

SCAS

Est. 1973

IMPACT REPORT

Small Claims Advisory Service



2025-2026

Mission Statement

The Small Claims Advisory Service is the only organization in Massachusetts that focuses primarily on helping individuals navigate the small claims court system in the Commonwealth. Through in-person, video, telephone, and email communication, we provide clients with information on Massachusetts law, small claims, and court presentation procedure. Our mission is to ensure that everyone has the information to seek redress and defend themselves in small claims court, to protect their rights as consumers, tenants, small landlords, small businesses, and members of our community.

Our Origins

SCAS was founded in 1973 as a subcommittee of the Phillips Brooks House Legal Committee. The first SCAS volunteers worked out of the Roxbury Courthouse, helping clients prepare for their cases by informing them of their rights. Originally, SCAS was no more than six students. Since that time, SCAS has grown considerably. We now have over 100 active volunteers helping the citizens of Massachusetts navigate the small claims system directly by phone and by appointment, and indirectly by advocating for structural (i.e. legislative) change.

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear members of the SCAS, PBHA, Harvard, and Massachusetts communities,

We are extremely excited to present the first-ever Small Claims Advisory Service Impact Report, detailing the incredible work the organization has accomplished over the past year.

Founded in 1973 by six Harvard undergraduates, the Small Claims Advisory Service is the only organization in Massachusetts that primarily helps individuals navigate the small claims court system. Six years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted how SCAS had operated for the previous 47 years, and the transition to a primarily virtual service model was bumpy.

After several years of rebuilding, we are proud to share that the 2025–2026 academic year has been one of SCAS’s strongest. This year marked a return to growth, with our largest-ever training class and active volunteer membership. SCAS has also seen significant increases in the number of clients served across the state, putting us firmly on track to reach and surpass previous peaks.

Much of this growth can be attributed to the return of regular phone-based client support. The SCAS hotline has been restored, with the new Phone Coverage Committee now providing several hours of live assistance to clients each week. In addition, SCAS is returning to the Red Line, allowing us to reach hundreds of thousands of individuals across the Greater Boston area. These initiatives represent just a small slice of the incredible work happening across SCAS’s ten committees and sub-boards. We have also updated and overhauled our website—check it out at masmallclaims.org.

We want to thank every SCAS volunteer for their exceptional hard work and dedication during this period of growth and transition. We are also deeply grateful to those who have contributed to SCAS during our text-a-thons and fundraising campaigns. Your support makes it possible for us to expand our reach and serve more clients each year. We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Kit Carroll, our Director of Programs at PBHA, as well as Louise Willis, Nathaniel Greenberg, Aby Hansell, and the entire PBHA staff for their guidance and support.

Looking ahead, we are excited to build on this momentum. In the coming semester, we plan to reintegrate multilingual services for our clients, launch our first-ever summer training cycle, introduce recurring in-person office hours at Boston Public Libraries, expand the resources available on our website, establish an alumni board, and much more.

The future of SCAS has never looked brighter, and we are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to lead this organization.



Jay Sweitzer-Shalit '28



Avi Agarwal '27

HISTORICAL FUN FACTS

1971

SCAS's predecessor was the Harvard Small Claims Group, which operated from 1971–1975 in Quincy House. Funded by esteemed lawyer and presidential candidate Ralph Nader, the group was originally commissioned to perform a nationwide study of small claims courts. Over 200 volunteers traveled the country to observe small claims court proceedings. The final report involved recommendations that were ultimately implemented by the Massachusetts small claims court system, such as increasing the limit on claims and hiring enforcement officers to collect award money.

1974

Even after the report was completed, the group, later called the Small Claims Study Group, remained active from its Quincy House outpost. It appeared on nighttime infomercial TV segments advertising its work and even took out a full-page ad in the *Globe*, May 26, 1974, giving readers the scoop on “How to Win in Small Claims Court.”

1974

When SCAS was first founded in October of 1974 by a group of six dedicated students, it was known as the Roxbury Small Claims Advisory Project (SCAP). The project was a request by Judge John Cratsley of the Roxbury Municipal Court for an advisory service, who provided SCAP with a rent-free office in the Roxbury Municipal Court. SCAS operated out of this office until 1981. The volunteers kept it open two mornings and two afternoons every week, along with a nighttime phonenumber.

