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## **State Bar Urges Budget Conferees to Make Access to Justice a Wisconsin Priority**

**July 25, 2007** -- The State Bar of Wisconsin is urging legislators to adopt a 2007-09 state budget that includes \$1 million to fund essential civil legal aid services for low- and moderate-income Wisconsin residents. State Bar President Tom Basting has released the following statement in support of this provision, which is included in the Senate version of the bill:

“Poverty should not be a barrier to justice in Wisconsin, yet a study released by the State Bar in March ([Bridging the Gap: Wisconsin’s Unmet Legal Needs](#)) shows that more than 500,000 state residents routinely cope with evictions, divorces and other critical legal issues on their own. Armed with this insight, Wisconsin lawyers will play a leadership role in efforts to ensure that legal services are available to all segments of Wisconsin’s population facing serious legal problems. We already provide legal assistance to people facing criminal charges, shouldn’t we extend the same level of justice to working families, the elderly and others who face the potential loss of homes, jobs, and medical coverage?

“Lawyers have already put their wallets where their mouths are on this issue. In addition to providing over 150,000 hours of pro bono legal services annually to low- and moderate-income Wisconsin residents, members of the State Bar of Wisconsin contribute over \$1 million to support the delivery of civil legal aid services and another \$1.5 million is made available from interest on lawyers’ trust accounts. While these funds help finance various legal service programs around the state, the lack of resources currently forces them to turn away more than 50% of qualified clients. For example, this lack of resources forced one legal service organization to turn away 9,120 people who sought help last year alone.

(more)

“Other states, including our regional neighbors, already support equal access to justice for all. Ohio provides \$14 million for civil legal services, Minnesota \$12 million, and Michigan \$7 million. More than 30 states provide at least a million dollars in funding for general civil legal services. Wisconsin is the only state in the Midwest that provides **no** state funding for these essential services.

“These services should be a priority for Wisconsin lawmakers because we know they can prevent homelessness; protect victims of domestic violence and child abuse; resolve inappropriate denials of health care; challenge unscrupulous debt collection activities; develop practical child support payment plans; allow workers to keep their jobs; and help alleviate congestion in the court system.

“In his budget, the Governor proposed \$1 million to fund civil legal services in Wisconsin. This state funding, while modest when compared to the need and the record of other states, will help offset the acute need for delivery of civil legal services to Wisconsin residents. The State Bar of Wisconsin urges budget conferees and all legislators to support this crucial first step toward greater access to justice for all Wisconsin families.”

*The State Bar of Wisconsin is the mandatory professional association, created by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, for attorneys who hold a Wisconsin law license. With more than 20,000 members, the State Bar aids the courts in improving the administration of justice, provides continuing legal education for its members to help them maintain their expertise, and assists Wisconsin lawyers in carrying out community service initiatives to educate the public about the legal system and the value of lawyers. For more information, visit [www.wisbar.org](http://www.wisbar.org) or [www.legalexplorer.com](http://www.legalexplorer.com)*

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