



LEGAL AID SOCIETY
OF SAN DIEGO

Annual Report 2024 |



Advancing Justice Since 1919

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WELCOME

Dear Friends,

At the Legal Aid Society of San Diego, we believe that meaningful change begins with listening to our clients, our communities, and our partners. In 2024, we committed ourselves to listening deeply, learning from those we serve, and leading with purpose.

This year, our work focused on bridging the gaps in legal access that continue to impact thousands across San Diego County. Whether helping a tenant facing eviction, supporting a veteran navigating benefits, or guiding a family through a health-related legal issue, our team remained steadfast in its mission to ensure that legal help is not a privilege, but a right.

We also reflected on the foundation that makes this work possible. The passing of Gregory Knoll, who led the Legal Aid Society of San Diego for nearly 50 years, was a profound moment for our organization. Greg's legacy lives on in our commitment to service, our belief in justice for all, and our dedication to meeting people where they are with compassion, expertise, and respect.

Under the leadership of our new CEO, Joanne Franciscus, and with the support of our Board, staff, volunteers, and community partners, the Legal Aid Society of San Diego continues to grow and evolve. We are proud to share this report with you, which highlights the impact of our work and the strength of the community that makes it possible.

We are deeply grateful for your continued partnership and support as we work to close the justice gap in San Diego.

With gratitude,



A blue ink signature of Joanne Franciscus.

Joanne Franciscus
CEO/Executive Director



A blue ink signature of Gwen Hanley-Pamplin.

Gwen Hanley-Pamplin
2024 Chairperson, Board of Directors

OUR IMPACT

THE NEED

In the U.S. there is ***no right to counsel*** in most civil legal matters.

In 2024:

7 in 10 CA households experienced at least one civil legal problem, with an average of 6 problems per household.*



*State Bar of California. (2024). 2024 California Justice Gap Study. <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/sites/default/files/portals/0/documents/reports/2025/2024-CA-Justice-Gap-Study.pdf>

When people don't have legal representation, the consequences can be life-altering:

- Evictions that leave families without stable housing.
- Denied medical care that jeopardizes health and safety.
- Domestic violence cases where survivors struggle to secure protection.
- Parents losing custody of their children without understanding their rights.
- Workers going unpaid because they can't navigate the legal system alone.
- Seniors being denied benefits they are entitled to receive.



This happens not because people lack rights, but because they lack help.

49% of requests for legal assistance must be turned away by legal aid organizations due to lack of resources.



More funding is needed to reduce the justice gap.

THE IMPACT

40,000 + People Benefited



20,035 People directly benefited from legal advice and representation

20,301 People benefited from **pro se clinics**

\$15M

Economic Benefits Reported for Clients



9,262 CASES CLOSED, INCLUDING:



