between the services identified by the client and those listed by the lawyers was relatively high (65%) for those cases in which the client was mailed additional information or told where to get additional information. But for all other categories, it was much lower: 32 to 36 percent for referral to another legal provider, advice on dealing with a private party, and self-representation in court; and 7 to 17 percent for all other categories. It appears that clients tended to choose the general help categories mentioned early in the list of 12 questions dealing with Hotline assistance and then respond negatively to the other, more specific help categories (see Report of the PFEJ Lawyers in Appendix D).

Consequently, we separated out the responses of those clients whose identification of the services they had received was consistent with the determinations of the PFEJ lawyers. Not surprisingly, these clients, who were able to describe the services they received with more specificity than other clients, tended to rank each service as somewhat more useful than did the group as a whole. (See Table VI-5). However, the overall ranking of the relative usefulness of the different types of services was consistent with that of the larger group, with brief services and information getting the highest ratings.

	% of cases with various actions according to:		% of cases PFEJ lawyers and clients agree	Of those who agreed on advice, % reported did what worker suggested	Of those who did what worker suggested, % who reported advice worked very/sort of well
	PFEJ Lawyers	Client			
Client was sent more information, told where to get more information, or referred to a Web site	36% (736)	52% (1,054)	65% (476)	N/A	*84% (399)
Client was referred to another legal service program, free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic, or told how to get help from a worker at the court	25% (507)	24% (486)	32% (161)	74% (113)	44% (49)
Client was told how to get help from a social service or non-legal community organization	16% (318)	13% (263)	17% (54)	74% (39)	64% (25)
Client was told how to deal with private party	23% (467)	19% (378)	36% (168)	83% (135)	72% (97)

<b>Table VI-5. Comparison of Hotline Actions Reported by Clients and PFEJ Lawyers and Perceived Helpfulness in Overlap Cases</b>					
	% of cases with various actions according to:		% of cases PFEJ lawyers and clients agree	Of those who agreed on advice, % reported did what worker suggested	Of those who did what worker suggested, % who reported advice worked very/sort of well
	PFEJ Lawyers	Client			
Client was told how to deal with a government agency	10% (196)	6% (124)	7% (13)	75% (9)	78% (7)
Client was given advice about representing self in court, or how to file, or respond to a legal action	36% (724)	23% (472)	36% (258)	66% (73)	69% (50)
Client was told how to fill out a form, or make a call, or write a letter	4% (78)	8% (162)	18% (14)	100% (14)	100% (13)

\* Reported advice was very/sort of helpful.

We also compared the client response to the question, “How helpful was the Hotline generally?” with the nature of the service provided to the client by the Hotline, as determined by the PFEJ lawyers. We found a much narrower range in client responses from this perspective. Being told to hire a private attorney was the only type of Hotline action that was associated with a much lower helpfulness ranking with 45 percent of clients who received this type of advice characterizing the Hotline as “not helpful.” This is consistent with other findings in the preceding chapter showing that clients who were told to hire a private attorney had less favorable outcomes. (See Table VI-6.)

Overall, the clients’ subjective assessment of the usefulness of particular kinds of Hotline actions is consistent with the level of favorable outcomes for various actions described in Chapter V. For example, clients who received brief services were most apt to have their outcomes characterized by PFEJ lawyers as favorable (69%) and to themselves characterize the Hotline as “helpful” (72%). Most clients who were coached on how to deal with another private party also received favorable outcome ratings by the PFEJ lawyers (59%) and rated the Hotline as “helpful” (76%). Finally, the types of Hotline actions that garnered the lowest favorable ratings (coaching on how to represent yourself with a government agency, referral to a social service agency and referral to a government agency) attracted the lowest helpfulness ratings with more than a third of clients who received each of these types of services describing the Hotline as “not helpful.”

**Table VI-6. Client Ratings of Helpfulness of Hotline Compared with Types of Actions Provided, as Determined by PFEJ Lawyers**

	Provided legal information/ assessment only (N=581)	Provided written information (N=708)	Provided advice on dealing with a landlord, creditor, ex-spouse or partner, or other private party (N=465)	Provided advice about representing self with a government agency (N=195)	Provided advice about representing self in a court procedure (N=723)	Referred to a social service agency (N=88)	Referred to another legal service program, free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic in state or out of state (N=113)	Referred client to government agency to file complaint/request investigation (N=236)	Advised client to hire private attorney (N=317)	Provided brief service (N=78)
<b>Percent clients reporting Hotline was:</b>										
Helpful	67%	74%	76%	64%	72%	68%	71%	65%	53%	72%
Not helpful	31%	24%	22%	35%	27%	32%	28%	32%	45%	24%
Not sure or refused	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%	3%	2%	4%

### Client Satisfaction Compared to Outcomes

Many Hotlines use client satisfaction surveys as a way of gauging their success and effectiveness. For example, half of the 44 Hotline managers and executive directors interviewed in Phase I of the Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study said they had collected some form of client satisfaction data. The biggest concerns expressed by managers about these studies were their low response rates and the self-selected nature of the group that participated.

With its random sample design and large number of completed interviews generated at each site, this study addressed many of the methodological weaknesses in previous user satisfaction studies conducted by Hotlines. The data also afforded a comparison of client satisfaction levels with outcomes assessments generated by PFEJ lawyers, which speaks more directly to the question of whether user satisfaction surveys are good ways of assessing the effectiveness of Hotlines. The results of this comparison are presented in Table VI-7.

<b>Table VI-7. Comparison of Client Satisfaction Ratings with Case Outcomes Assessments by PFEJ Lawyers</b>					
	<b>Outcomes Assessments by PFEJ Lawyers* (N=1,462)</b>			<b>Selected Favorable<sup>1</sup> and Unfavorable<sup>2</sup> Outcomes* (N=747)</b>	
<b>% of Clients Rating Hotline as:</b>	<b>Favorable (N=585)</b>	<b>Unfavorable (N=526)</b>	<b>Miscellaneous (N=351)</b>	<b>Favorable (N=347)</b>	<b>Selected Unfavorable (N=400)</b>
Very helpful	62% (365)	19% (100)	34% (120)	70% (235)	21% (87)
Somewhat helpful	22% (129)	32% (169)	33% (117)	21% (71)	31% (125)
Not very/not at all helpful	14% (83)	47% (245)	30% (104)	11% (38)	45% (184)
Not sure/Refused	1% (8)	2% (12)	3% (10)	.9% (3)	3% (10)

<sup>1</sup> *Favorable outcomes* includes cases where the outcome was “resolved to complete satisfaction” or “resolved but did not get everything.”  
<sup>2</sup> *Selected unfavorable outcomes* includes cases where the client “did not understand,” “did not follow through,” or “did not prevail.”  
\* Differences across outcomes are statistically significant at .05.

As is readily discernible, client satisfaction ratings were significantly related to outcomes assessments by PFEJ lawyers. Clients with favorable outcomes were significantly more likely than their counterparts with unfavorable outcomes or those that could not be classified either way to characterize the Hotline as “very helpful.” While 62 percent of clients with favorable outcomes gave the Hotline the highest satisfaction rating, this was the case for only 19 percent of clients with unfavorable outcomes.

The pattern held when we isolated satisfaction ratings for clients with the best and worst outcomes: cases that were resolved or cases where the client did not understand the advice, did not follow through, or did not prevail. While 71 percent of clients with the most favorable outcomes rated the Hotline as “very helpful,” this was the case for only 21 percent of clients with the worst outcomes.



The relationship between outcome and satisfaction was less consistent among clients who selected the less enthusiastic rating of “somewhat helpful.” About a fifth of clients with favorable outcomes characterized the Hotline as “somewhat helpful,” but this was the case for approximately one-third of clients with unfavorable outcomes. It is noteworthy that over half of the clients who had experienced the worst outcomes — receiving advice they did not understand or failing to act or failing to prevail — described the Hotline as “very” (21%) or “somewhat helpful” (51%).

