

# MICHIGAN INDIAN LEGAL SERVICES

2005 MILS Office Locations: Traverse City and Lansing

**MILS Service Area:** Statewide

**Service Population:** 25-50,000 individuals living at or below 125% of the poverty level



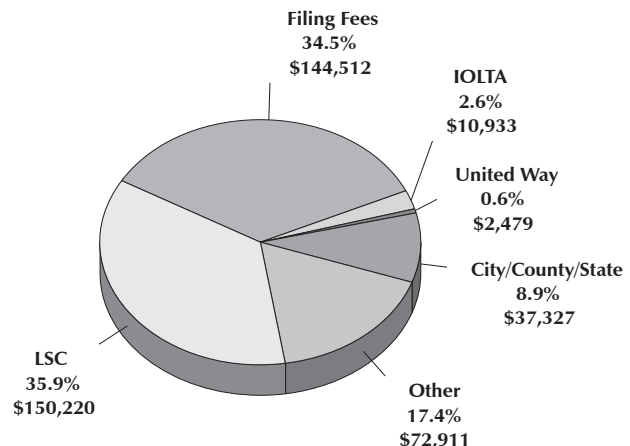
Michigan Indian Legal Services (MILS) provides civil legal services to low-income Indian individuals and tribes to further self-sufficiency, overcome discrimination, assist tribal government and preserve Indian families. MILS is engaged in work which produces long term benefits. In 2005, MILS continued to focus on legal assistance that helps Native American tribes gain federal recognition which can

MILS helped a newly recognized tribe draft a legal code to build its infrastructure. MILS attorneys researched existing tribal codes from across the country and held discussions with tribal officials to determine the needs of the community. With the legal code to provide guidance in tribal affairs, the tribe can govern itself, operate effectively and maintain justice and order within the community.

help raise their members out of poverty by providing job training, educational benefits, health care, social services and jobs. One report indicated that 49% of American Indian households in Michigan were near or below the poverty level compared to 11.3% of the total population in Michigan. Clients contact MILS through a toll free number or can reach MILS through its outreach to reservation communities, providing direct access to an attorney. During outreach events, clients can be helped on the spot with advice and counsel or receive additional follow-up services. Often, tribes allow MILS phone and Internet access, enabling MILS to use legal research, legal forms, conflict checks and other services to assist clients outside of the main MILS office. This cooperative arrangement significantly increased Michigan Indian Legal Services' efficiency and ability to provide services statewide and enhance client access to those services.

MILS represented a tribal member in a tribal court child custody case involving a non-Indian grandmother, citing the Indian Child Welfare Act because the parent, grandmother and child were living on tribal land. With legal assistance from MILS, the tribal member won custody of the child in the lower court and on appeal, thus allowing the tribal parent to keep the Native American family together.

**MILS Sources of Funding for 2005: \$ 418,382**



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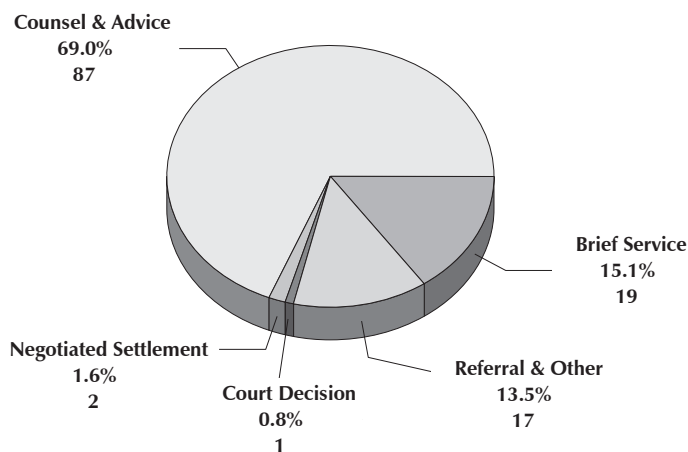
**Community Outreach and Collaboration.** MILS works closely with other agencies in the Michigan Tribal/State Partnership to improve compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and promote better care for Indian children. MILS and the Department of Human Services continue to work together to train tribal and state social workers, attorneys and others on the Indian Child Welfare Act and its purpose to keep Native American families together. Agencies and workers who work with the Indian Child Welfare Act often call upon MILS to provide expertise on the subject. MILS also collaborates with several tribes to provide legal services to tribal members locally near Petoskey, Baraga, and Wilson, and in Detroit and Grand Rapids. The MILS executive director created and moderates an electronic mailing list for Indian legal services programs nationwide. The list is used for legal advice, technology discussions and resource development efforts and has subscribers from many Indian legal services programs in the country.

Client Age	
18 & Under	2
19-59	121
60 & Over	1
Groups	2
Total	126

**Pro Bono Support.** Because of the specialized nature of MILS' work, it is difficult to engage general pro bono attorneys to assist MILS clients directly, but MILS involves the private bar whenever possible on a case by case basis. MILS utilizes the Michigan Litigation Assistance Project and the pro bono panels of Michigan Legal Services and local legal aid programs to assist MILS clients particularly concerning civil legal problems where tribal ancestry is not a significant aspect of the legal claim. MILS also encourages other Indian law practitioners to assist clients in need of pro bono services.

Client Ethnicity	
White	8
Black	0
Hispanic	0
Native American	116
Asian	0
Other	2
Total	126

MILS Types of Service in 2005



MILS Cases Closed in 2005: 126