350

for Support for Families



4,988

for Preserving the Home



1,679

for Safety, Stability, & Health



1,152

for Maintaining Economic Stability

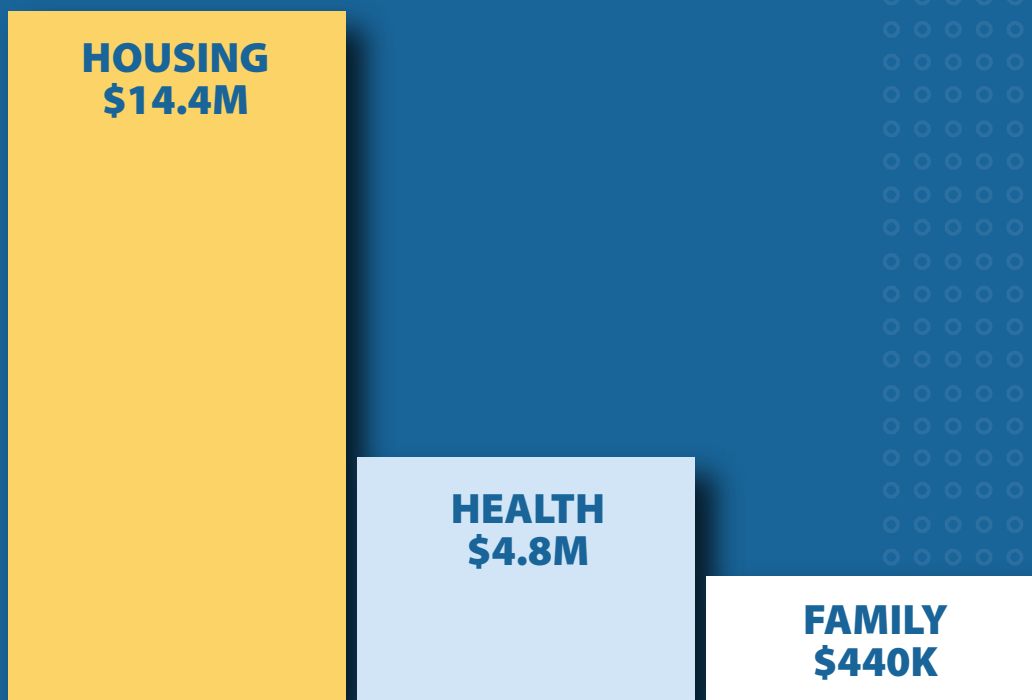
SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

For every \$1 invested in the Legal Aid Society of San Diego in 2024, returns an average of \$5.11 in financial benefits.

Legal Aid Society of San Diego provides services in over 44 types of legal problems.

The total net value resulting from the legal services activities of the Legal Aid Society of San Diego in 2024 was \$137,517,000.

Direct Economic Impact



The total funding investment for these legal aid services made by city, state, and federal government agencies, and from contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals was \$26,930,000 for 2024.

The total Net Social Return on Investment for the Legal Aid Society of San Diego during 2024 was 511%.

OUR GOALS / NEEDS ASSESSMENT

OUR GOALS

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego's strategic planning process embraced a systematic approach to our goals, ensuring alignment with our mission and community needs. Through careful analysis, we identified four priorities. These priorities guide our efforts to deliver accessible, high-quality legal services and create lasting community impact.

- Strengthening financial resilience
- Aligning programs with client needs
- Enhancing impact and visibility
- Building sustainable organizational infrastructure



NEED ASSESSMENT KEY FINDINGS

Our needs assessment revealed critical challenges impacting access to justice in San Diego County:

- 1. Housing Instability** – Evictions and unsafe living conditions remain the most urgent legal needs, highlighting ongoing demand for housing-related support.
- 2. Limited Awareness** – Many residents and partners struggle to find legal aid services, underscoring the need for stronger outreach and education.
- 3. Access Barriers** – High costs, language gaps, and privacy concerns prevent many from seeking help, requiring trust-building and equitable solutions.
- 4. Employment Challenges** – Job insecurity, workplace issues, and barriers for those with criminal records point to significant needs for employment and expungement services.
- 5. Language & Cultural Gaps** – Multilingual and culturally responsive services are essential to serve San Diego's diverse communities effectively.

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

PRIORITIES	GOALS
Priority #1: Funding: Broadening and Strengthening the Financial Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Strengthen Grant Program Capacity■ Develop a Comprehensive Plan for Funding Diversification and Sustainability
Priority #2: Program Alignment: Aligning Services and Strategic Focus Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Evaluate each practice area and team to determine community needs, inform them of the needs assessment results, and develop targeted strategies to maximize impact and effectively address them.■ Improve and expand accessibility to ensure equitable access to services for all individuals and communities.■ Expand Capacity for Extended Services and Impact Work
Priority #3: Impact and Visibility: Strengthen LASSD's Brand and Stakeholder Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Enhance Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy■ Use Metrics to Demonstrate Impact and Drive Advocacy■ Expand Media Presence and Strengthen Community Education
Priority #4: Organizational Infrastructure: Building Sustainability and Supporting Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Evaluate and Strengthen Organizational Infrastructure■ Enhance Recruitment and Retention Strategies■ Foster Career Development and Support for Staff

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego helped **964 clients** achieve support for their families.