1981

Starting in the early 1980s, SCAS began exploring ways to make the small claims system better through legal reform. One frustration that had been plaguing litigants was the low \$750 limit on small claims cases. In the spring of 1981, a SCAS chair testified before the state legislature on behalf of a small claims reform bill to raise this limit. In 1982, that bill became law, and the ceiling of small claims court was raised from \$750 to \$1,250. This was the first involvement by SCAS in the legislative arena.

2013

In 2013, the SCAS looked much more like how we know it today. That year, SCAS fully **assisted 993 clients** through phone calls, emails, and face-to-face meetings, had over 900 system log-ins by our 92 undergraduate volunteers, and received over 17,000 significant page-views (over 15 seconds each) on its website.

SCAStatistics

Fall 2025-Spring 2026 (unless otherwise noted)



440

Email clients



700

Phone calls



576

of web visits in our 1st
month of a new website

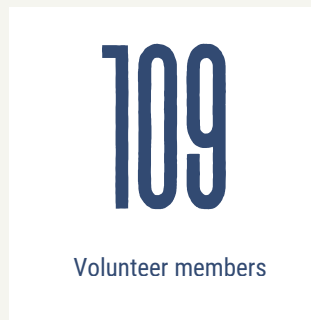
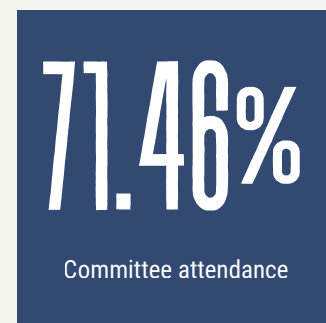


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Donations from Fall 2025-Spring 2026

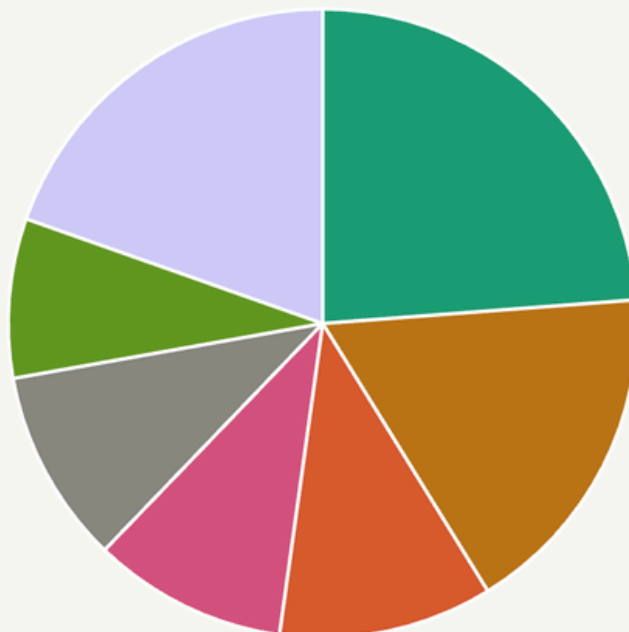
Volunteer Stats:

Fall 2025-Spring 2026



Committee Membership Breakdown

- Case Management (23.8%)
- Advocacy (17.4%)
- Outreach (11%)
- Legal Research (10%)
- Phone Coverage (10%)
- Internal Partnerships (8.2%)
- Other (19.6%)



Common Causes

*Small Claims areas most encountered by SCAS,
from over 5 years of data.*

Consumer Law: deceptive practices, breach of contract, unsatisfactory work.

Landlord-Tenant Law: security deposit withholding, property damage, breach of implied habitability.

Wage Law: withheld pay due to extenuating circumstances, poor management.

Auto Law: car dealership disputes.

Credit/Debit Law: debt negotiation and collection rights.

Collections: judgement enforcement & asset recovery, responding to legal discovery & protecting rights.

Home Improvement Law: contractor misconduct & consumer protection, strategy & dispute resolution.

Personal disputes: insurance liability, small claims limitations, relationship-based conflicts.