## Summary

- Clients rated their experiences with Hotlines favorably with 41 percent characterizing them as “very helpful” and 28 percent as “somewhat helpful.” Among those who rated the Hotline negatively, 18 percent said “there was nothing anyone could do,” and 11 percent wanted “a lawyer or someone at Legal Aid to do more for me.” Forty clients made a point of noting that the Hotline worker did not appear to care about the client and was rude, discourteous, and/or unpleasant.
- Approximately two-thirds of interviewed clients identified other benefits to phoning the Hotline, such as feeling as though they were able to make better decisions, gaining confidence, feeling heard, and believing they had kept the problem from escalating.
- Across the sites, a quarter of interviewed clients had trouble reaching a Hotline worker, with 39 percent of Washington callers reporting long wait times or busy signals.
- Using the Hotline action codes provided by PFEJ lawyers and the helpfulness ratings provided by clients, we found that clients who received brief services gave the Hotline the highest helpfulness ratings. Those who were sent written information or were coached on how to deal with another private party gave the Hotline the second and third highest ratings, respectively. Clients who were most apt to rate the Hotline as unhelpful had been told how to represent themselves with a government agency, or had been referred to social services or a government agency to file a complaint or request an investigation.
- Clients with favorable outcomes were significantly more likely than their unfavorable counterparts to rate Hotlines as “very” helpful, but they were more generous than their objective situation would suggest with many clients with unfavorable outcomes rating the Hotline as “somewhat successful” and some even classifying the Hotline as “very helpful.” Thus, although outcomes are significantly related to client satisfaction levels, the association is not perfect.
- Comparisons between reports and ratings provided by clients and PFEJ lawyers indicated that clients and lawyers rated the success of cases similarly, but that clients seriously under reported the problems they encountered in understanding the advice they were given and following through on their own. Clients also tended to characterize the types of assistance they received from the Hotline as general and informational rather than pertaining to a specific advice category.



# Chapter VII:

## Summary and Recommendations

### Summary

Phase III of the Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study conducted a full-scale survey of legal Hotline users to answer a variety of questions about legal outcomes and the characteristics of callers who experience successful and unsuccessful results. As part of this study, researchers at the Center for Policy Research (CPR), PFEJ lawyers, and telephone interviewers with SRBI collaborated to design and conduct a survey that involved the following elements:

- Generating samples of callers at five legal Hotlines that were representative of the total universe of clients served at legal services programs;
- Conducting telephone interviews with 2,034 callers three to six months after they contacted the Hotlines and eliciting their general reactions to the Hotlines, as well as the specific outcomes of their cases;
- Having experienced legal services lawyers generate what they termed to be both “factual” and “evaluative” assessments of outcomes, which were based on a review of case files and interview notes, including verbatim responses to questions about legal outcomes;
- Analyzing the resulting data set to produce profiles of callers across the five sites and outcome patterns with special attention to the client, case, and advice characteristics of cases with favorable and unfavorable outcome patterns.

The Phase III study has answered a number of fundamental questions about Hotlines and their efficacy with various types of callers. The key findings for the study are described below.

- **Where an outcome could be determined, Hotline cases were almost evenly split between successful and unsuccessful outcomes.** After indeterminate cases were eliminated, such as pending matters or cases where no outcome could be determined, the percent of cases where clients got the information they needed or the results they wanted (48%) almost matched the percent with unsuccessful outcomes (52%).
- **When callers understand what they are told to do and follow the advice they are given, they tend to prevail.** Only 6 percent of clients were determined by PFEJ lawyers to have received unfavorable results because they did not prevail after following the advice of Hotline workers. In contrast, 13 percent were determined to have received unfavorable results because they did not understand the advice that was given, and 9 percent were determined to have failed because they lacked the time, initiative, or courage to try to do what the worker suggested.

- **Most clients who do not act fail to understand the advice they are given or are too intimidated or overwhelmed to attempt the recommended action.** Three to six months after phoning the Hotline, 21 percent of callers had not acted on the advice they received. About a quarter of the clients who did not act on the Hotline’s advice did not understand what they were supposed to do. Another 25 percent were too afraid to try or lacked the time or initiative. An additional 10 percent who did not act were told to hire a private attorney and reported that they could not afford or find one. Taken together, these three factors accounted for 60 percent of the no action cases in the sample.
- **Many Hotline cases result in outcomes that cannot readily be classified as successful or unsuccessful.** Only 72 percent of the cases in the sample could be classified by PFEJ lawyers as successful or unsuccessful. Success could not be gauged for many clients because they had a matter that was still pending three to six months after phoning the Hotline (19%) or their responses to questions about their cases were so unclear that PFEJ lawyers were unable to determine outcomes (9%).
- **Certain types of Hotline services are more apt to result in favorable outcomes.** Brief services yielded the highest proportion of cases that were classified as favorable. Coaching clients on how to deal with a landlord, creditor, or other private party was next, followed by providing written legal information and coaching clients on how to proceed pro se in court. Favorable assessments were still lower in cases where clients were instructed on how to deal with a government agency or were referred to another legal services program or social service agency.
- **Clients who were told to hire a private attorney had the worst outcomes and were the most dissatisfied.** Only 11 percent of clients who were told to hire an attorney achieved favorable case outcomes and 52 percent rated the Hotline as unhelpful. The decision to hire a private attorney appeared to be unrelated to Hotline advice. Only 18 percent of clients who were advised by Hotline workers to hire a private attorney did so; as noted above, many reported being unable to afford or find one. Most who did retain an attorney (65%) were not advised by the Hotline to do so.
- **Outcomes for housing and consumer cases are most apt to be rated favorably, while family cases are most apt to be pending.** Housing and consumer cases had the highest rate of favorable outcomes, while family cases were lowest with many still pending when clients were interviewed. The higher favorable rates for housing cases may reflect the fact that housing clients with unsuccessful cases may not have been reachable for an interview because they had moved. Since family matters frequently require court action, it is not surprising that many were still unresolved when the interviews were conducted.
- **Hotline clients with the best and worst case results had distinct demographic characteristics.** Clients with outcomes that were rated most favorably were significantly more likely to be white, English-speaking, educated at least to the eighth-grade level, and have a marital status other than being separated from a spouse. Clients who received the least favorable outcomes were Spanish-speaking, Hispanic, individuals with the lowest education levels, those who reported no income from any source, and those who were separated and lived apart from their spouse. Substantial proportions of Spanish speakers, individuals with

the lowest education levels and those with no income source appeared to experience unfavorable outcomes because of a failure to understand the advice they were given. The lower results for callers who were legally separated may have been because they were calling about divorce or other family matters, and thus were disproportionately advised to retain a private attorney.

- **Many clients face barriers that may affect their ability to follow through on Hotline advice.** Many Hotline callers disclosed that they or a member of their households had a disability or a serious health problem (42%). About a third reported serious transportation problems. Smaller proportions reported having work, school, or daycare schedules that might make it hard for them to handle their legal problems (16%). Reading or speaking English well enough to complete forms and other legal paperwork was noted to be a problem for about 12 percent of Hotline callers. And 44 percent disclosed other problems, such as depression or fear of an ex-partner or current household member. While clients with disabilities fared no worse than their counterparts without disabilities, the other barriers listed above were associated with outcomes that were significantly worse. Those with problems using English appeared not to have understood the advice they were given, while those with transportation, scheduling difficulties, or “other” problems frequently failed to follow through.
- **Some types of follow-up actions by the Hotline may boost the chances of callers experiencing favorable results.** Most clients (78%) only spoke once with a Hotline worker. The rest phoned back a second or third time and/or obtained assistance in person from a lawyer, law clinic, or court worker. Clients who went to the office and met with Hotline workers in person did not appear to have a higher rate of favorable outcomes than those who just used the telephone, nor did clients who called the Hotline more than once. Higher favorable outcomes were associated with getting a letter or other written material, a follow-up phone call from the Hotline or help from someone other than the Hotline worker.
- **Clients rated their experiences with Hotlines favorably.** Nearly half (41%) characterized the Hotline as “very helpful” and 28 percent as “somewhat helpful.” Only 29 percent rated it as unhelpful, although a quarter of interviewed clients across the sites had trouble reaching a Hotline worker, with 39 percent of Washington callers reporting long wait times or busy signals. About half were certain that they would use the Hotline again for another legal problem. Two-thirds of clients at every site credited the Hotline with helping them make better decisions, feel more confident about their abilities, and keep the problem from escalating.
- **Disappointed Hotline callers typically said there was nothing anyone could do or that they wanted a lawyer to do more for them, although a small fraction of callers complained about being treated rudely.** Callers who were critical of the Hotline and rated it as unhelpful typically said there was nothing anyone could do for them. The next most common reason for their dissatisfaction was wanting a lawyer to do more on their behalf. Approximately 2 percent of callers complained about disrespectful and uncaring treatment by Hotline workers.
- **User satisfaction ratings are associated with Hotline outcomes, but the relationship is not perfect.** Clients with favorable outcomes were significantly more likely than their

unfavorable counterparts to rate Hotlines as “very” helpful, but they were more generous than their objective situation would suggest. While 63 percent of clients with favorable outcomes gave the Hotline a “very favorable” rating versus only 19 percent of clients with unfavorable outcomes, a third (32%) of clients with unfavorable outcomes rated the Hotline as “somewhat helpful.” More to the point, a quarter of the clients who were judged by PFEJ lawyers as not having followed the Hotline’s advice or not having prevailed rated the Hotline as “very helpful.”

