



January 31, 2026

TO: The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety
Mark White, Fiscal Research Division
Bhairavi Jayaraman, Fiscal Research Division
Meredith Randolph, Fiscal Research Division
Morgan Weiss, Fiscal Research Division

FROM: Leigh Wicclair
Executive Director, NC LEAF

Subject: Annual Report 2024-25

NC LEAF provides loan repayment assistance to public interest attorneys, helping government agencies and legal service organizations recruit and retain qualified lawyers needed to carry out essential public functions across North Carolina.

High educational debt can make it difficult for attorneys to accept lower-paying positions, contributing to attorney shortages—especially in rural areas. NC LEAF helps ensure that educational loans do not prevent attorneys from serving where they are most needed.

Per S.L. 2023-134 NC LEAF is required to report as follows:

REPORTING REQUIREMENT FOR THE NC LEGAL EDUCATION ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION (NC LEAF)

SECTION 16.9.(a) No later than February 1, 2025, and February 1, 2026, the NC Legal Education Assistance Foundation (NC LEAF) shall report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, at a minimum, all of the following:

- (1) An accounting of all loan repayment assistance funds distributed during the prior year.*
- (2) The number of individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year.*
- (3) The job titles and salaries of the individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year.*

Please find the report on the following pages, covering July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025. Thank you for this opportunity to report on the tangible outcomes made possible by the state of North Carolina. As you review the report, we hope it demonstrates not only the value of the state's continued investment but also our commitment to maximizing every dollar in service of the people of our great state.

Should you have any additional questions, please reach out to me at lwicclair@ncleaf.org.



An accounting of all loan repayment assistance funds distributed during the prior year.	\$137,015.00
The number of individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year.	88 Individuals
The job titles and salaries of the individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year.	See Appendix A

How Funds Were Disbursed During the Prior Year:

NC LEAF distributed Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) funding quarterly for North Carolina lawyers in public service up to \$400 per month. NC LEAF does not reimburse for any payments above the amount required by the participant’s loan repayment plan. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, NC LEAF reimbursed participants for the loan payments that they made to their lenders from April 2024- March 2025.

How Federal Forbearance Impacted NC LEAF Participants:

Covid-related federal forbearance expired in the fall of 2023. After a brief partial reinstatement in early 2024, many borrowers were placed back into involuntary forbearance by summer 2024 due to litigation blocking the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Repayment Plan and thus funds were not distributed to them for the remainder of 2024 and 2025. On December 9, 2025, the Department of Education announced that a settlement related to the SAVE plan litigation is pending court approval and that borrowers enrolled in SAVE “will have a limited time to select a new, legal repayment plan and begin repaying their student loans.” In addition, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act phases out most existing income-driven repayment plans by July 1, 2028 (and possibly sooner) and creates the Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP), to be available by mid-2026.

Due to these extended periods of forbearance, many NC LEAF participants did not have loan payments due, and as a result, funds were not distributed to them. These unused funds remain fully allocated to support our participants who continue to meet eligibility requirements in the coming year. Prior to 2020, NC LEAF’s participants’ payments averaged \$3,600 per year. Once the forbearance period ends, NC LEAF will pay up to \$4,800 per year per participant in loan repayment assistance. NC LEAF anticipates that loan repayment assistance will increase to pre-2020 levels during the second half of 2026.

Our Participants:

Participants in NC LEAF must be full-time attorneys working in one of the following: (1) a government agency or nonprofit legal organization benefiting North Carolinians or (2) Private Assigned Counsel (PAC) who billed at least 1,456 hours in the prior fiscal year. These funds are



not used to provide assistance to attorneys working for Legal Aid of North Carolina, Inc.

Loan repayment assistance is awarded on a calendar-year basis, and participants are required to apply annually. In 2024, NC LEAF admitted 113 attorneys who work across eighty-seven counties and include:

- 50 assistant district attorneys,
- 24 assistant public defenders & 1 privately assigned counsel
- 22 clerks and other government sector attorneys
- 16 nonprofit attorneys

In 2025, NC LEAF admitted 106 attorneys who work across seventy counties and include:

- 45 assistant district attorneys
- 26 assistant public defenders & 1 privately assigned counsel
- 19 nonprofit attorneys
- 15 clerks and other government attorneys

NC LEAF participants protect public safety and help North Carolinians — including veterans, families, and disaster victims — navigate life’s toughest challenges. They are passionate about serving their communities, and we are passionate about providing them with the financial capacity to do so.

As one participant writes, “I’m deeply grateful for both the financial support and the clear, accessible guidance NC LEAF provides. My monthly payment recently jumped from \$67 to \$640, and without this program, I’d be left with just \$60 a month for food, gas, and basic necessities. Continuing a career in public interest law would simply be out of reach. This assistance is nothing short of a lifeline.”

NC LEAF is currently reviewing applications for 160 attorneys for the 2026 calendar year.

Job titles and salaries of the individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year:

The job titles and salaries in the attached appendix were collected as part of NC LEAF’s annual, calendar-year application process.



