

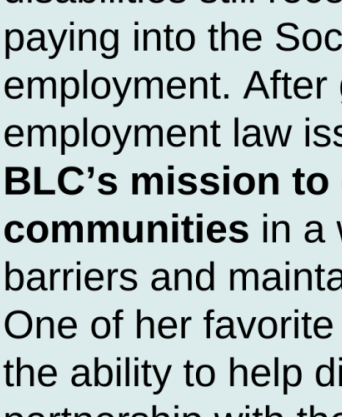
Season Greetings

“The holiday season is a perfect time to reflect on our gratitude and seek out ways to make life better for those around us.” –Anonymous

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Lexi Hanson

Lexi Hanson, Staff Attorney



In October, BLC welcomed our newest Staff Attorney, Lexi Hanson! A graduate of the University of Washington Bothell with a degree in Law, Economics, and Public Policy, she earned her law degree from Seattle University School of Law in 2025. Before joining BLC, Lexi worked with the Washington State Attorney General's Office and externed for the Honorable Judge Jamal Whitehead in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, where she gained hands-on experience with civil rights cases.

Passionate about helping individuals in poverty with disabilities navigate the legal system to reaffirm their rights and achieve economic security, Lexi chose to join our legal team to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. She is zealous about ensuring that those who are unable to work due to their disabilities still receive the resources they need to get by, after paying into the Social Security system through decades of employment. After gaining experience with civil rights and employment law issues in law school, **Lexi is eager to further BLC's mission to empower economically vulnerable communities** in a way that allows them to overcome systemic barriers and maintain access to the benefits they are entitled to. One of her favorite aspects of her attorney position is having the ability to help disabled veterans through BLC's long-running partnership with the King County Veterans' Program (KCVP). Through this collaboration, Lexi visits KCVP's Tukwila office twice a month to help veteran's traverse the Social Security system and determine whether they need to be referred to other organizations to resolve other potential legal issues.

When asked about the importance of her work with BLC now and in the new year, Lexi said:

“As we've seen with the recent cuts to SNAP and other government benefits, **the work BLC does for low-income communities in King County is more important than ever. Disabled individuals are among the most marginalized groups in this country. Because many of our clients are people of color, they face even more barriers in attaining socio-economic stability. In a perfect world, I would love to see the Social Security Administration take active steps to make the process more accessible to our clients so it does not feel so frustrating and overwhelming for them.**

We're so lucky to have Lexi as part of our dedicated legal team here at BLC!

We Are Moving!

as of January 1

new year, new office!



TRAINING SPOTLIGHT

2025 Access to Justice Conference

On September 18th, Hillary Lovell, BLC's Directing Attorney for our Disabled Homeless Advocacy Project, had the opportunity to present an important Continuing Legal Education Training focused on the **Social Security rules and regulations that impact Washington's Native American populations** at the statewide **2025 Access to Justice Conference (ATJ)** in Yakima. Every two years, the ATJ Conference brings together 300 community members, legal system advocates, judges, attorneys, and policymakers across Washington State committed to dismantling legal systems of oppression and poverty. In partnership with experienced staff from Northwest Justice Project's Native American Unit, our training (titled *Reimagining Economic Security: Addressing the Gaps and Barriers in State and Federal Cash Assistance for Native Americans*) provided critical information for Native American communities who encounter complex challenges to obtaining and maintaining their Social Security benefits, which include:

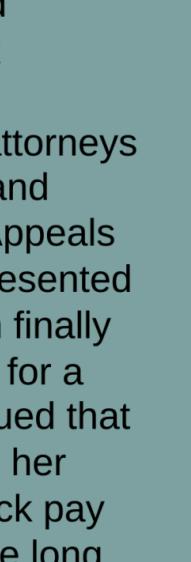
- SA's frequent miscalculation of or estimation of tribal income resulting in cessations, overpayments and/or underpayments of disability benefits
- SSA's misapplication of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act income exclusion, resulting in benefit cessation, incorrectly estimated income, and
- SSA's improper denial of Canadian-born indigenous people who are rightly eligible for SSI and exempt from non-citizenship requirements under the Jay Treaty.