- **Hotlines serve a broad population with a variety of demographic characteristics.** While most interviewed clients were English-speaking females, the sample was almost evenly split between white and African-American respondents, with a representation of Hispanics (13%). About 41 percent reported income from wages; the rest reported income from benefits, Social Security, and other sources, including about 10 percent who reported no income source at all. Roughly equal proportions were married, separated, divorced, and single. And while a third had completed high school and another third had some college, about 20 percent had less than a high-school education and 14 percent had completed college.
- **Most Hotline callers have family, housing, or consumer problems.** About 40 percent of respondents had phoned the Hotline with a family problem; 20 percent had housing and consumer issues, respectively. The remaining callers had a variety of other problems, the most common of which dealt with benefits and employment matters. Within the major problem types, two-thirds of callers with consumer problems phoned with collection/bankruptcy matters, while a quarter phoned with warranty problems. Family law callers were equally divided between divorce, custody/paternity, and support matters.
- **There is close agreement between clients and PFEJ lawyers in their characterization of the success clients experience when they phone the Hotline.** Using different coding schemes, 39 percent of clients classified their legal problem as completely or somewhat resolved, while PFEJ lawyers rated 34 percent of the cases as favorably resolved. Both clients and PFEJ lawyers rated 57 percent of the cases as having outcomes that were unfavorable or pending. However, as discussed in Appendix D, clients and PFEJ lawyers differed in how they characterized Hotline actions, with clients tending to characterize the types of assistance they received from the Hotline as general and informational rather than pertaining to specific advice categories.

## Recommendations

These findings suggest that Hotlines succeed in delivering legal services to many individuals with a broad range of problems. However, a substantial proportion of clients fail to understand the advice they are given or fail to implement it because of fear, discouragement, lack of time, or lack of initiative. These problems are far greater than failure to prevail among those who understand the advice and try to follow it. To increase the ratio of favorable to unfavorable outcomes, Hotlines should adopt measures to enhance understanding and promote action.

- **Hotlines should recognize that certain demographic groups are particularly less likely to obtain favorable outcomes.** Non-English speakers, individuals at the lowest education

levels, and those who report no income perform significantly worse than other demographic sub-groups, chiefly because they appear not to understand the advice they are given. Hotlines should develop special protocols for dealing with these clients, possibly including increased support or more extended services.

- **Policymakers should take further steps to evaluate whether Hotlines are an appropriate method of delivering service to non-English speakers.** The non-English speaking clients in this study were Spanish speakers who were provided services by the Hotline in Spanish. They had a particularly high rate of failure to act due to inability to understand the Hotline advice. This suggests that the lower level of favorable outcomes they obtained may have had to do with factors other than language per se. Policymakers should conduct more in-depth evaluations of outcomes obtained by non-English speaking Hotline clients to determine whether this method of delivering services is suited to this demographic group.
  
- **Hotlines should screen callers for certain barriers that are associated with unfavorable outcomes.** Clients who, when asked a specific question, report having a less than eighth-grade education or problems with transportation, reading, or comprehending English, scheduling (work, daycare, or other), stress, fear of an ex-partner or other personal factors affecting their ability to resolve their problems are less likely to obtain a successful outcome. Hotlines should routinely screen for these barriers, which is likely to require special attention during intake, since the PFEJ lawyers noted that most of these barriers could not be discerned from existing case files. Hotlines should develop protocols for dealing with these clients, possibly including increased support or more extended services.
  
- **Hotlines should institute or improve follow-up procedures.** Hotlines would do well to institute tickler systems flagging cases for a callback to check on the client's progress. Cases that should be flagged are those in which the problem is particularly likely to have serious consequences for the client. Especially important are those in which one of the following factors is present:
  - The recommended action is one where clients are less likely to obtain a favorable outcome: representing self in court; dealing with a government agency; obtaining legal assistance from another provider or help from a social services agency.
  - The client falls into one of the demographic categories identified above that are less likely to obtain a favorable outcome.
  - The client reports one of the barriers described above as associated with a reduced likelihood of obtaining a favorable outcome.

- **Hotlines should develop or increase their capacity to provide brief services or institute a brief services unit.** Brief services are more likely to result in successful outcomes than advice or referral services. In cases where it may be possible to resolve the client's problem with a letter, telephone call, completion of a form, or completion of a referral, it is likely to be a more effective use of resources for the Hotline or a related unit to perform the action than for the Hotline to advise the client how to do so. The Hotline will already have invested time in developing the facts and legal issues in response to the client's call; investment of the additional time required for the brief service will substantially increase the likelihood of a successful outcome for the client's problem. Cases in which clients are less likely to obtain a favorable outcome on their own, as discussed above, should be given priority for brief services.
- **Hotlines that do not routinely provide written information to clients should do so.** The provision of written information, whether a generic pamphlet on an issue or a letter detailing the advice provided, increases the likelihood of a successful outcome.
- **Hotlines should recognize that telling a caller that they should obtain a private attorney is unlikely to result in a successful outcome.** When Hotline workers advise callers to retain a private attorney, particularly in divorce cases that do not fall within program priorities for extended representation, they should know that most of these clients will not be able to afford to hire an attorney or will not be able to find one willing to take their case. Hotlines should explore alternative services that are more likely to result in successful outcomes. Local policymakers should explore the implications of this problem, such as devoting more resources to developing panels of attorneys willing to take cases for reduced fees.
- **Hotlines should be aware of the limitations of client satisfaction data and analyze the data they get in ways that maximize their utility.** While user satisfaction is a legitimate and an important indicator, it is not a perfect measure of Hotline effectiveness. Clients are frequently more generous in their evaluations of Hotlines than their personal situations would suggest. Half of the clients who experienced unfavorable outcomes described the Hotline as "very" (19%) or "somewhat" helpful (32%). To some extent, this may reflect the fact that some clients who do not get what they want feel empowered by the information they receive. In conducting client satisfaction surveys, "very helpful" and "somewhat helpful" response categories should not be merged in the analysis, because only the "very helpful" category is strongly associated with case outcomes.
- **Hotlines should conduct random follow-up telephone interviews with clients.** In order to more accurately assess performance, Hotlines would do well to institute random follow-up interviews to gauge the effectiveness of their services and to identify ways to improve them.



# **Appendix A:**

## **Face Sheet**

# Hotlines Phase III

## Follow-up Telephone Questionnaire Face Sheet (Completed by the Center for Policy Research)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hotline: \_\_\_\_\_ Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Client name:	Phone:	City:	State:	Zip:
Backup contact:	Relationship to party:	Phone:		
Sex: Male Female	Age:	Number adults in home:	Number children in home:	
Income sources (circle all that apply) 1 - Work/wages      5 - Social Security 2 - Alimony/support      6 - Other 3 - Welfare/TANF      7 - None 4 - SSI                  8 - Benefit	Language 1 - English 2 - Spanish 3 - Bilingual Eng/Spanish 4 - Other	% Poverty Level _____	Ethnicity/Race 1 - White/non-Hispanic      5 - Asian/Pacific Islander 2 - Black/non-Hispanic      6 - Group 3 - Hispanic                  7 - Other 4 - Native American	

### Case Codes —Use Code From Case Record

#### Consumer / Finance

- 01 - Bankruptcy/debtor relief
- 02 - Collection (including repossession)
- 03 - Contracts/warranties
- 04 - Credit access
- 05 - Energy (other than utilities)
- 06 - Loans/installment purchases (other than collections)
- 07 - Public utilities
- 08 - Unfair sales practice
- 09 - Other consumer/finance

#### Education

- 11 - Education

#### Employment

- 21 - Job discrimination
- 22 - Wage claims
- 23 - Minimum wage
- 29 - Other (including CETA)

#### Family

- 30 - Adoption
- 31 - Custody/visitation
- 32 - Divorce/separation/annulment
- 33 - Guardianship/conservatorship
- 34 - Name change
- 35 - Parental rights termination
- 36 - Paternity
- 37 - Domestic violence (circle if DV advice provided)
- 38 - Support
- 39 - Other family

#### Juvenile

- 41 - Delinquent
- 42 - Neglected/abused dependent
- 49 - Other juvenile

#### Health

- 51 - Medicaid
- 52 - Medicare
- 59 - Other health

#### Housing

- 61 - Federal subsidy housing rights
  - a - Application
  - b - Eviction
  - c - Rent increase/charges, conditions, other tenants rights
- 62 - Other public housing
  - a - Application
  - b - Eviction
  - c - Rent increase/charges, conditions, other tenants rights
- 63 - Landlord/tenant (not public house)
  - a - Eviction
  - b - Rent increase/charges, conditions, other tenants rights
- 64 - Home ownership/real property
- 69 - Other housing

#### Income

#### Maintenance/Benefit

- 71 - TANF/other welfare
- 72 - Black lung
- 73 - Food stamps/commodities
- 74 - Social Security
- 75 - Supplemental Security Income
- 76 - Unemployment compensation
- 77 - Veterans benefits
- 78 - Worker's compensation
- 79 - Other income maintenance

#### Individual Rights

- 81 - Immigration/naturalization
- 82 - Mental health
- 83 - Prisoner's rights
- 84 - Physically disabled rights
- 89 - Other individual rights

#### Miscellaneous

- 91 - Incorporation/dissolution
- 92 - Indian tribal law
- 93 - License (auto and others)
- 94 - Torts
- 95 - Wills/estates
- 99 - Other miscellaneous

#### Case Type

- 1 - Sample
- 2 - Refused
- 3 - Referred
- 4 - Not asked

#### Interview Outcome

- 1 - Interviewed
- 2 - Refused
- 3 - Not reached

Briefly describe the problem.