Client Feedback

"I have always had the best experience with the Small Claims Advisory Service. They are knowledgeable and very trustworthy. I do not know of anywhere else where I am able to understand my legal rights. They are super helpful!"

"Provided with important information that I needed to move forward thank you so much for being extremely supportive."

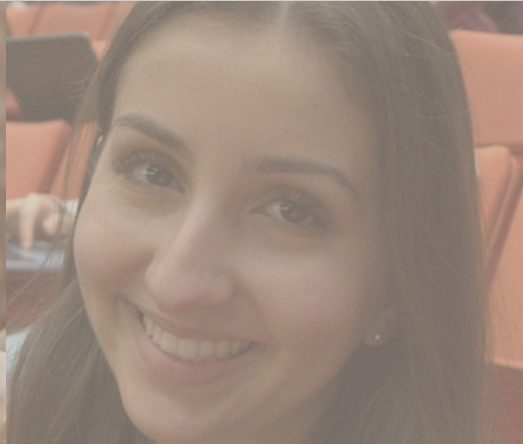
"Very patient individual, went out of the way to get me the best possible information, great information given to me."

100%

of respondents rated their assistance as helpful

88%

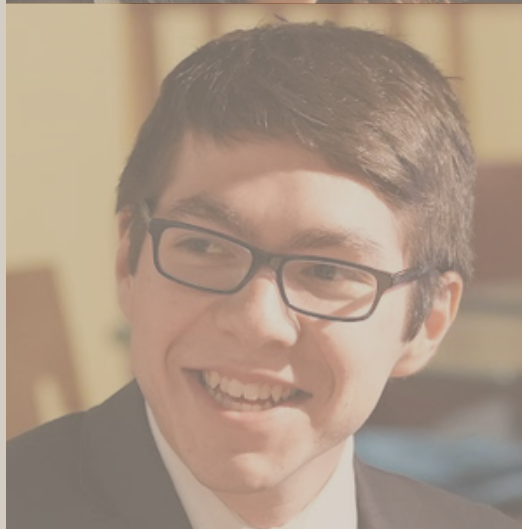
of respondents rated their assistance as "very helpful" or better



Committee



Updates





Legal Research

As usual, Legal Research assisted SCAS clients whose situations fell outside the scope of our volunteers' training. They handled unusually complex cases at every stage of the process— from evaluating whether to sue, to filing claims, to pursuing post-judgment collection. They even assisted clients navigating small claims procedures in other states, and clients pursuing non-small claims cases. Committee members worked in small groups, collaborating on research before making phone calls and responding to client emails. Beginning in the Spring 2026 semester, the committee also assumed responsibility for maintaining the volunteer manual. They have been updating outdated information, verifying uncited statements, improving organization and clarity, and filling in gaps. They also implemented a new system for tracking edits, in which all changes are peer-reviewed, and utilized feedback from the broader SCAS community as well as external legal aid attorneys to identify needed revisions.

Outreach

This year, the Outreach Committee connected 61 Massachusetts-based organizations to SCAS, substantially increasing the number of clients referred to SCAS.

For the first time in recent history, they also physically distributed zines, a creative way to communicate complex information, across the greater Boston area.



Internal Partnerships

During Internal Partnerships' inaugural semester, they identified key gaps in pre-law programming through volunteer feedback. Their committee also began a new initiative to strengthen alumni connections, building new pathways between students and graduates across diverse industries. They concluded the semester by hosting Kristi Jobson, Assistant Dean of Admissions at Harvard Law, for a conversation with our volunteers.



Case Management

Case Management is responsible for ensuring timely and high quality responses to all SCAS clients. This year, they continued to make sure that volunteers responded to their clients within the required timeframe of 48 hours, and reviewed every email that was sent to make sure that they met our standards of client support. One of Case Management's key responsibilities is ensuring that clients are being provided legal information and not advice. Case Management is also the only committee that meets twice a week in order to ensure that volunteers are responding to time-sensitive emails on a regular basis. They also created SCAS' first-ever AI policy, which clarifies expectations for volunteers who want to use AI for their client correspondences.