BLC is proud to be the primary legal aid organization in Washington State that has expertise in Social Security benefits. For more than five years, BLC has had one dedicated attorney that provides direct, face-to-face support on a regular basis to Native American populations at Chief Seattle Club. Our Applications Clinic also supports Chief Seattle Club members by providing outreach at their locations to complete benefits applications. Additionally, our legal teams helps tribal members with disabilities via our partnerships with Seattle Indian Health Board, and through self-help publications and Know-Your-Rights publications and trainings. 10% of BLC's clients each year are Native Americans / Indigenous community members.

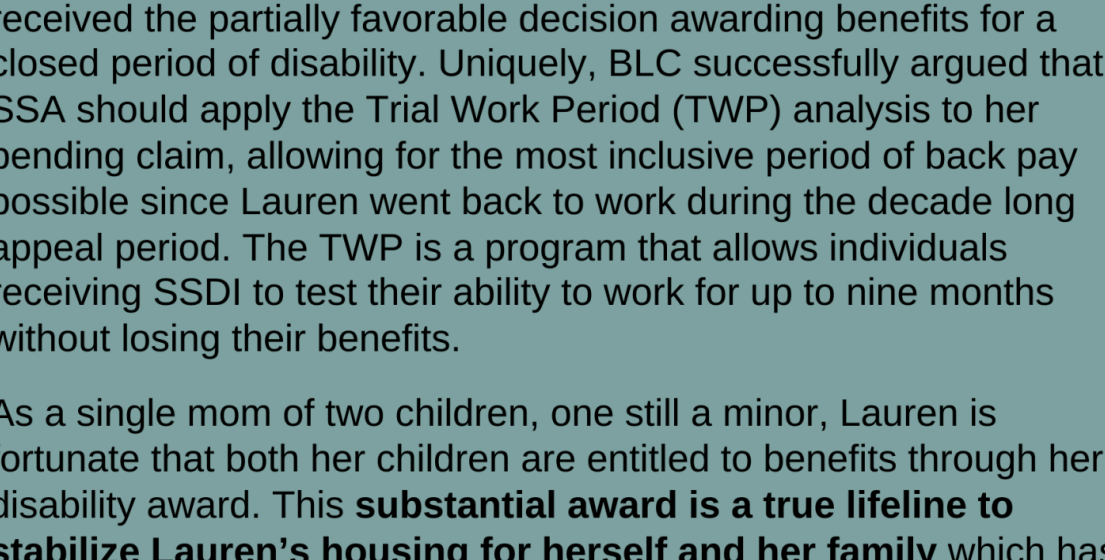
As a result of this unique community education and these resources, **our goal is to reduce the legal barriers that local Native American individuals and families** – living across the Puget Sound – **face when navigating the complexities of the Social Security system.** Our work with tribal communities is especially important because they often have little or no access to legal services.

Do you need a Continuing Legal Education Training or Know-Your-Rights Workshop for your staff or clients? Please email us at info@benefitslawcenter.org

If you would like to view our formal presentation and handouts, Click Here.



STATISTICS THROUGH THIRD QUARTER 2025:



LAUREN'S STORY | BLC CLIENT

Lauren's success story is a result of **10 complicated and strenuous years of legal advocacy from three BLC attorneys** and one federal attorney. As a result of their support which includes hundreds of hours of paperwork, phone calls with long wait times, documentation gathering and organizing, and brief writing — not to mention hard won battles in court — Lauren finally **received over \$100,000 in back pay** that she greatly deserved.