# **Appendix B:**

## **Follow-up Telephone Questionnaire**

# Hotlines Phase III

## Follow-up Telephone Questionnaire

24 Interviewer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

25 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

26 Client Name: \_\_\_\_\_

27 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm calling on behalf of [DETROIT: The Legal Aid Help Line; CHICAGO: C.A.R.P.L.S. - Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services; ARKANSAS: Legal Aid Help Line; CALIF: The Legal Aid Help Line; SEATTLE: C.L.E.A.R. - Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral]

We are helping [insert name of program from ABOVE] find out what people think of their Legal Hotline. They indicated that you called the Hotline a few months ago.

They gave you legal information about your problem regarding [Insert from face sheet].

**28a.** Would you be willing to answer a few questions about that?

1 - Yes

2 - No [Try to reschedule: **28b** New date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**28c** Time: \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

**28d** Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_]

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**28e. Can you tell me briefly why you called the Hotline?**

[Interviewer: If the description does not seem to match the problem listed on face sheet, probe: Is this what you called the Hotline about? According to the Hotline records you called about...]

1 - same problem as on face sheet (record more details if needed)

2 - different problem

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Did the Hotline Worker...	q29b IF YES, ASK: How helpful was this?						Codes for "Partially/ Tried" or "No" 1 - didn't understand, forgot, confused 2 - too hard, afraid, discouraged, no confidence 3 - changed mind, not worth it 4 - situation changed, problem resolved, other side dropped it 5 - nothing could be done 6 - tried, no one called back, couldn't get through 7 - other (describe)
	q29a Yes	N o	D K	q29b Very	Sort of	Not really helpful	
a. Explain how the law works regarding your problem?	1	2	3	1	2	3	
b. Send you more information?	1	2	3	1	2	3	
c. Tell you where you could get more information?	1	2	3	1	2	3	
d. Refer you to a website	1	2	3	1	2	3	

Did the Hotline Worker...	q29d. Did you do what the worker suggested					If Yes in Q29d, How did this work for you?				If No in q29d, or partially  q29f Enter code from above
	q29c Yes	N o	q29d Yes	Partially/ Tried	No	q29e Very well	Sort of worked	Did not really work	Too soon to tell	
e. Refer you to another legal service program, free or reduced-fee attorney, or legal clinic?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
f. Tell you how to get help from a social service or non-legal community organization?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
g. Tell you how to deal with your landlord, creditor, or other private party?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
h. Tell you how to deal with a government agency?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
i. Tell you how to get help from a worker at the court — like a family law facilitator?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
j. Tell you how to represent yourself in court, or how to file, or respond to a legal action?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
k. Review your income or other qualifications for public benefits and tell you how to apply for benefits?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
l. Help you fill out a form, or make a call, or write a letter?	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
m. Other (explain)	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	

**After phoning the Hotline:**

**30. Did you get legal help from someone other than the Hotline worker, like a legal clinic or free or reduced-fee attorney?**

- 1 - No SKIP TO Q32
- 2 - Yes, legal clinic
- 3 - Yes, free attorney
- 4 - Yes, attorney I hired
- 5 - Yes, a court worker
- 6 - Yes, a worker in another agency
- 7 - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 - Not sure/Refused

**31. Did the Hotline worker refer you to this source of help?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes
- 9 - Not sure/Refused

**32. Did you ever receive a letter or other written material from the Hotline?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes
- 9 - Don't remember/Refused

**33. Did anyone from the Hotline ever phone to see how you were doing or if you needed more help with your problem?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes
- 9 - Don't remember/Refused

**34. Did you ever go to the Hotline office and meet with a worker for help on your case?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes
- 9 - Don't remember/Refused

**35. Did you call the Hotline back a second or third time to get more help over the phone about your case?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes
- 9 - Don't remember/Refused

**36. Is your legal problem solved?**

- 1 - Yes, completely
- 2 - Yes, somewhat
- 3 - Don't know, too soon to tell
- 4 - Situation changed, dropped the matter, changed my mind

**5 - No, not really** °

**6 - No, not at all** °

9 - Refused

**If "not really" or "not at all" ask:**

**37. Since you called the Hotline is your legal problem?**

- 1 - Better?
- 2 - Worse?
- 3 - Same?
- 9 - Not sure/Refused

**38. In your own words, what would you say happened with your legal problem? PROBE FOR DETAILS - what was resolution or outcome?**

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**Interviewer:**

The following lists some of the main types of cases handled by Hotlines and shows some of the most common outcomes in those cases.

If the case falls into one of these case type categories and if the client's description of the outcome meets one of the outcome categories, check the appropriate outcome box.

If the case type or the client's description of the outcome does not fall into a category listed below, check the appropriate outcome box under "All Other Cases".

<b>Case Type</b>	<b>a. Favorable Outcome</b>	<b>b. Unfavorable Outcome</b>	<b>c. Check here if cannot determine</b>
<b>Consumer</b>			
40 Debtor relief	1 - Client able to stop debt collection harassment, avoid garnishment or repossession, or otherwise resolve situation without bankruptcy, including entering into reasonable repayment plan.	1 - No relief	<input type="checkbox"/>
41 Bankruptcy	1 - Obtained federal bankruptcy protections	2 - Did not obtain federal bankruptcy protections	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Family</b>			
42 Custody	1 - Obtained, maintained, improved custody 2 - Successfully filed action or motion or response pro se (no reason to believe case will not proceed to resolution)	1 - Lost, failed to obtain or improve custody 2 - Has not successfully filed motion or response pro se or has filed but case is not proceeding as it should	<input type="checkbox"/>
43 Divorce	1 - Obtained divorce 2 - Successfully filed action or motion or response pro se (no reason to believe case will not proceed to resolution)	1 - Failed to obtain divorce 2 - Has not successfully filed motion or response pro se or has filed but case is not proceeding as it should	<input type="checkbox"/>
44 Support	1 - Obtained/preserved/increased child support 2 - Obtained modification of payment plan 3 - Successfully filed action or motion or response pro se (no reason to believe case will not proceed to resolution)	1 - Did not obtain desired change 2 - Has not successfully filed motion or response pro se or has filed but case is not proceeding as it should	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Housing</b>			
45 Eviction	1 - Not evicted 2 - Obtained additional time to move	1 - Evicted with no additional time	<input type="checkbox"/>
46 Rent/Conditions/Etc.	1 - Did not have to pay all or part of charges or increases 2 - Obtained repairs or improvements	1 - Landlord got what s/he wanted 2 - Did not obtain repairs/ improvements	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Income Maintenance</b>			
47	1 - Obtained or retained benefits	1 - Did not obtain/retain benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>All Other Cases</b>			
48	1 - Client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted	1 - Client did not obtain what s/he wanted	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Let's talk about your overall experience with the Hotline.**

**52. How helpful was the Hotline generally?**

- 1 - Very helpful
- 2 - Somewhat helpful
- 3 - Not very or not at all helpful<sup>o</sup>
- 4 - Not sure/Refused

**IF NOT HELPFUL: 53. Why wasn't the Hotline more helpful to you? (Circle all that apply) DO NOT READ**

- 1 - I couldn't understand what I was told or what I was supposed to do
- 2 - I was told to do things, but I didn't understand how to do them
- 3 - I didn't have time to do what I was told to do
- 4 - Things changed and the advice didn't make sense any more
- 5 - I tried, but couldn't get through to the people I was supposed to
- 6 - I tried, but I made mistakes
- 7 - I tried, but it was too difficult/hard
- 8 - I tried, but the court didn't accept my pleading
- 9 - I wanted a lawyer or someone at Legal Aid to do more for me
- 10 - There was nothing anyone could do
- 11 - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 12 - Not sure/Refused