January 31, 2026
 NC LEAF Report
 Appendix A

Job Title	Agency/ Organization	Salary
Agency Legal Consultant II	NC Industrial Commission	\$ 74,387.00
Associate Legal Counsel II	NC Real Estate Commission	\$ 88,000.00
Asst. Appellate Defender	NC Office of the Appellate Defender	\$ 81,712.00
Asst. Attorney General	NC Department of Justice	\$ 73,000.00
Asst. Attorney General	NC Department of Justice	\$ 87,268.00
Asst. Clerk of Court	Dare County	\$ 74,792.00
Asst. District Attorney	Anson, Richmond, and Scotland Counties	\$ 55,461.00
Asst. District Attorney	Vance County	\$ 59,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	\$ 60,074.00
Asst. District Attorney	Halifax County	\$ 62,607.00
Asst. District Attorney	Forsyth County	\$ 65,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	New Hanover County	\$ 65,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Sampson County	\$ 66,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Union County	\$ 66,720.00
Asst. District Attorney	Burke County	\$ 69,890.00
Asst. District Attorney	Catawba County	\$ 70,610.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wayne County	\$ 72,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Rockingham County	\$ 72,100.00
Asst. District Attorney	Lee County	\$ 72,806.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	\$ 73,480.00
Asst. District Attorney	Harnett County	\$ 73,892.00



Asst. District Attorney	Randolph County	\$ 76,357.00
Asst. District Attorney	Stokes County	\$ 76,920.00
Asst. District Attorney	Franklin County	\$ 77,038.00
Asst. District Attorney	Bladen County	\$ 80,958.00
Asst. District Attorney	Hoke County	\$ 82,400.00
Asst. District Attorney	Guilford County	\$ 83,269.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg	\$ 84,600.00
Asst. District Attorney	Edgecombe County	\$ 85,164.00
Asst. District Attorney	Richmond County	\$ 85,480.00
Asst. District Attorney	Vance County	\$ 87,635.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	\$ 88,716.00
Asst. District Attorney	Cumberland County	\$ 90,731.00
Asst. District Attorney	Durham County	\$ 92,700.00
Asst. District Attorney	Davidson County	\$ 94,165.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	\$ 94,226.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wayne County	\$ 98,842.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	\$ 99,436.00
Asst. District Attorney	Moore and Hoke Counties	\$ 100,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Carteret County	\$ 110,912.00
Asst. Public Defender	Durham County	\$ 59,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	New Hanover County	\$ 62,400.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	\$ 63,240.00
Asst. Public Defender	Durham County	\$ 63,311.00
Asst. Public Defender	Robeson County	\$ 65,800.00
Asst. Public Defender	Wake County	\$ 66,278.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	\$ 67,573.00



Asst. Public Defender	Henderson County	\$ 77,437.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	\$ 77,578.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	\$ 79,539.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	\$ 80,134.00
Asst. Public Defender	Cumberland County	\$ 81,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Forsyth County	\$ 81,767.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	\$ 82,708.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	\$ 84,483.00
Asst. Public Defender	Robeson County	\$ 87,053.00
Asst. Public Defender	Bertie County	\$ 91,670.00
Asst. Public Defender	McDowell and Rutherford Counties	\$ 97,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	\$ 97,814.00
Attorney	Land Loss Prevention Project	\$ 61,000.00
Attorney	Disability Rights NC	\$ 76,800.00
Attorney	U.S. Navy	\$ 102,643.00
Attorney	U.S. EEOC	\$ 118,521.00
Attorney	Self-Employed	\$ 50,176.00
Attorney I	Buncombe County	\$ 100,776.00
Attorney III	NC Department of Justice	\$ 97,267.00
Deputy Counsel	NC State Bar	\$ 62,000.00
Deputy Counsel	NC State Bar	\$ 87,644.00
Deputy County Attorney	Henderson County	\$ 105,463.00
Managing Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	\$ 93,120.00
Resource Prosecutor	Conference of District Attorneys	\$ 85,000.00
Resource Prosecutor	Conference of District Attorneys	\$ 87,217.00
Staff Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	\$ 50,500.00



Staff Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	\$ 50,500.00
Staff Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	\$ 57,000.00
Staff Attorney	Disability Rights NC	\$ 69,600.00
Staff Attorney	NC Innocence Inquiry Commission	\$ 69,617.00
Staff Attorney	Center for Family Violence Prevention	\$ 72,064.00
Staff Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	\$ 75,617.00
Staff Attorney	ACLU	\$ 83,811.00
Staff Attorney	U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants	\$ 85,000.00
Staff Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	\$ 85,000.00
Staff Attorney	NC Innocence Inquiry Commission	\$ 87,010.00
Staff Attorney II	NC Innocence Inquiry Commission	\$ 80,375.00
Staff Attorney II	Supreme Court of NC	\$ 81,120.00
Supervising Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	\$ 66,000.00
Supervising Attorney	Disability Rights NC	\$ 81,200.00
Supervising Attorney	Disability Rights NC	\$ 82,800.00