KEY FACTS

- 1.** Domestic violence is widespread. In 2024, there were 15,682 domestic violence-related calls made to law enforcement across San Diego County.
- 2.** Most people in family law cases stand before a judge without a lawyer. Seven in ten have no legal help, leaving survivors at risk and children unprotected.
- 3.** Legal support keeps kids safer. Survivors with an attorney are more likely to get custody orders that protect their children. Without help, abusers may get unsupervised access—even when it's unsafe.

WHY IT MATTERS



With Legal Help People Can:

- Survivors get legal protection and safer custody arrangements.
- Children stay safely with their families.
- Parents can secure child support and resources to care for their kids.



Without Legal Help:

- Survivors may remain in danger without legal support.
- Children may enter foster care unnecessarily.
- Children may go without basic needs because support orders aren't enforced.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Legal Aid Society of San Diego's programs that provide support for families in 2024:

- **Direct Service Impact: \$440,000**
- **Long-Term Impact: \$1.5M**

LEGAL AID HELPS FAMILIES FIND SAFETY

When María came to us, she was exhausted. For over 20 years, she endured domestic violence in silence. Speaking limited English and isolated from family, she finally decided to leave her abusive husband. Then everything changed when he suffered a severe stroke. María put her plans aside and cared for him through months of recovery. She hoped compassion might bring peace. Instead, as his health improved, the abuse returned. Worse, a relative became her husband's guardian and hired a lawyer to kick María out of her home and lock her out of bank accounts. She faced losing everything she had worked for. That's when our team stepped in. We fought back, filing for spousal support and securing access to critical benefits, including medication and aging resources. For the first time in months, María felt heard. This case was never just about legal paperwork. It was about restoring stability and respect for someone who had been overlooked and mistreated. Today, María has the support she needs to live safely and independently.

**This story reflects real experiences, but some details have been modified to ensure confidentiality*

PRESERVING THE HOME

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego preserved housing stability for **11,502 clients** and their families.

KEY FACTS

- 1. Legal help is out of reach for most tenants.** In California eviction court, fewer than 10% of tenants have legal representation, while about 90% of landlords are represented by an attorney.
- 2. Housing costs are crushing low-income families.** 83% of extremely low-income households in San Diego County pay more than half of their income on housing costs.
- 3. Preventing homelessness saves money.** One chronically homeless person can cost taxpayers as much as \$50,000 per year.

WHY IT MATTERS



With Legal Help People Can:

- Stay in their homes.
- Access emergency housing assistance.
- Protect their children's education.



Without Legal Help:

- Are far more likely to lose their homes.
- Experience job and income loss.
- End up in shelters or on the streets.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Legal Aid Society of San Diego's HOUSING programs in 2024:

- **Direct Service Impact: \$14.4M**
- **Long-Term Impact: \$71.3M**

LEGAL AID HELPS KEEP PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES

When Chris reached out to our office, he was facing an overwhelming challenge. After his wife became terminally ill, Chris made the difficult decision to stop working so he could care for her and their three children. Tragically, his wife passed away, leaving Chris as the sole caregiver without family or friends to assist him. During this time, Chris fell behind on rent for his affordable housing unit, facing the very real threat of losing his home. Our team stepped in immediately. We connected Chris with our internal case management services and negotiated a settlement with his landlord to resolve the unlawful detainer case. Through these efforts, case management assisted him in securing rental assistance to pay all the rent owed. The landlord agreed to waive late fees and allow Chris and his family to remain in their home. Thanks to this cross-team collaboration, Chris and his children were able to maintain their affordable housing and avoid the devastating impact of homelessness. Today, Chris is back on his feet, providing for his family and building a stable future.

**This story reflects real experiences, but some details have been modified to ensure confidentiality*

SAFETY, STABILITY, AND HEALTH

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego helped 2,953 clients and their families improve their safety, stability, and health.

KEY FACTS

1. Wrongful denials and delays in health benefits leave some San Diego residents without essential care.
2. Mental health needs are growing.
3. Coverage disruptions are impacting seniors and persons with disabilities.