**54. Which of these statements best describes what you thought about the Hotline worker?**

**54a. Given what I know about the legal system . . . CIRCLE ONLY ONE**

- 1 - the Hotline worker talked over my head, using legal words I didn't understand
- 2 - the Hotline work explained things in a way that was just right, OR
- 3 - the Hotline worker talked down to me
- 4 - None of these/Not sure/Refused

**54b. Given my life and who I am . . . CIRCLE ONLY ONE**

- 1 - the Hotline worker expected me to do things that were too hard
- 2 - the Hotline worker was about right in what they thought I could do, OR
- 3 - the Hotline worker treated me as if I couldn't do anything for myself
- 4 - None of these/Not sure/Refused

**55. As a result of calling the Hotline . . .**

	Yes	Somewhat	No	NS
a. Were you able to understand the legal system better? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
b. Were you able to understand your problem better? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
c. Were you able to make better decisions after talking to the Hotline? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
d. Are you more confident that you will be able to handle a problem like this in the future? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
e. Did you feel like the people in the system heard your side of the issue? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
f. Were you able to keep a problem from growing into something bigger? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
g. Were you able to resolve the problem and get what you wanted? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
h. Were you able to do more than you could have done on your own? . . . . .	1	2	3	4
i. Was there anything else you accomplished? (Describe): _____				

**56. If you have another legal problem, will you call the Hotline again? Would you say..... ?**

- 1 - Definitely
- 2 - Maybe
- 3 - Not sure/Refused
- 4 - Probably not
- 5 - Definitely not/never again



**57. Did you have trouble reaching a Hotline worker?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Don't remember
- 3 - Yes °
- 4 - Not sure/refused

**IF YES, 58. What was the problem you had in reaching the Hotline worker (circle all that apply).**

- 1 - I got a busy signal or no answer °
- 2 - I had to wait on hold for a long time °
- 3 - I was told someone would call back, but there was a long delay °
- 4 - I don't have a phone
- 5 - Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**59. How many times did you call before getting through? \_\_\_\_\_**

**60. About how long? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes**

**61. About how long? \_\_\_\_\_ hours or \_\_\_\_\_ days**

**62. What could be done to make the Hotline better?**

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**50. Since you called the Hotline about this issue, have you had any other legal problems that are different than this issue we have been discussing?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes °
- 9 - Not sure/Refused

**IF YES, ASK: 51. In what area or areas? READ IF NEEDED**

- |                      |                                 |                          |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 - Consumer/finance | 5 - Housing                     | 9 - Criminal             |
| 2 - Employment       | 6 - Income Maintenance/Benefits | 10 - Immigration         |
| 3 - Family           | 7 - Individual Rights           | 11 - Being sued or suing |
| 4 - Health           | 8 - Juvenile                    | 12 - Other               |
|                      |                                 | 13 - Not sure/Refused    |

**Finally, I have just a couple of questions about you.**

**65. Do you have any children age 18 or younger?**

- 1 - No
- 2 - Yes °
- 3 - Refused

**IF YES, ASK: 66. What are their ages? 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_**

**67. Are you currently:**

- |   |                                       |             |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 - Married and living with your spouse | 4 - Unmarried, living with a partner  | 9 - Refused |
| 2 - Married, living apart (separated)   | 5 - Single, not living with a partner |             |
| 3 - Divorced                            | 6 - Widowed                           |             |

**68. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- |                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 - Up to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade | 4 - Some college      |
| 2 - Completed grades 9-11       | 5 - Completed college |
| 3 - Completed high school       | 9 - Refused           |

**These last questions just require a "Yes" or "No" answer.**

**69. Do you or any member of your household have a disability or serious health problem?**

- |        |         |                      |
|--------|---------|----------------------|
| 1 - No | 2 - Yes | 9 - Not sure/Refused |
|--------|---------|----------------------|

**70. Do you have problems with transportation, like not having a car, having a car that breaks down a lot or having limited bus service?**

- |        |         |                      |
|--------|---------|----------------------|
| 1 - No | 2 - Yes | 9 - Not sure/Refused |
|--------|---------|----------------------|

**71. Do you have problems reading or speaking English that make it hard for you to fill out forms or do paperwork?**

- |        |         |                      |
|--------|---------|----------------------|
| 1 - No | 2 - Yes | 9 - Not sure/Refused |
|--------|---------|----------------------|

**72. Did your work, school or daycare schedule make it hard for you to handle the legal problem you had? (Things like not being able to take time off or not having day care?)**

1 - No

2 - Yes

9 - Not sure/Refused

**73. Did other things make it hard for you to handle your legal problem, like feeling stressed, nervous or depressed; or worrying about getting into trouble; or being afraid of an ex-partner or current partner or household member?**

1 - No

2 - Yes

9 - Not sure/Refused

**That's all of my questions. Thank you very much for your help.**

**9415 LEGAL HOTLINES.  
SCRIPT FOR BACK-UP CONTACT. CAN BE REVISED IF NEEDED.**

Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_. May I speak to (Back-up contact name). I'm calling on behalf of  
[DETROIT: The Legal Aid Help Line; CHICAGO: C.A.R.P.L.S. - Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services;  
ARKASAS: Legal Aid Help Line; CALIF: The Legal Aid Help Line; SEATTLE: C.L.E.A.R. - Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral]

We spoke with (client name) about three months ago regarding a survey we are conducting and he/she gave us your name as a back-up contact to use if we could not reach him/her again.

We have not been able to reach him/her at the phone numbers they had 3 months ago. Would you have a current phone number we might be able to reach him/her at? He/she did agree to this recontact.

- 1 - New info/phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 - Refused/hesitant - try to leave 800# and key #
- 3 - Refused hard - will not help

I understand that you (might be hesitant about giving out phone numbers/might not have that number handy). Could I give you our 800# where they could call us to verify the study and conduct the interview? Our number is 1-800-772-9287. Please ask them to use their name and this key number \_\_\_\_ when the call in.

Thank you very much. We really appreciate your help.

# **Appendix C:**

## **Legal Review Code Sheet**

**A. Case Handler Category**

1. Paralegal with less than 2 years legal services experience
2. Paralegal with more than 2 years legal services experience
3. Attorney with less than 2 years legal services experience
4. Attorney with more than 2 years legal services experience
5. Law student
6. Volunteer attorney
7. Hotline supervisor consulted or took over
9. Missing, don't know

**B. Does CASE RECORD indicate that client has:**

1. Disability
2. Mental illness
3. Illiteracy
4. Limited English comprehension
5. Difficulty in comprehension
6. Reviewer perceives that client may be difficult
9. Missing, don't know

**C. Hotline Actions—identify principal categories (OK to check more than one)**

100. Provided legal information/assessment only
  110. Information only; explained rights and responsibilities, legal options, and possible outcomes
  120. Case not ripe – told client to call back if situation changed
200. Provided advice about how to handle problem on own
  210. Advice on dealing with a landlord, creditor, ex-spouse or partner, or other private party
    211. How to take affirmative steps – make complaint, write letter
    212. How to respond to action by other party – negotiate bill, rent increase
  220. Advice about representing self with a government agency
    221. How to apply for benefits or fill out a form
    222. How to negotiate with agency personnel
    223. How to obtain information/records from agency
    224. How to request a hearing/represent self at hearing
    225. How to appeal a hearing decision
  230. Advice about representing self in court procedure
    231. How to initiate a court action pro se
    232. How to respond to or proceed with a court action pro se

300. Referred after assessment
  310. Referred client to a social service agency or other non-legal source of assistance
  311. Referred client to another in-state legal services provider or legal clinic
  312. Referred client to out-of-state legal services provider
  313. Referred client to family law facilitator or other court-based support for pro se litigants
  314. Referred client to legal clinic or pro bono program providing support for people representing themselves
  315. VOID
  316. Referred client to gov't agency to file complaint or request investigation
  317. Arranged for representation (by program, another legal services provider, pro bono attorney)
  318. Advised client to hire a private attorney—no specifics
  319. Advised client to hire a private attorney—given names, lawyer locator number or other contact info.
400. Provided brief service
  410. Filled out form for client/helped client fill out form/reviewed paperwork
  411. Wrote letter for client
  412. Negotiated on behalf of client with third party
  413. Obtained information for client from third party
  414. Other brief service
500. Written information/web site
  510. Sent pamphlet or similar generic written information
  511. Sent letter summarizing specific advice provided during call
  512. Referred to web site

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**D. Outcome: Can the outcome of the problem be determined on the basis of the interview?**

