



January 31, 2025

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

FROM: Leigh Wicclair  
Executive Director, NC LEAF

Subject: Annual Report 2023-24

Since 1990, NC LEAF has assisted many of the state's lowest paid but essential attorneys to repay their law school debt, helping government agencies and legal service organizations hire and retain talented, dedicated, and well-trained attorneys to provide critical legal help to the people of North Carolina.

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 first such report on the following pages, covering July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024. 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](mailto:lwicclair@ncleaf.org).

An accounting of all loan repayment assistance funds distributed during the prior year.	\$121,646.82
The number of individuals that received funds from the Foundation during the prior year.	106 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 recipient's loan repayment plan. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, NC LEAF reimbursed recipients for the loan payments that recipients made to their lenders from April 2023- March 2024.

### **How Federal Forbearance Impacted the Disbursement of State Funds:**

Covid-related federal forbearance expired in the fall of 2023. In the spring and summer of 2024, many NC LEAF recipients were placed back into involuntary forbearance by the Department of Education due to litigation blocking the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Repayment Plan. This period of forbearance is expected to end by September 2025, if the plan is not repealed sooner. In mid-January, borrowers in the SAVE plan were permitted to begin the process of changing to another repayment plan in order to avoid this continued forbearance and earn payment credits towards Public Service Loan Forgiveness. It will take an unknown amount of time for loan servicers to process these changes.

Due to these unusual extended periods of forbearance, some recipients who were admitted into NC LEAF did not have loan payments due for all or a significant portion of the year, and as a result, funds were not distributed to them. These unused funds remain fully allocated to support our recipients who continue to meet eligibility requirements in the coming year. NC LEAF's goal is to provide loan repayment assistance to each recipient for a minimum of three years, as long as the recipient remains eligible. To support this commitment, we strive to project budget forecasts at least three years into the future.

### **Our Recipients:**

NC LEAF recipients must be attorneys employed in full-time, law-related roles for public service employers benefiting North Carolinians. These include government agencies, organizations providing legal services to low-income North Carolinians, and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. These funds are not used to provide assistance to attorneys working for Legal Aid of North



Carolina, Inc.

Attorneys who spend at least 80% of their time on court-appointed representation and work full-time are also eligible for assistance. Court-appointed attorneys must certify that in the last fiscal year, they billed at least 1,456 hours of court appointed work.

Loan repayment assistance is awarded on a calendar-year basis, and applicants are required to apply annually. In 2023, NC LEAF admitted 136 attorneys into the program who work across eighty-three counties and include fifty-two district attorneys, twenty-eight public defenders, twenty-seven clerks and other government sector attorneys, twenty-seven nonprofit attorneys, and two attorneys doing primarily court-appointed work. In 2024, NC LEAF admitted 113 attorneys into the program who work in eighty-seven counties across the state and include fifty assistant district attorneys, twenty-four assistant public defenders, twenty-two clerks and other government sector attorneys, sixteen non-profit attorneys, and one court-appointed attorney. We are currently reviewing 161 applications for 2025.

NC LEAF recipients provided life-changing help that their clients would not otherwise have access to, including achieving justice for crime survivors, supporting children in abuse and neglect cases, restoring driver's licenses on behalf of low-income North Carolinians, and providing disaster recovery legal assistance to hurricane survivors.

NC LEAF recipients are passionate about serving their communities, and we are passionate about providing them with the financial capacity to do so.

### **What Our Partners Say:**

*At Campbell Law School, we take great pride in our unwavering commitment to cultivating the next generation of public interest attorneys. NC LEAF is an invaluable partner in making it possible for many of our graduates to pursue impactful careers serving the public good.*

-J. Rich Leonard, Dean of Campbell University Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law

*NC LEAF plays a crucial role in helping us recruit and retain talented assistant district attorneys who could pursue more lucrative careers in private practice. By easing the financial burden of law school debt, this program empowers dedicated individuals to choose public service, ensuring that our communities are protected by those committed to justice, not profit."*

-Kimberly Spahos, Director and Chief Resource Prosecutor, NC Conference of District Attorneys

### **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 and reflect the recipient's most recent information for fiscal year 2023-2024.