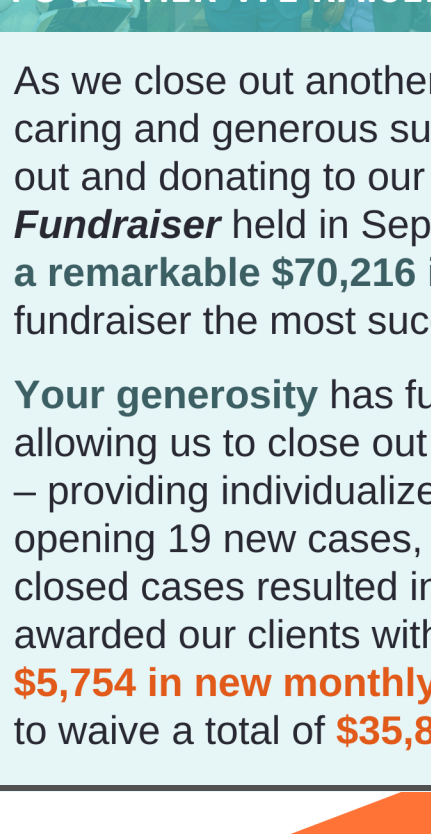
Lauren is a single mother of two children who lives with significant mental and physical disabilities which include major cognitive disorders, Major Depressive Disorder, PTSD, Cerebral Palsy, Myalgias, Chronic Fatigue syndrome, Bipolar Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder that affect her ability to work consistently. Lauren's journey through the Social Security Administration system (SSA) began in 2015 when BLC's attorneys filed for Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) benefits and continued her appeal through multiple remands from the Appeals Council and the Federal District Court. BLC attorneys represented her through five administrative law hearings before Lauren finally received the partially favorable decision awarding benefits for a closed period of disability. Uniquely, BLC successfully argued that SSA should apply the Trial Work Period (TWP) analysis to her pending claim, allowing for the most inclusive period of back pay possible since Lauren went back to work during the decade long appeal period. The TWP is a program that allows individuals receiving SSDI to test their ability to work for up to nine months without losing their benefits.

As a single mom of two children, one still a minor, Lauren is fortunate that both her children are entitled to benefits through her disability award. This **substantial award is a true lifeline to stabilize Lauren's housing for herself and her family** which has been insecure for years. The funds will also allow her to afford ongoing support with cleaning and organizing, which she is unable to manage due to her impairments.

Lauren has expressed her gratitude for BLC's compassion and support by saying,

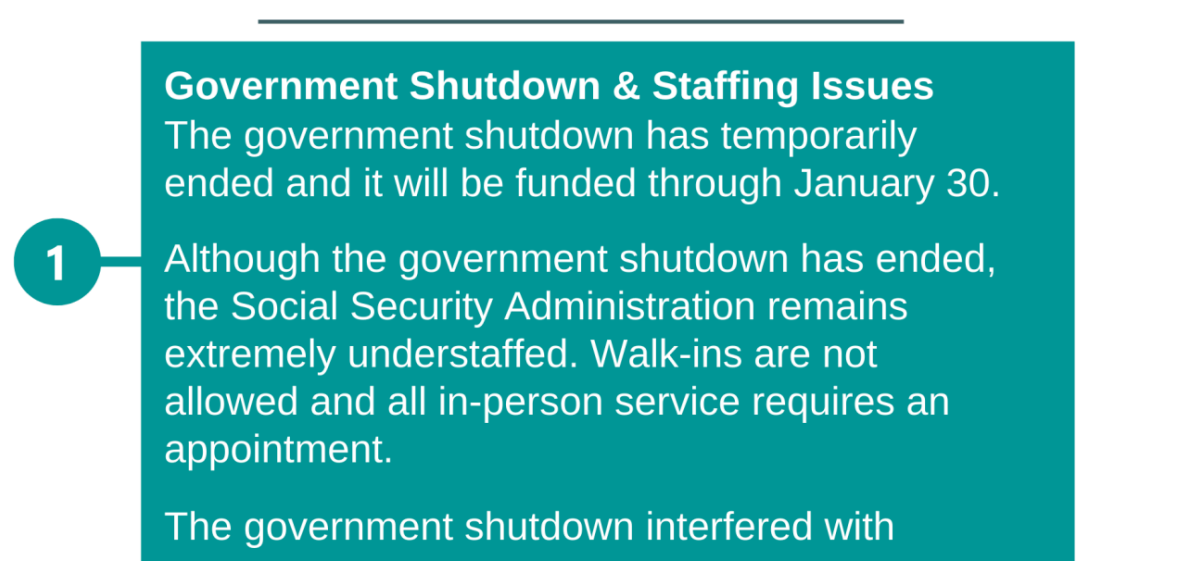
“This has been a very long process and through it all, the lawyers at BLC stood by me and never gave up. Hillary [my attorney at BLC] pushed for a Trial of Work Period to be reviewed and this showed I was disabled. I now have some options to help me get my housing secure and safe thanks to BLC staying with me until the approval [of my award].