10. YES, Consumer
  11. Stopped debt collection harassment, avoided garnishment or repossession or otherwise resolved situation w/o bankruptcy, including entering into repayment plan
  12. Got no relief from debt collection harassment, garnishment or repossession
  13. Obtained federal bankruptcy protections
  14. Did not obtain federal bankruptcy protections
  15. Other consumer: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted
  16. Other consumer: client did not obtain what s/he wanted
20. YES, Family
  21. Obtained, maintained, or improved custody/paternity/support
  22. Lost custody or failed to obtain or improve custody/paternity/support
  23. Obtained divorce
  24. Failed to obtain divorce
  25. Other family: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted
  26. Other family: client did not obtain what s/he wanted
30. YES, Housing
  31. Not evicted/foreclosed
  32. Evicted/foreclosed but obtained additional time to move
  33. Evicted/foreclosed with no additional time to move
  34. Did not pay all or part of rent increase or other charges/got security deposit
  35. Had to pay all of rent increase or other charges/did not recover security deposit
  36. Obtained repairs or improvements
  37. Did not obtain repairs/improvements
  38. Other housing: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted
  39. Other housing: client did not obtain what s/he wanted

40. YES, Income Maintenance
  41. Obtained or retained benefits
  42. Did not obtain/retain benefits
  43. Other income maintenance: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted
  44. Other income maintenance: client did not obtain what s/he wanted
50. YES, Other
  51. Client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted
  52. Client did not obtain what s/he wanted
60. NO (See Assessment below, Part E)
  61. Client needed information only
  62. Client has not acted on advice or information from Hotline
70. NO (No Part E Assessment)
  71. Insufficient information in interview notes
  72. Outcome that client reports not consistent with problem described in case notes
  73. Circumstances changed and advice/service no longer relevant
  74. Client reports case is resolved but whether it is actually resolved or what the specific outcome is cannot be determined
  75. Client has a complex of problems and the problem she called about cannot be singled out as resolved
  76. Client proceeding pro se; assisted by Part C program
  77. Client proceeding pro se; no known assistance
  78. Case pending with government agency (Part C #316)
  79. Client obtained private attorney; case pending
  80. Other pending

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**E. Assessment**

10. FAVORABLE, because:
    11. Client needed information only; got appropriate information
    12. Client made reasonably appropriate decision not to act on Hotline advice
    13. Client resolved situation to her complete satisfaction. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts
    14. Client resolved situation to her satisfaction, although she did not get everything she wanted when she called the Hotline. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts
  20. UNFAVORABLE, because:
    21. Client resolved situation to her satisfaction. Legal review indicates resolution was not appropriate based on facts/client should have been able to get a better result
    22. Client did not understand advice/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/mistakenly expected callback
    23. Client chose not to follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.
    24. Client did not prevail; result may not have been appropriate based on facts
  25. Client was advised to retain a private attorney but reports he/she could not afford or find one
  26. Hotline did not operate as it should
    - 26.1 Client did not receive written information
    - 26.2 Prejudicial delay/failure to return call
    - 26.3 Inappropriate interaction with client (judgmental, bad advice, hostile, etc.)
  27. Other unfavorable
  30. MISCELLANEOUS, because:
    31. Client did not prevail; result seems appropriate; case had little likelihood of success
    32. Client resolved situation to her satisfaction, but insufficient information to assess whether result was appropriate
    33. Client got private attorney
    34. Problem resolved but does not appear that Hotline advice played a role
    35. Insufficient information to assess outcome/neither favorable nor unfavorable
-

# **Appendix D:**

## **Report of the PFEJ Lawyers**

## **Report of the PFEJ Lawyers** *By Robert Echols<sup>1</sup> and Julia Gordon<sup>2</sup>*

We served as the Project for the Future of Equal Justice (PFEJ) lawyers who assessed and categorized the outcome of some 2000 cases from five different Hotlines as part of this Study. We also served as advisors to the Center for Policy Research (CPR) and as liaisons between CPR and the Study's Advisory Committee and between CPR and the five participating Hotlines. This report describes the Legal Review phase of the Study, as well as some of the insights we gained relating to Hotline outcomes assessment through our involvement in the Study.

### **Design of the Legal Review Process**

From the start of the Study, the Advisory Committee planned to have a review of individual cases by attorneys with legal services experience. The Advisory Committee felt that for the Study to have credibility within the legal services community, it was important that every case be assessed by an experienced attorney familiar with poverty law issues. We designed the legal review process in conjunction with CPR to ensure our ability to provide this type of review.

Initially, we thought that defining case outcomes would be relatively simple. We identified the major case types (using LSC's CSR categories) and the main outcome possibilities for each type. For example, for evictions, the outcomes we listed were: client was not evicted; client moved but obtained additional time; client was evicted without additional time. We assumed that the majority of case outcomes would fall into one of these relatively simple categories. We also thought that the interviewers would be able to identify these outcomes relatively easily and that the function of the legal review would primarily be to ensure that the identification was correct from a legal perspective.

However, the pre-test of this phase of the Study made it clear to us that for many cases, probably a majority, the outcome would not fit into one of these categories and that a broader range of ways to categorize the outcome of cases was needed. We also found that we frequently disagreed with the interviewer's identification of the legal outcome. Consequently, we came to believe that the legal review should be the primary method of assessing the outcome of the case, rather than simply a check for accuracy.

On the basis of our experience in the legal review phase of the pre-test and our initial examination of selected cases from the full study, we devised a two-tier outcome definition process. The first level of analysis was essentially factual, intended to provide an answer to the question, "What happened with respect to the client's legal problem?" In the second level of analysis, we assessed the outcome from the perspective of the Hotline's services: "Was the client able to obtain what s/he wanted when s/he called the Hotline, and was it obtained as a result of calling the Hotline?" For unsuccessful cases, we also sought to understand what had gone wrong.

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<sup>2</sup> Julia Gordon is Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Law and Social Policy. She can be reached at [jgordon@clasp.org](mailto:jgordon@clasp.org).



## **Factual Outcome (Legal Review Form, Part D)**

For the first level of analysis, we used the specific outcomes for various case types, discussed above. We also used general categories of “Client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted” or “client did not obtain what s/he wanted” to cover cases that did not fall into the main categories. The categories were:

- **Consumer**
  - *Stopped debt collection harassment, avoided garnishment or repossession or otherwise resolved situation without bankruptcy, including entering into reasonable repayment plan*
  - *Got no relief from debt collection harassment, garnishment or repossession*
  - *Obtained federal bankruptcy protections*
  - *Did not obtain federal bankruptcy protections*
  - *Other consumer: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted*
  - *Other consumer: client did not obtain what s/he wanted*
- **Family**
  - *Obtained, maintained, or improved custody/paternity/support*
  - *Lost custody or failed to obtain or improve custody/paternity/support*
  - *Obtained divorce*
  - *Failed to obtain divorce*
  - *Other family: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted*
  - *Other family: client did not obtain what s/he wanted*
- **Housing**
  - *Not evicted/foreclosed*
  - *Evicted/foreclosed but obtained additional time to move*
  - *Evicted/foreclosed with no additional time to move*
  - *Did not have to pay all or part of rent increase or other charges/recovered security deposition*
  - *Had to pay all of rent increase or other charges/did not recover security deposit*
  - *Obtained repairs or improvements*
  - *Did not obtain repairs/ improvements*
  - *Other housing: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted*
  - *Other housing: client did not obtain what s/he wanted*
  - *Income Maintenance*
  - *Obtained or retained benefits*
  - *Did not obtain/retain benefits*
  - *Other income maintenance: client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted*
  - *Other income maintenance: client did not obtain what s/he wanted*
- **Other**
  - *Client obtained most/all of what s/he wanted*
  - *Client did not obtain what s/he wanted*

We also created a set of categories for those cases in which no outcome could be determined. Several of these related to insufficiencies or problems in the information obtained in the client interview:<sup>3</sup>

- Insufficient information in interview notes
- Outcome that client reports not consistent with problem described in case notes
- Client reports case is resolved but whether it is actually resolved or what the specific outcome is cannot be determined<sup>4</sup>

These cases had to be excluded from the Study's analysis. Another category of cases that we excluded was the following:

- Circumstances changed and advice/service no longer relevant

Many cases were still pending at the time of the interview. In order to gain a more complete picture of what was happening with these cases, we broke them down into several subcategories:

- Pending; client proceeding pro se; assisted by part C program<sup>5</sup>
- Pending; client proceeding pro se; no known assistance
- Case pending with government agency (Part C # 316)
- Client obtained private attorney; case pending
- Other pending

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<sup>3</sup> While interviews were conducted by a leading professional interview firm, based on a written protocol, the interviewers were working from a very brief description of the problem the client had called about. We found that in many cases they did not have sufficient information or legal background to ask the type of targeted follow-up questions that would have provided the answers necessary to determine the outcome. In order to ask these kinds of questions, the interviewer would have to have the capacity to read and understand the case record (often difficult to interpret) and have a better understanding of the issues and processes involved in various types of legal cases.

