

WISCONSIN ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

OUR MISSION

To develop and encourage means of expanding access to the civil justice system for unrepresented low-income Wisconsin residents.

CORE VALUES

Established by order of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission is responsible for developing, supporting and promoting a statewide civil legal aid delivery system that is comprehensive, integrated, efficient, accessible, effective, fair and achieves just outcomes. To accomplish our work, we must first make clear the values that form the foundation of our efforts. We adopt the following core values to guide our work in designing and supporting the implementation of initiatives to further our mission, and to promote fair and equal justice for all Wisconsinites.

- 1. Grounded In The Just Rule Of Law.** Because law forms the foundation of all civil relationships in our democratic society, all residents of the state of Wisconsin should have a meaningful ability to know of, understand, assert, enforce and defend important rights and privileges as well as sufficient information to understand and abide by their corresponding civil legal duties and obligations.
- 2. Equal Justice For All.** Our justice systems in Wisconsin are founded on constitutional principles of equal justice for all. To function fairly and effectively, justice systems must be open to and accessible by all. It must also be responsive to the unique diversity of our geography, economies and population. Geographic location, income, wealth, social status, age, disability, legal status or considerations not relevant to an individual's specific legal situation should not define the measure of a person's ability to meaningfully access and secure justice within all Wisconsin civil legal systems. Equal justice is a bedrock principle of enlightened self-government, one that originates from the notion that all power is inherent in the people, who share equal political and civil rights.
- 3. Legal Assistance Is Essential To Securing Justice.** Effective legal assistance is often necessary to enable individuals with legal problems to meaningfully assert and defend important civil legal rights and prerogatives; the lack of legal assistance not only results in the effective denial of the meaningful ability to participate in important civil legal proceedings, but often in the denial of justice itself.
- 4. The Need For A Statewide Legal Aid System.** All low income people in Wisconsin should have access to legal assistance and, where necessary, effective legal representation with respect to civil legal matters that affect important personal, family, social, cultural and economic interests. A statewide civil legal aid system is needed to ensure that such assistance and representation is meaningfully available and consistent with the justice needs of clients and low income communities, including consideration of economy and efficiency and these values. The civil legal aid system in Wisconsin should be integrated and highly coordinated, using all potential resources in the most strategic and fair manner, consistent with the overall goals and objectives developed by the Commission.

- 5. Full Range Of Civil Legal Aid Delivery Methods.** The statewide legal aid system should provide for a full range of civil legal aid delivery methods so that those in need of assistance can access the appropriate type and quality of help they need, whether it be brief information and advice, self-help, limited scope assistance, or full legal representation in all forums where rights and obligations are defined, regulated and adjudicated.
- 6. Client-Centered Priorities.** Because resources are finite, it will always to be necessary to prioritize both areas of legal need for which legal help is most critical and the types of services to be provided (respecting any legal and contractual obligations that may apply). Low income people and communities must be actively involved in defining areas of priority and focus for the delivery of civil legal aid in Wisconsin.
- 7. Accountability.** The civil legal aid system must be effective and economical in the delivery of necessary legal assistance and representation, and must be accountable to clients and client communities in need of civil legal help, the justice system and all those who provide resources to support the civil legal aid system. The Commission must also be responsive to all of its stakeholders.
- 8. Efficient, Accessible And Effective.** Wisconsin's administrative and judicial systems should be efficient, accessible and effective in enabling all participants, including low income residents, to achieve just outcomes.
- 9. Expanded Resources Are Needed.** Increased funding from a range of sources is necessary to create and sustain a statewide civil legal aid delivery system that is comprehensive, integrated, efficient, accessible, effective and fair in achieving just outcomes.

ESSENTIAL CAPACITIES

The following capacities must be developed and maintained as integral components of a statewide civil legal aid delivery system committed to ensuring that low income Wisconsin residents have access to the type and scope of civil legal help appropriate to identify and resolve important civil legal problems in an effective and economical manner.

1. Outreach and community education designed to help low income people identify and avoid legal problems and provide them with information about how to access the civil legal aid delivery system;
2. Accessible and accurate legal information on common civil legal problems;
3. Client-centered, inclusive systems for legal aid intake, advice, brief service, and referral that are accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of all low income people;
4. Effective advice, brief service, assistance with document preparation and review, and other support services for self-represented litigants;
5. Emergency legal assistance relating to issues implicating survival and safety, including domestic violence, housing loss/safety, food and denial of essential medical care;
6. Extended representation in judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings with respect to legal matters that affect important client needs, rights and interests;
7. Representation in all relevant legal forums, using all appropriate legal advocacy tools, consistent with national standards for the delivery of civil legal aid services and applicable law;
8. Continuous engagement with low income communities to identify and initiate effective responses to emerging legal problems; and
9. An infrastructure to provide effective and ongoing training, client advocacy coordination, technology planning, statewide contracting and technical support for the statewide legal aid delivery system.