



CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES IN WISCONSIN

Helping Those Who Cannot Help Themselves

State funding for Wisconsin's civil legal services programs helps low-income individuals and families who cannot help themselves due to illness, age, abuse, disability or the complexity of their problem. The people served are:

- Victims of domestic violence and others who need protection from abuse
- Facing the loss of their home due to illegal evictions and foreclosures
- Seniors who want to live in dignity and security
- Disabled residents who need protection and advice
- Families with health and disability issues
- Veterans and service members who need a little extra help
- Children and families trying to rebuild their lives

What is "civil legal services?"

- It's not about criminal defense services or personal injury lawsuits. Civil legal services programs don't handle those types of issues.
- It is about helping the most vulnerable Wisconsin residents who need assistance with civil legal issues to protect their safety, family, housing, income and other basic necessities of life.

A Cost-Effective Investment

For every \$1 of state civil legal services appropriation funding, Wisconsin's civil legal services providers have a track record of recovering over \$10 for their clients in the form of child support, maintenance, federal benefits, security deposits and more.

Helping people resolve legal problems early also means avoiding higher costs later:

- Fewer emergency room visits, shelter stays and police calls for abuse victims,
- Higher property values for neighborhoods when unsafe living conditions are remedied or unlawful foreclosures are stopped and people can remain in their homes.
- Increased child support payments reduces the need for public benefits
- Barriers to employment are removed, reducing claims for unemployment and other benefits
- Veterans who get the benefits they're due can contribute more to our state's economy
- Children in safer, stable families can focus on learning

State funding for civil legal services pays dividends in other ways too. It helps legal services nonprofits obtain other federal and private grants, because the state's contribution can be used to meet the matching or overhead requirements of those grants.

Moving Wisconsin Forward

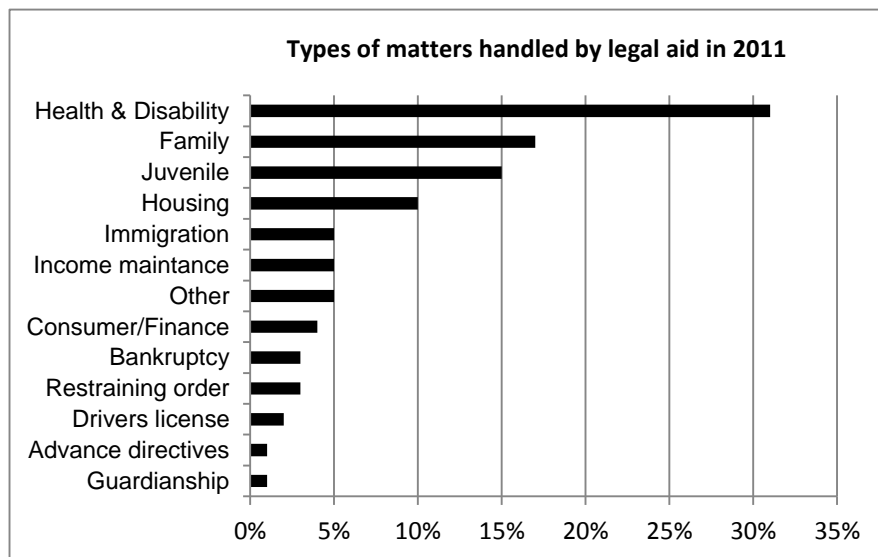
- Other Midwestern states budget an average of \$7.6 million per year for civil legal services to the indigent.
- Wisconsin is one of only four states with \$0 in the state budget for civil legal services to the indigent.

Meeting Critical Needs

Even before the recent economic downturn, more than 500,000 low-income residents regularly faced a critical civil legal problem – loss of a home or loss of income or disability benefits, for example -- without any legal assistance. Two-thirds of low-income households with children are left to cope with a critical civil legal problem without any help.

The recession has widened the justice gap. Low-income people feel the effects of recession well before the middle class and their civil legal problems begin to cascade from bad to worse as they begin to lose employment and are forced into homelessness or unsafe living situations.

The recession has also left many formerly middle-class people out of work, leading to foreclosure, bankruptcy, evictions and a host of other problems that they cannot handle alone.



Joining Other Stakeholders

A broad range of individuals and groups have made the commitment to invest time and money in access to justice. The State of Wisconsin should join them.

- Wisconsin lawyers, judges and justices pay a \$50 annual fee that provides over \$800,000 in support for civil legal services.
- Lawyers, judges, law firms and businesses contribute \$300,000 annually to the Wisconsin Equal Justice Fund.
- In 2012, Wisconsin lawyers in private practice donated over 100,000 hours of free legal service to the poor.
- The federal Legal Services Corporation provided \$4 million in 2012 to fund civil legal services programs in Wisconsin (down 17% from 2011).
- Wisconsin banks provided \$250,000 from the interest on lawyers trust accounts to the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation for grants to civil legal services organizations in 2012 (down 84% since the recession as interest rates collapsed).