— Lauren, Client



YOUR GENEROSITY

LOL Comedy Fundraiser



TOGETHER WE RAISED \$70,216!

As we close out another impactful year, BLC wants to thank our caring and generous supporters and stakeholders for coming out and donating to our **LOL: Comedy for A Cause Fundraiser** held in September. Together, we were able to **raise a remarkable \$70,216 in donations** – making 2025's fundraiser the most successful one in six in years!

Your generosity has fueled the work of our devoted legal team allowing us to close out the last quarter of 2025 in a strong way – providing individualized legal services to hundreds of clients, opening 19 new cases, and closing 71 cases. 75% of our closed cases resulted in full and favorable decisions which awarded our clients with a total of **\$87,705 in back pay** and **\$5,754 in new monthly benefits**, as well as helped our clients to waive a total of **\$35,899 in overpayments.**

SSA UPDATES

Multiple Policy Changes

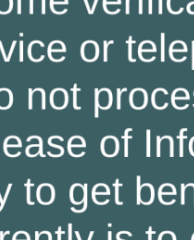
Below is a summary of **key developments and policy changes at the Social Security Administration (SSA) in 2025 and how these changes may impact benefit recipients:**

Government Shutdown & Staffing Issues

The government shutdown has temporarily ended and it will be funded through January 30.

- Although the government shutdown has ended, the Social Security Administration remains extremely understaffed. Walk-ins are not allowed and all in-person service requires an appointment.

The government shutdown interfered with processing of overpayments and continuing disability reviews. Now that it has ended, normal operations will resume. However, due to staffing issues certain workloads are still deprioritized, most notably overpayments. Beneficiaries may not be notified of new debts in a timely manner, and appeals of overpayments may take a very long time.



What does this mean for recipients?

If you are trying to contact Social Security over the phone, **be persistent!** If there is a pending issue that you are trying to resolve, it is wise to call in about once a month to check in and ask if there is any other information you can provide.

Many services are now provided online, and SSA is encouraging people to use the online services. Make an account by clicking here at **Social Security | SSA** to take advantage of online services.

To meet with Social Security in person, you should make an appointment with your local field office.

As always, beneficiaries should make sure that they are complying with all income and resource rules to not incur an overpayment.

Benefit / Income Verification Letters

Currently, SSA is not providing benefit and income verification letters through in-person service or telephone at the field office. They are also not processing form SSA-3328 Request for Release of Information by mail or fax. The only way to get benefit and income verification letters currently is to call the national office at **1-800-772-1213**

Alaskan Tribal Income Exclusions

A new emergency message fully excludes all Alaska Tribal Income for 5 years. Previously, only \$2,000 of Alaskan Tribal Income was excluded when SSA determined income.

What does this mean for recipients?

If you receive an overpayment due to Alaskan Tribal Income, file a Request for Reconsideration citing Emergency Message 25050.

Compassionate Allowance List

In August 2025, SSA added 13 new conditions to its Compassionate Allowance list. Claimants with conditions on the Compassionate Allowance received expedited processing of their claims.

The new conditions include:

- Au-Kline Syndrome
- Bilateral Anophthalmia
- Carey-Fineman-Ziter Syndrome
- Harlequin Ichthyosis – Child
- Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation
- LMNA-related Congenital Muscular Dystrophy
- Progressive Muscular Atrophy
- Pulmonary Amyloidosis – AL Type
- Rasmussen Encephalitis
- Thymic Carcinoma
- Turnpenny-Fry Syndrome
- WHO Grade III Meningiomas
- Zhu-Tokita-Takenouchi-Kim Syndrome

Click Here for the full list.