WHY IT MATTERS (WITH VS. WITHOUT LEGAL HELP)

WITH

- **Protect their health benefits.** Legal support helps people retain Medi-Cal, Social Security, and other essential programs.
- **Get timely mental health support.** Legal aid ensures individuals receive services without wrongful denials or delays.
- **Navigate coverage changes.** Seniors can get help switching plans, appealing coverage decisions, and maintaining continuity of care.

WITHOUT

- **Lose access to medical care.** Insurance denials or lapses in coverage can delay or prevent treatment.
- **Go without mental health services.** Language barriers, long wait times, and administrative errors leave many untreated.
- **Have benefits wrongly cut off.** Errors in paperwork or eligibility reviews can leave vulnerable residents without coverage.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Legal Aid Society of San Diego's HOUSING programs in 2024:

■ **Direct Service Impact: \$14.4M** ■ **Long-Term Impact: \$71.3M**

LEGAL AID HELPS KEEP PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES

Homeless at 15, John lived in an abandoned building without windows or water when he was turned away when he asked for help after being kicked out for being gay. Growing up in a home marked by abuse and addiction, he never felt safe. At school, bullying and isolation compounded his undiagnosed behavioral health challenges. John turned to Legal Aid more than 20 years ago and found something he hadn't felt in years—support and understanding. Legal Aid secured SSI benefits, Medi-Cal coverage, and fought to maintain his Section 8 voucher. We defended him against eviction, housing discrimination, and ensured access to critical medication. When his mother passed, we connected him with a pro bono attorney to navigate her estate. Today, John has been in recovery for over 30 years and advocates for behavioral health policy. Legal Aid didn't just change his circumstance, we empowered him to thrive.

**This story reflects real experiences, but some details have been modified to ensure confidentiality*

MAINTAINING ECONOMIC STABILITY

\$15M in economic benefits were reported across the organization for clients and their families.

KEY FACTS

1. Food Stamp Access Is Fragile but Essential. Nearly 400,000 San Diegans rely on CalFresh (food stamps), including seniors, veterans, and families.
2. Veterans Rely on Local Support to Access Benefits. Assistance to veterans help them navigate complex systems including benefits related to disability, pension, and education.
3. Elder Financial Scams Are Surging. In 2024 alone, San Diego seniors lost over \$108 million to financial scams—including solar panel fraud, tech support scams, and fake investment schemes. The average loss per victim was \$80,000, and many never recover financially.

WHY IT MATTERS (WITH VS. WITHOUT LEGAL HELP)

- | | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| WITH | ■ Recover from financial scams. Seniors and vulnerable adults can get help disputing fraudulent contracts and deceptive sales. | |
| | ■ Secure food assistance. Legal support ensures eligible households can access and retain CalFresh (food stamps) without wrongful denials. | |
| | ■ Access tax credits and refunds. Legal aid helps families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit and resolve IRS disputes. | |
| | WITHOUT | ■ Fall victim to scams and predatory lending. Seniors are especially vulnerable to deceptive contracts and fake services. |
| | | ■ Go hungry despite being eligible for aid. Confusing paperwork and wrongful denials keep food assistance out of reach. |
| | | ■ Face aggressive and illegal debt collection. Many don't know their rights or how to respond to harassment. |

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

of Legal Aid Society of San Diego's ECONOMIC STABILITY programs in 2024:

- **Direct Service Impact: \$5.1M**
- **Long-Term Impact: \$1.9M**

LEGAL AID HELPS KEEP PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES

When Linda came to us, she was terrified. Her CalFresh benefits had been cut off because she didn't submit one very specific document—even though she had already provided plenty of proof. Without those benefits, Linda faced an impossible choice: pay rent or buy groceries. We stepped in. Our team challenged the denial and proved that the information Linda had given was enough. The result? Her benefits were reinstated, and she received three months of backpay. That win meant more than paperwork. It meant Linda could keep a roof over her head and food on the table. No one should have to choose between hunger and homelessness—and thanks to your support, we make sure they don't.*

**This story reflects real experiences, but some details have been modified to ensure confidentiality*

SPECIAL VULNERABILITIES

SENIORS

VETERANS

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

FROM OVERWHELMED TO HOPEFUL: MARCY'S STORY

“Thanks to Legal Aid Society of San Diego, my son is finally on the path to getting the care he needs—and I have hope again.”