January 31, 2025  
NC LEAF Report  
Appendix A



Job Title	Agency/ Organization	Salary
Asst. District Attorney	12th Prosecutorial District	68,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	77,647.00
Staff Attorney	Center for Death Penalty Litigation	57,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	68,222.00
Direct Services Attorney	Center for Family Violence Prevention	73,840.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wayne County	72,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	84,767.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	66,320.00
Asst. District Attorney	Johnston County	82,000.00
Attorney III	Department of Transportation	97,267.00
Asst. District Attorney	12th Prosecutorial District	57,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Wake County	50,000.00
Associate Legal Counsel	NC Community College System	82,800.00
Asst. District Attorney	11th Prosecutorial District	66,741.22
Counsel	Forward Justice	75,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Cumberland County	77,000.00
IIC Staff Attorney	NC Judicial Branch	79,076.00
Staff Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	50,500.00
Staff Attorney	ACLU of NC	81,370.00
Asst. District Attorney	33rd Prosecutorial District	87,510.00
Attorney	Conference of District Attorneys	80,644.00
Asst. District Attorney	2nd Prosecutorial District	97,682.00
Asst. Public Defender	Durham County	53,556.00
Asst. Clerk of Court	Dare County	65,721.00
Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	72,200.16
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	71,000.00
Asst. Attorney General	NC Department of Justice	84,726.00
Attorney	NC Land Loss Prevention Project	61,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Randolph County	70,638.00
Attorney	Dept. of Navy	102,643.00
Asst. District Attorney	21st Prosecutorial District	70,638.00
Managing Attorney	Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy	63,063.12
Asst. Public Defender	Rutherford and McDowell Counties	97,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Mecklenburg County	61,026.00

Associate Legal Counsel II	NC Real Estate Commission	88,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	8th Prosecutorial District	72,800.00
Supervising Attorney	Disability Rights NC	74,500.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	77,022.00
Managing Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	93,120.00
Asst. District Attorney	15th Prosecutorial District	75,600.00
Asst. District Attorney	23rd Prosecutorial District	74,680.00
Asst. District Attorney	Durham County	61,727.00
Asst. District Attorney	15th Prosecutorial District	75,600.00
Asst. Public Defender	New Hanover County	62,400.00
Asst. District Attorney	29th Prosecutorial District	77,342.40
Executive Director	Combat Sexual Assault	30,000.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	77,578.00
Contract Development Specialist	NC Dept. of Health and Human Services	65,944.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County Public Defender	50,625.00
Asst. Public Defender	Henderson County	77,437.00
Agency Legal Consultant II	NC Dept. of Insurance	74,387.00
Attorney	Office of Special Counsel	76,172.00
Asst. District Attorney	1st Prosecutorial District	52,000.00
Staff Supervising Attorney	NC Prisoner Legal Services	66,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	11th Prosecutorial District	59,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Catawba County	70,610.04
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	71,231.09
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	88,716.00
Defense Attorney	US Navy	71,200.80
Staff Attorney	Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy	59,316.00
Asst. District Attorney	Guilford County	62,000.00
Deputy Counsel	NC State Bar	62,000.00
Trial Attorney	EEOC	95,844.00
Asst. District Attorney	21st Prosecutorial District	52,278.00
Attorney	Self-Employed	74,865.00
Staff Attorney	US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants	81,730.74
Asst. District Attorney	Durham County	65,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	29th Prosecutorial District	62,700.00
Associate Attorney	Self-Employed	50,176.30
Deputy Counsel	NC State Bar	87,644.00
Asst. District Attorney	29th Prosecutorial District	67,383.00
Asst. District Attorney	39th Prosecutorial District	93,418.00
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	75,299.00
Special Prosecutor	NC Dept of Insurance	78,298.00

Attorney	Self-Employed	79,000.00
Deputy County Attorney	Henderson County	102,388.00
Asst. Public Defender	Cumberland County	67,714.00
Staff Attorney	NC Innocence Commission	68,235.00
Asst. District Attorney	15th Prosecutorial District	84,000.00
Attorney I	Buncombe County	100,776.66
Attorney	Disability Rights NC	62,528.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	73,480.00
Asst. District Attorney	6th Prosecutorial District	57,976.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	68,041.00
Asst. District Attorney	Cumberland County	72,800.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	75,032.15
Asst. District Attorney	Wayne County	89,167.00
Asst. Public Defender	New Hanover County	71,760.00
Asst. Public Defender	Forsyth County	73,748.04
Asst. Public Defender	Pitt County	72,800.00
Asst. District Attorney	22nd Prosecutorial District	70,000.00
Staff Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services	79,200.00
Asst. District Attorney	11th Prosecutorial District	77,038.00
Asst. District Attorney	Mecklenburg County	47,500.00
Asst. Public Defender	Guilford County	58,573.00
Asst. Appellate Defender	Office of the Appellate Defender	65,697.00
Asst. Public Defender	Robeson County	60,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Cumberland County	74,235.00
Asst. District Attorney	8th Prosecutorial District	80,934.00
Asst. District Attorney	Durham County	80,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	Wake County	76,906.00
Asst. District Attorney	9th Prosecutorial District	53,818.00
Asst. District Attorney	Guilford County	62,000.00
Asst. District Attorney	2nd Prosecutorial District	76,152.00
Staff Attorney II	Supreme Court of NC	81,120.00
Asst. District Attorney	Cumberland County	53,000.00