

# Civil Legal Funding



## Civil Legal Aid Funding

Some people assume they have a constitutional “right to an attorney” but that right only applies to criminal matters. Many Wisconsin citizens struggle to find legal representation for housing, employment, family, or other matters in civil court.

Without legal assistance, thousands of Wisconsin families face a very real barrier to accessing justice, falling into the “justice gap.” Civil legal aid funding helps ensure fairness for all within the justice system, regardless of how much money an individual has.

Civil legal aid funding also has a far-reaching impact on the judicial system as a whole. When individuals have legal representation or receive proper legal advice about the legal process and their rights, it increases courtroom efficiency, reduces court crowding, and improves public confidence in our system of fair and impartial justice.

Investing in civil legal aid avoids higher costs later, making it a wise investment for Wisconsin. For every \$1 invested, Wisconsin’s civil legal aid providers obtain \$10 for their low-income clients in the form of child support, security deposits, jobs obtained, and more. Investing in civil legal aid:

- Results in fewer emergency room visits, shelter stays, and police calls for domestic abuse victims.
- Increases child support payments that reduce the need for public benefits.
- Increases job readiness and reduces unemployment claims, leading to higher tax revenue and greater self-sufficiency.
- Provides safe, stable families and homes for children so they can focus on learning.

Civil legal aid has long enjoyed broad bipartisan support for a reason: Wisconsinites believe equal justice under the law is a right, not a privilege. It



helps people of all backgrounds and ages, saving taxpayers money while ensuring equal access to justice for all.

## Federal Funding

At the federal level, funding for the [Legal Services Corporation \(LSC\)](#) provides the largest single source of funding for civil legal aid programs in Wisconsin. It allows our two Wisconsin LSC grantees, [Legal Action](#) and [Judicare](#), to serve over 10,000 low-income clients each year. Other federal agencies that provide key sources of funding for civil legal aid include the Justice Department, HUD, and the VA. Together, these funds help eligible individuals and families solve civil legal problems that help them stabilize their families, maintain safe housing, and get and keep gainful employment.

## State Funding

In the last four biennial state budgets, the Wisconsin legislature has allocated \$1 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds for legal services to TANF-eligible survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. In March of 2022, Governor Tony Evers announced a historic, one-time grant of \$8 million from federal

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coronavirus relief funds to help address the massive increase in unmet civil legal needs of Wisconsin residents resulting from the pandemic. The State Bar recognizes the potential positive impacts of this investment, but continues to advocate for future funding on a more permanent basis.

**The State Bar believes that the best way to fund civil legal needs is through sustainable, long-term budget allocations.**

Wisconsin funding for civil legal needs lags far behind our neighboring states. Commitment to regular funding for civil legal services ensures access to justice is not dependent upon one-time infusions of funds.

**The State Bar of Wisconsin supports funding for civil legal assistance to low-income individuals, providing them access to the legal system to improve economic success and stability.**

The civil legal needs of low-income individuals go largely unmet. Access to legal services removes obstacles for low-income individuals and provides full access to the courts and advocacy that is available to others in our society.

## Contact Info



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