– Marcy, Senior Client

When Marcy walked into the Vista courthouse, she was carrying more than a stack of paperwork—she was carrying the weight of fear, confusion, and heartbreak. She had come to file a domestic violence restraining order against her own son, whose untreated behavioral health issues had escalated to violence.

Marcy learned that a domestic violence restraining order meant her son could no longer live with her. She wondered where he'd go and who'd take care of him. Marcy learned that filing a CARE Court petition could potentially connect her son with a full ecosystem of help, including supportive housing, mental health treatment, and care coordination.

At LASSD's CARE Act Clinic, our advocate and staff attorney worked side-by-side to guide Marcy through each step of the petition. “I was filled with worry, confusion, and financial obstacles,” Marcy shared. “I can't begin to describe the gratitude I feel” says Marcy.

Without LASSD, I would have been looking at legal costs anywhere from \$2,000 to \$15,000, which was simply not possible for me. As a result of the Care petition, Marcy's lost son was located by county staff, and he is housed and has chosen to participate in a 12-month sustainability program.



CASE MANAGEMENT

16 CASE MANAGERS CLOSED 434 CASES IN 2024

In July 2024, Legal Aid Society of San Diego brought all case managers together into one dedicated team to better integrate case management with legal services. This unified approach ensures clients receive timely, coordinated support to overcome barriers and achieve positive outcomes.

When Anna came to us, she needed help with housing, healthcare, behavioral health, and escaping domestic violence. One day, while out of town, she feared her abusive ex-partner (who had a felony warrant) was back. After repeated attempts to reach her failed, our Case Manager grew concerned.

During a visit with another client at the same property, she noticed Anna's truck and an unfamiliar car. Then, she saw a man matching the ex-partner's description. Following protocol, she called the police for a wellness check. Officers arrived and arrested him. Anna was safe.

This is what case management means at Legal Aid, going beyond paperwork to protect lives. Thanks to your support, we can keep standing guard for those who need us most.*

**This story reflects real experiences, but some details have been modified to ensure confidentiality*

CASE MANAGEMENT PROCESS



PRO BONO



451
Volunteers



116,661
Service hours



20,301
People benefited
from pro se clinics



\$8.1M
Direct service
impact

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: WILL

Over the years, Will has gone above and beyond. He's helped an unsheltered client obtain a birth certificate so they could finally reclaim their identity and assisted others with preparing important legal documents. This year was no exception.

Hours from the nearest courthouse, families were relocated to a barren stretch of desert where promises of affordable living turned into heartbreak. They found themselves living in nightmarish conditions, where sewage seeped into the ground, the water supply turned foul, infestations crawled unchecked, and repairs never came. Electricity was cut off without warning and people lived in fear of when the next ominous eviction notices would appear. With nowhere to turn and no one listening to such a small, faraway community, desperation grew louder than the desert wind.

That's when Will stepped in. Will is the kind of person who shows up when it feels like no one else will. Residents were afraid that speaking out would cost them the only shelter they had. Many had already endured homelessness, and the thought of losing everything again was unbearable. But Will didn't give up. He talked with people. He built trust. His persistence and compassion opened the door for a law firm specializing in homeless advocacy to take up the fight. Will's effort was never just about legal strategy; it was about restoring hope. It was about giving people a chance when they had nowhere else to turn. Pro bono work changes lives because justice should never depend on where you live.