<sup>4</sup> We also created a related category, "Client has a complex of problems and the problem she called about cannot be singled out as resolved." However, we ended up putting so few cases in this category that we did not use it in the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> In the Pre-Test of this phase of the Study, which involved two hotlines in states with extensive support systems for self-represented litigants, we considered family law cases in this subcategory to be "favorable," in the sense that the client had successfully obtained access to the justice system and connected with a system that would provide support during the process. (See Pre-test Report.) While that categorization seemed reasonable to us under those circumstances, we would not do so in the complete Study, in which the majority of the sites had no system of support for self-represented litigants. In any case, we have not included any of the pending cases in the second, assessment level (Part E).

We also identified a group of cases in which the client had wanted or needed information only, as compared to advice about how to address a legal problem. For these cases, the provision of the service itself could be considered the outcome — that is, the client received the information s/he needed.

- Client needed information only

Finally, we identified those cases in which the client had as yet taken no action. As is discussed in the body of the Study, this number was strikingly large.

- Client has not acted on advice or information from Hotline

### **Outcome Assessment (Legal Review Form, Part E)**

The second level of outcomes categorization involved a more subjective assessment on our part. We looked beyond the question of “What happened?” to explore a variety of issues relating to whether or not the client had been able to obtain what s/he had wanted *as a result of* calling the Hotline.

We excluded from this phase of analysis those cases in which we could not determine the factual outcome under Part D because of either insufficient information or the fact that the case was still pending. We included all those cases in which we had identified a factual outcome. We also included those cases in which the client had needed information only and those in which the client had not acted. For the “information only” cases, we sought to determine whether the client had correctly understood the information provided. For the cases in which the client had not acted, we tried to determine why not, and to categorize the reason accordingly.

In assessing these cases, we used three major categories: Favorable, Unfavorable, and Miscellaneous.

#### ***FAVORABLE CASES***

We assessed as having a favorable outcome those cases in which the client had obtained in whole or in part what s/he had wanted when s/he contacted the Hotline and the resolution appeared to be appropriate based on the facts, and which were not included in one of the Miscellaneous categories above (i.e. the outcome had not been obtained through a private attorney, the outcome appeared to come about as a result of the contact with the Hotline, and there was sufficient information to assess the outcome). The categories we used were:

- ***Client resolved situation to her complete satisfaction. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts.***

*EXAMPLE: Client's license was suspended in 1997 after a 12/96 accident where she was issued a ticket. Client said she didn't appear for the court hearing because she didn't know about it (she was in an abusive relationship at the time and her boyfriend often intercepted her mail). She also did not realize there was a civil judgment against her. Client has a hearing tomorrow on a petition for a payment plan and wants to know if she can get her license back. Hotline advised her on procedures at the hearing and told her that once she gets the payment plan in place, she should be able to take the proof to the Secretary of State and get her license reinstated.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Client called Hotline about how to get back driver's license with a civil judgment in effect. Hotline told client to attend a hearing she had and ask judge to arrange payment plan to satisfy judgment. Client arranged payments. Payments current - license restored."*

- ***Client resolved situation to her satisfaction, although she did not get everything she wanted when she called the Hotline. Legal review indicates resolution was appropriate based on facts.***

*EXAMPLE: Client and her husband divorced for 10 years. Original parenting plan provided for joint custody, but client now in Washington, kids and ex in California. Client has been diagnosed with schizo-depression disorder, on medication and SSD. E-husband is not letting her contact the children due to the disability diagnosis. Client doesn't want custody, just visiting rights. Hotline advised client that since the original custody order was in CA and children have been living in CA for over 6 months, she will need to file actions there. Hotline advised she could also write a letter demanding contact with her children. Hotline gave her CA referral numbers.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Client called Hotline because she wanted contact and visitation with children. Hotline told client to call Legal Aid in California -- out of WA jurisdiction. Hotline also suggested client write a demand letter to the father. Client didn't call California Legal Aid, but did write a letter to the father. Client worked out a contact agreement with the father but still hasn't seen them. Client hopes to work out agreement with father to actually see her children."*

We also assessed as favorable those cases in which the client had needed information only and it appeared that s/he had received appropriate information and had understood it. We based our decision on whether the client had understood the information on the way that the client described the information in the interview. Cases in which we were not sure that the client had understood the information were assessed as miscellaneous. Cases in which the client described the information inaccurately were assessed as unfavorable.

- ***Hotline needed information only; got appropriate information.***

*EXAMPLE: Client is married but separated. She is supporting two children from a prior marriage as well as a grandson. She called the Hotline to find out if she could compel financial support from her husband. She did not want a divorce and neither did he. The Hotline told her that since the children were not her husband's and he had not adopted them, he had no obligation to support them. The Hotline also gave her a callback number in case she changed her mind about pursuing a divorce.*

*Client Outcome Narrative: "Client called the Hotline because she wanted to know if she could get support from her husband (they are separated). Hotline told client no, there is no way to get support. Client left it at that, has no further plans. Understood Hotline -- they were loud and clear."*

Finally, we assessed as favorable some cases in which the client had received advice from the Hotline about how to proceed and, having received that advice, decided on another course of action, including doing nothing. We included in this category only those cases in which the client appeared to have made an informed decision and the decision appeared reasonable to us under the circumstances. We categorized such cases as:

- ***Client made reasonably appropriate decision not to act on Hotline advice.***

*EXAMPLE: Prior to her mother's death, client's name was added to deed for property that her mother owned in Florida. Client now wants to add names of siblings to deed. Hotline advised her on general procedures and consequences of adding someone's name to a deed, but told her she would need to contact someone in Florida for specific Florida rules. Gave her number for Florida Bar Association for referral.*

*Client outcome narrative: "I called the Hotline to find out how to add a person to a deed. Hotline explained implications of action so I decided not to add anybody to deed."*

## **UNFAVORABLE CASES**

We assessed as unfavorable those cases in which the client acted and did not prevail, unless we felt that the client had been unlikely to succeed from the beginning, even if s/he had obtained representation:

- ***Client did not prevail; result may not have been appropriate based on facts.***

*EXAMPLE: Client has been living with a man for 14 years. He has been abusive on and off during that time. She says they have two condos attached by a stairway. There is a door that can be locked but they never lock it. They have broken up and he is threatening her. The Hotline advised the client to lock the door between the condos and to go the courthouse to get an order of protection.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Client contacted Hotline because client was scared of boyfriend. Might become abusive. Hotline advised client to get order of protection. Client tried to get order but judge refused to give order of protection. Client says she moved out with child for her and her child's safety."*

We also assessed as unfavorable two categories of cases in which the client had taken no action. These cases were distinguished from those in which the client had made a reasonably appropriate decision not to act, or in which the client's decision could otherwise be seen as reasonable (for example, there was no urgent need to act, and the client simply decided to defer action). The unfavorable categories were:

- ***Client did not understand advice/was not able to follow advice due to complexity/mistakenly expected callback.***

*EXAMPLE: Client has custody of son from divorce and called the Hotline to find out what would happen to him if she dies before he turns 18. Client wants to have one of her siblings raise her son but hasn't decided which one. Hotline advised her to draft a will giving guardianship to whichever sibling she decided on. Hotline told her the court would give weight to her wishes and also to her son's wishes, but that the father would be entitled to notice of the proceedings and to participate if he wished. The Hotline advised the client that the legal aid program could assist her in drafting a will once she decided what to do.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Called Hotline to find out how to establish guardianship of son if client dies. The law keeps you tied to my ex and that's not good for me or my son. My situation remains somewhat unsolved because I must go by the law. Hotline told me that my ex-husband can still claim my son, because his is my son's father!"*

- ***Client chose not to follow advice due to fear, discouragement, lack of time or initiative, etc.***

*EXAMPLE: Client has not filed income taxes in 12 years because he has had child support arrearages and his past tax refunds were intercepted. Client is now trying to get things in order and wants to clear up tax files. The Hotline advised him how to file his returns and also how to file a motion to reduce his child support arrearages.*

*Client outcome narrative: “Client contacted Hotline about how to deal with tax filing and how to reduce child support. The Hotline told client to file back taxes. Client hasn’t gotten around to this yet. Just lazy. Hotline told client to file motion regarding child support issues. Client hasn’t done this. Too busy! Plans to get around to it soon.”*

We also categorized as unfavorable those cases in which the Hotline had advised the client to obtain a private attorney and the client reported that s/he was either not able to afford one or had been unable to find one to take the case.

- ***Client was advised to retain a private attorney but reports he/she could not afford or find one.***

Finally, we created an “other unfavorable” category.<sup>6</sup>

### ***MISCELLANEOUS***

Broadly speaking, the Miscellaneous categories represented those cases which could not be assessed as either favorable or unfavorable. Separating them out permitted us to focus more closely on those in which the outcome had been distinctly favorable or unfavorable in relation to the Hotline service.

