



**SPECIAL
EDUCATION
LEGAL
FUND**

Frequently Asked Questions LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

What is S.E.L.F.'s mission?

Special Education Legal Fund's mission is to level the playing field in special education for all families, by providing resources and knowledge to families in need so that they may achieve full advocacy for their children in the special education system. Special Education Legal Fund was founded in 2018 by parents who have navigated the special education system for their children. In so doing, they discovered cracks in the special education system, particularly for families and children without the means to afford lawyers, advocates, and providers in the special education process.

Is my family eligible for a S.E.L.F. grant?

Your family may be eligible for a Legal Assistance Program grant if your family's gross income meets S.E.L.F.'s guidelines, you live in Connecticut or Westchester County, New York, and you have a child in district special education with a current IEP (Individualized Education Plan). S.E.L.F. is currently accepting applications from families with adjusted gross income at or below 300% of the federal minimum poverty level (FMPL). The applicant must complete an in-person or phone interview with a representative from S.E.L.F. The qualifying family must agree to contribute a modest (income based) portion of the legal fees in their case. Finally, the grant recipient family agrees to update S.E.L.F. on their child's progress for a three year period after the receipt of the grant from S.E.L.F.

How do I apply for a S.E.L.F. grant?

First, you must be prescreened to ensure your family meets the guidelines for the program. For a prescreening, please email S.E.L.F. at christine@spedlegalfund.org. Should you meet the qualifications for the program, you will receive a grant application form, which must be returned to S.E.L.F. with appropriate documentation. This includes documentation of the income reported in the prescreening and on the application (first page of your most recent tax return or a verification of government assistance), your child's IEP (Individualized Education Plan), your child's most recent evaluation (if applicable), and an invoice/estimate of proposed legal fees from a qualified special education attorney (if available). After the completed application has been received by S.E.L.F., a representative will contact you to schedule a phone interview (30-45 minutes).

What expenses are covered in a S.E.L.F. grant?

A S.E.L.F. grant covers up to \$5000 of fees related to a qualifying family's special education legal issues, provided by an attorney that meets Special Education Legal Fund's professional requirements. All S.E.L.F. grants are payable directly to the attorney. For more information on professional requirements, please visit our website. S.E.L.F. does not, through the Legal Assistance Program or any other program, cover ancillary costs related to the special education process like private evaluations or therapies.



Frequently Asked Questions, Part II

How long is the S.E.L.F. grant review process? When can I expect to be notified of a decision?

Special Education Legal Fund's grant review process is conducted on a rolling monthly basis from October through June of each year. Applications are due on the third Monday of each month. Each application is reviewed by the Grants Review Committee; decisions are rendered based upon available funding and applicants are notified by the end of the month in which they apply.

My application for a S.E.L.F. grant was denied. Can I reapply?

Unfortunately, each month Special Education Legal Fund receives many more applications than grants that we can support. If your initial application for funding is not approved, you are welcome to reapply in the following month's grant cycle by notifying S.E.L.F. in writing (email) of your intent. You may update S.E.L.F. on any changes or developments to your case at any time before the new monthly deadline; a new phone interview is not required.

My family has previously received a grant for my student & we need an attorney again. Can we reapply?

If your family has previously received a grant from Special Education Legal Fund's Legal Assistance Program, you may be eligible to reapply to the program if (1) more than one year has elapsed since the receipt of the initial grant (2) your family continues to meet the baseline requirements for the program (3) your new grant application is not a continuation of the legal case for which you previously received a grant from Special Education Legal Fund.

Will S.E.L.F. recommend a special education attorney for my family?

Special Education Legal Fund does not make recommendations about attorneys to applicant families or families who have been approved for a S.E.L.F. grant, and families are responsible for finding and securing their own legal representation, subject to the following professional requirements. Attorneys that receive grants from S.E.L.F. must:

- (1) have practiced law with an emphasis on special education or disability rights for seven years or more*
- (2) have special education or disability rights law represent a majority of their legal practice*
- (3) be affiliated with the American Bar Association (ABA), the Connecticut Bar Association, or the New York Bar Association*
- (4) be licensed to practice law in the state of Connecticut or New York.*

I have been approved for a S.E.L.F. grant, I don't have an attorney, and I don't know what to do. Can you help?

S.E.L.F. is available to answer the applicant's questions about the program or the process at any time after approval for a grant has been secured. After an applicant has been approved, S.E.L.F. and the applicant will schedule an introductory conference call to discuss the program and any concerns or questions that the approved applicant may have. Upon conditional grant approval, the applicant has four weeks from that date to secure the services of an appropriate special education attorney who meets the specified professional requirements. If the Attorney does not meet the requirements, grant approval for the S.E.L.F. client/applicant will be withdrawn.