SUPPORTERS

2024

INDIVIDUALS

- Ali J Ali
- Cheryl Clark
- Amy McCourt
- Jessica Holstein
- Joanna and David Fox
- Linda Lane
- David and Marcia Gill
- Mark and Molly Rackers
- Jo Anne SawyerKnoll
- Alysson Snow

ORGANIZATIONS

- Adi IT Works
- California Bank & Trust
- Cooley
- Ensign Services Inc.
- Inland County Legal Services (ICLS)
- Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP
- Manatt Phelps & Phillips LLP
- Law Office of Joseph B. Ollinger
- Latham & Watkins LLP
- Pheonix Settlement Administrators
- Sheppard Mullin
- South Coast Copy Systems

FOUNDATIONS AND GRANT FUNDERS

- Anonymous
- CA Department of Financial Protection and Innovation
- CA Department of Health Care Services
- CA Department of Housing and Community Development
- CA Department of Managed Health Care
- CA Department of Social Services
- California ChangeLawyers
- California Coverage & Health Initiatives
- California Housing Finance Agency
- City of Encinitas
- County of San Diego
- Covered California
- Employee Rights Center
- Equal Justice Works
- Family Health Centers of San Diego
- Gary and Mary West Foundation
- Georgetown University
- Hallagan Giving Fund
- Heinzinger/Pfann Family Foundation
- Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego
- Kaiser Permanente
- Legal Services Corporation
- National Health Law Program
- San Diego 211
- San Diego County Bar Foundation
- San Diego Housing Commission
- Scripps Health Foundation
- State Bar of California
- Superior Court of California – County of San Diego
- The Blackbaud Giving Fund via Sempra Foundation
- The Schveibinz Family Charitable Fund
- The California Endowment
- The Children’s Partnership
- U.S. Bank Foundation
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs
- Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation
- Yale University



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

CY24 TOTALS

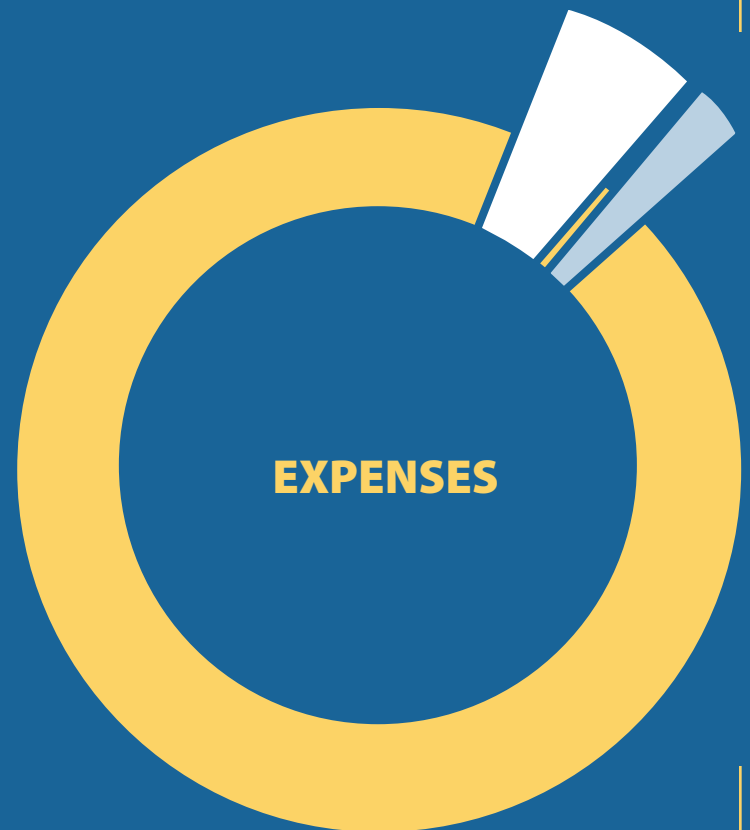


REVENUE

\$31,750,713.71

EXPENSES

 Program	\$27,276,810.74
 Admin	\$3,722,648.78
 Fundraising	\$130,877.13
TOTAL	\$31,130,336.65



2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2024 OFFICERS

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Attorney
Grimes & Warwick



LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO

Mission: The mission of the Legal Aid Society of San Diego is to improve lives by advancing justice through effective, efficient and vigorous legal advocacy, outreach and education.

Vision: A San Diego County where all people enjoy equity and equality allowing them to live and thrive because of our efforts.



[lassd.org](https://www.lassd.org)

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