

Wisconsin's Justice Gap

- More than **half a million** people in Wisconsin face significant civil legal problems without legal assistance.
- Nearly **two-thirds** of the state's poor households with children face serious civil legal issues.
- Wisconsin is **one of only three** states with no state funding for civil legal aid for the indigent.
- Half of eligible clients who seek help from legal aid programs can't be served due to a lack of resources.

Low income residents in most areas of Wisconsin have little or no access to the legal help they need to resolve even the most basic civil legal problems

What Foundations Can Do

- Encourage your grantees to consider including legal aid as an intervention in addressing your foundation's priorities.
- Identify grantees and programs that can achieve improved outcomes and reach their goals more efficiently by adding legal aid partners.
- Identify and eliminate unintended barriers that can prevent legal aid providers from becoming grantees or subgrantees.
- Encourage current grantees to investigate collaborations with legal advocates for the populations they serve.

Resources

Learn more about civil legal aid and areas of need by visiting these websites:

- Access to Justice Commission, wisatj.org
- Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation wistaf.org
- Legal Services Corporation lsc.gov
- Public Welfare Foundation publicwelfare.org/civil-legal-aid/

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EQUAL JUSTICE Strong Communities



Investing to help low-income people solve their legal problems is smart, results-oriented philanthropy.

Ensuring access to justice is essential to improving economic, social and health outcomes.

Legal aid programs are “natural allies” who complement and increase the impact of your philanthropic efforts.

What is Civil Legal Aid and Why Does it Matter?

Every day, Wisconsin residents who face complex legal problems are forced to go it alone, in court, before government agencies, in negotiations with their adversaries – that is, if they don't simply give up. Unresolved, their problems can multiply, tearing families apart and driving them further into poverty.

Civil legal aid doesn't just mean going to court. Sometimes, what's needed is help from an attorney to explain forms, rules, or rights, or to negotiate a quick resolution to a problem.

Civil legal aid groups across the state are helping to break the cycle of poverty. They use combinations of staff and volunteers to provide the appropriate level of free legal advice, advocacy and representation to low-income people, to ensure that individual rights are protected regardless of a client's ability to pay for an attorney.

Civil legal aid assures fairness for all in the justice system.



Civil legal aid is a powerful tool for empowering low-income families and building strong communities

Access to legal aid:

- Reduces emergency room visits, shelter stays, work absences and police calls for abuse victims
- Can prevent people from losing the affordable housing that your foundation has already provided funds to preserve
- Increases child support payments, reducing the need for public benefits
- Removes barriers to employment, reducing claims for unemployment and other benefits
- Stabilizes and strengthens families, so they can focus on self-sufficiency and other goals

Opportunities Abound For Strategic Investment in Civil Legal Aid

Investing in civil legal aid improves our communities in ways that are consistent with your philanthropic goals.

Many serious social and economic consequences of poverty can be alleviated by providing legal aid at critical points in people's lives.

The untapped potential of legal aid presents an incredible moment of opportunity for philanthropy.

Including legal aid as a tool in your grant-making toolbox can bring added value and complement other efforts to maximize your impact.

Studies show that:

- **\$1 million** investment in legal aid programs can yield more than:
- **\$9 million** in net benefits to their clients, saving the costs of medical care, mental health care, property damage, lost productivity, and lost quality of life.