Legal Advocacy

Over the past year, the Legal Advocacy Committee has worked to advocate for a more up-to-date, equitable, and just small claims system in Massachusetts, both through public outreach and legislative testimony. They have submitted legislative testimony and accompanying fact sheets on 8 separate bills to the Massachusetts State House, produced two documents of original quantitative and qualitative research on SCAS's internal email database, and drafted an original bill to be submitted in the next legislative cycle. They look forward to continuing this work in upcoming semesters to help shape the future of the small claims system in Massachusetts.

Phone Coverage Committee

This spring, SCAS revived an active hotline for the first time in over 5 years. The Phone Coverage Committee, or PCC, with 13 dedicated volunteers, received calls from clients for 8 hours each week, helping 39 clients through the semester. After a successful debut, PCC is continuing to run as one of only three committees over the summer, with coverage expanding to 15+ hours per week. SCAS hopes to further expand the hours offered in the fall, with the hope of eventually returning to full 40-hour-a-week phone coverage.

Community Engagement

The Community Engagement team transformed SCAS's community this semester. On an end-of-year survey, members reported feeling more connected to each other and the organization than in previous years. They hosted a total of 10 social or professional development events in the Spring semester alone! Two of their most popular events were a Q&A with Dean Jobson, Assistant Dean of Admissions at Harvard Law, and the SCAS Gala.



Q & A with Dean Jobson



SCAS Jeopardy Night

Scenes from the Gala:



Communications and Marketing



The Communications and Marketing team had a busy year! They completely rebranded SCAS, designing a new logo, choosing a new color palette and font, and helping with the website redesign. They sent a newsletter every two weeks with updates about the organization, fun facts, and internship opportunities for aspiring lawyers. They created a form for community members to use every time they had something they needed pubbed, and posted frequently on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. In addition to the internal Instagram account that communicates updates to SCAS members, they created an external Instagram account to share advocacy content and information about small claims law with the broader community. They also launched an MBTA campaign on the red line and created this impact report.

MBTA Campaign

SMALL CLAIMS ADVISORY SERVICE

Small claims court *made simple.*

masmallclaims.org
masmallclaims@gmail.com
(833) 365-7227

Let us guide you — for free.

- Got scammed by a business?
- Landlord-tenant issues?
- Bought a faulty car?
- And more!

SCAS is part of the PBHA, a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit.

SCAS
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Scan to get help!



Thanks to our generous donors, SCAS was able to invest in an MBTA ad for the first time in seven years! The interior train car ads were released the week of May 4, 2026 on the red line. The ad was estimated to have gained 500,000 impressions.

We would like to give special shoutouts to Felipe Cifuentes and his team at Outfront Media, as well as Michaela Rheault and the PBHA for coordinating the payment.

How you can help:

SCAS used to benefit from abundant funding and a robust alumni network that enabled us to have an incredible impact on the lives of Massachusetts residents. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic undermined our progress— administrative oversight suffered, funding contacts were lost, and volunteers were no longer able to meet in-person to help clients. While we survived by transitioning to emails as the primary means of client communication, the program—and the number of clients helped—suffered. Over the past few semesters, we have been busy restoring our organization to its former stature, while hoping to make it bigger and better suited to our clients’ needs than ever before. Your generous donation helps make this possible.



Your Donation Matters:

\$25- Helps fund our in-person Help Desk office hours at the Boston Public Library, local courthouses, and other community locations, where people in need can directly ask questions.

\$50- Helps cover the printing costs for informational posters, pamphlets, and zines. This helps us solidify our relationships with community partners and improve our referral network, maximizing our impact in our community.

\$100- Helps fund a new client intake and management system, enabling us to respond to clients faster, to better match volunteers on the basis of language and subject area, and to gather more comprehensive client feedback.

\$500- Helps fund MBTA advertisements, increasing our visibility in low-income Boston neighborhoods and making our services better known regionally; one of our most effective outreach efforts.

\$1,000- Covers the cost of website redesign and modernization, along with continued upkeep, making small claims court information easily accessible on the web. Our website is viewed by more than 5k unique visitors each month- a redesign would more than double that number.

\$5000- Fully funds a SCAS MBTA advertising campaign, informing hundreds of thousands of Greater Boston residents about our services.

masmallclaims.org/donate/

Thank you for your support!