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<sup>6</sup> We originally created several other unfavorable categories, all of which had very low numbers and were eventually subsumed into the “Other unfavorable” category: these were Hotline did not operate as it should (Client did not receive written information; Prejudicial delay/failure to return call; Inappropriate interaction with client [judgmental, bad advice, hostile, etc.]; Client resolved situation to her satisfaction-Legal review indicates resolution was not appropriate based on facts-client should have been able to get a better result.

We separated out two categories of cases in which it appeared that the outcome did not come about as a result of the client's contact with the Hotline:

- ***Client got private attorney.***
- ***Problem resolved but does not appear that Hotline advice played a role.***

*EXAMPLE: Client called the Hotline to file for bankruptcy due to concerns about debt and the possibility of wage garnishment. Client is not currently working. The Hotline advised client that she was judgment proof unless she started working again. The Hotline further explained bankruptcy procedure and the pros and cons.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Client called Hotline because she wanted to file for bankruptcy. Hotline told client she shouldn't because she was collection proof. 'My girlfriend told me to how to handle the situation. I used a friend of hers for help and everything is fine now.' She applied for bankruptcy and obtained protection."*

*We also separated out those cases that had little merit or likelihood of success from the beginning. We felt that these cases should not be characterized as unfavorable in relation to the Hotline service, despite the outcome.*

- ***Client did not prevail; result seems appropriate; case had little likelihood of success.***

*EXAMPLE: Client was living in CHA housing and was arrested carrying a gun in the lobby. Criminal charges and eviction case are pending. The Hotline told him there was no referral available since he was carrying a gun. The Hotline advised him to be silent at the hearing and make the other side prove their case, and then to ask the judge for as much time to leave as possible.*

*Client outcome narrative: "Client called because he was arrested in CHA housing for carrying a gun and was getting evicted. Hotline told him there was nothing he could do. Client got evicted with no additional time -- client doesn't want to pursue this case -- he was carrying a gun."*

Finally, we separated out those cases in which we could not characterize the outcome as either favorable or unfavorable, either because of lack of information or for some other reason. These were cases in which the factual outcome was known, but it was not possible to assess the outcome as either favorable or unfavorable.

- ***Insufficient information to assess outcome/neither favorable nor unfavorable.***<sup>7</sup>

## **Other Information Collected as Part of Legal Review**

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<sup>7</sup> We originally created another related category, "Client resolved situation to her satisfaction, but insufficient information to assess whether result was appropriate." However, there were so few cases in this category that we combined these into the broader category of "Insufficient information to assess outcome/neither favorable nor unfavorable."



During the legal review process we also collected some additional information that required review of the case file. This included identifying the case handler as an attorney or paralegal and the level of experience (Part A). (This determination was in essence a clerical task, but it was included as part of the legal review since the information was contained in the case record, which had to be reviewed as part of the legal review process. We had originally hoped to correlate this information with case outcomes; however, for reasons discussed in the Report at p. 41, footnote 8, this was not possible.)

We also noted whether the case record contained indications of factors that might make it difficult for the client to follow advice (disability; mental illness, illiteracy; limited English comprehension) or whether we perceived upon reading the file that the client was difficult (Part B) although this type of information was rarely available in the case record (see p. 24, footnote 6). Finally, we identified the various types of services provided by the Hotline, based on the case record (Part C). This category of information is discussed below.

### **Comparison of Our Identification of Hotline Service to Client Identification**

In the interview, clients were asked whether they had received particular types of services, and if so, whether they had done what the Hotline suggested, how helpful it was, and if not, why not. The question was not an open-ended question, but was a series of fixed-choice questions asked in the same order for all the interviews. As shown in table VI-5, the overlap between the services identified by the client and those that we identified in the legal review phase as described in the case record was very low for almost all categories.

The first question that clients were asked was, “Did the Hotline worker explain the law regarding your problem?” We noted that many clients answered “yes” to that question and “no” to all the other categories on the list. Some clients answered "no" in response to a service that they themselves described in a later open-ended question, "what happened in your case?" Some clients denied having been told “how to represent yourself in court, or how to file, or respond to a legal action,” yet went on in the subsequent open-ended question to describe being told how to represent themselves in court and in some cases doing so.

The clients clearly had trouble selecting a relatively precise description of the services they received from a list of 12 possible services presented to them. The fact that so many clients answered “yes” to the first question and “no” to all the rest suggests that they may have felt the general response was sufficient. Client difficulties were undoubtedly compounded by the fact that three to six months had passed since the services were provided and that many clients had dealt with other agencies and legal providers in the course of attempting to resolve their problems.

The limitations on the clients’ capacity to identify in detail the services provided to them resulted in a potential methodological problem, since only those clients who identified a particular service were asked whether they had followed up and whether it was helpful. Client who received the same service but did not identify it were not asked the follow-up questions.

Fortunately, we asked several other questions that explored the clients' general perception of the helpfulness of the Hotline and were able to use these items in the analysis. (See Report, Chapter VI, Tables VI-1 and VI-2.)

### **Problems with Cooperation and Buy-In from Hotline Staff**

Although we had full cooperation from the management of the participating Hotlines, we found that we had difficulty in getting the Hotline workers to collect all the information we needed. Initially, some workers either failed to ask many of their clients for consent to participate in the study, or had a very high refusal rate. Since certain workers had far higher refusal rates than others, and since all workers were using the same text for the request, it seemed clear that there was a problem with the way they were presenting the request. Supervisors were eventually able to get this problem under control.

A more serious problem was the continuing failure of workers to collect secondary contact information from clients (i.e. the phone number of someone who would always know where to reach them), despite our repeated emphasis on the importance of this information. In most of the programs, a very small percentage of the cases in the sample have secondary contact information. Many hotline workers seemed so convinced that their clients would not have secondary contact information that they thought it would be offensive to ask them. Others perhaps might have thought that certain clients should not be tracked down. At one hotline, the hotline manager suggested that the resistance might be because the hotline workers there were lawyers who ran their own practice part time, and that they might see this effort as trying to tell them how to interact with their own clients. As discussed in the text (see pp. 7 and 38), the failure to obtain secondary contact information may have compromised the value of the outcomes assessment, particularly in housing cases.

These problems suggest to us that it is important to have staff understand the purposes of the evaluation (the most important of which is to serve clients better) so that cooperation and buy-in would be easier to achieve. In this case, staff seemed to perceive the study as something irrelevant to their jobs and their clients.

### **Quality of Hotline Services**

The Study was not designed to assess the quality of Hotline services. However, in the course of our review, we did identify some cases in which it was clear from the case record that there had been a problem with the Hotline's interaction with the client. In a few cases, the Hotline did not follow through with the client as promised or did not do so in a timely fashion. In others, it was clear based on the case record that the Hotline worker had either provided bad or incorrect advice or had otherwise dealt with the client inappropriately. Because the number of cases that we identified in these categories was very small, these cases were not considered in the body of the report.

In a larger number of cases (still relatively small, however), clients themselves identified a problem of this nature. (See Chapter VI, p.56.) For example, about two percent of all clients made a comment indicating that the hotline worker did not seem to care about their problem or treated them rudely. While not all these clients may have been justified in their feelings, we think that it is important that hotline managers take this finding seriously as a supervision and training issue. Manager should also be aware that problems of this type will not necessarily be apparent in the case record.

### **Utility of Follow-Up Interviews as an Evaluation and Supervision Tool**

We found that reviewing these 2000 cases gave us extremely valuable insights into how Hotlines actually work for clients, as well as into recurring or shared problems in each of the Hotline service areas, and we are confident that the 400 case interviews we will return to each of the five participating Hotlines will provide similar insights to those Hotlines' managers.

Furthermore, we believe the Study demonstrates the effectiveness of random client surveys as a technique that provides more accurate information about client attitudes than client satisfaction surveys and more complete data about outcomes than models that are currently used by some programs. We think this type of outcome survey is a technique that should be used broadly in the legal services community for program and delivery model evaluation and assessment. This Study will provide baselines against which programs can measure their own outcomes. Even more valuable, however, Hotlines who engage in this type of study will be hearing in the clients' own voices what actually happened to them after they contacted the Hotline and what role the Hotline played in helping them address their problem.

### **Report Recommendations**

We strongly concur with the recommendations made in Chapter VII. We understand that Hotlines are working under great pressure and have limited resources and limited capacity to respond to clients. Nevertheless, we think that Hotlines would do well to adopt these recommendations and thereby provide more useful services to those clients that they serve, even if it means that they are able to serve fewer clients.