

# Justice For All

***“Access to justice is a dream; we must make it a reality.”***

John W. Cummiskey  
ATJ Leader (1917-2002)



The Michigan State Bar Foundation is pleased to present this “Justice For All” report about the important work supported by the IOLTA and Filing Fees funds awarded by the Foundation to civil legal aid programs (see list on page 28). The nonprofit programs profiled in these pages help low-income families throughout Michigan stay safe from family violence, prevent homelessness, access medical care, obtain child support and resolve other critical legal needs.

In 2006, more than 52,000 cases were closed by legal aid programs in housing, family, income, consumer and other areas in which low-income clients face legal problems. These programs also handle many non-case “matters” that help clients avoid problems or seek community solutions through brochures and educational sessions on legal topics, information on web sites, self-help assistance, and training to help staff at other nonprofits spot legal issues and direct clients earlier to assistance to keep problems from becoming more serious. They also support pro bono programs which facilitated more than 42,000 hours of free legal help to low-income persons from volunteer lawyers in 2006.

These agencies provide services that reach every county in Michigan, with 88% of cases resolved without the need to go to court or to other forums. 64% of clients received legal advice and counsel to help prevent or solve problems; 17% received brief services such as completing forms, making calls to resolve disputes or reviewing documents; 7% were referred to human service providers or to others providing the legal services they needed; and 12% were represented in litigation, negotiated settlements or administrative processes.

Legal aid programs also leverage limited resources through cooperation and innovation, including participating in state planning; collaborating on statewide technology, pro bono and fundraising strategies; working together in joint telephone hotline systems; assisting with and sharing training opportunities; and working with community legal assistance centers. They also partner with the Foundation and the State Bar of Michigan on the Access to Justice Campaign to raise endowment and operating funds for civil legal aid for the poor (see [www.atjfund.org](http://www.atjfund.org)).

Despite these remarkable efforts, the need still far outpaces available resources. More than 1.3 million persons in Michigan qualify for free legal assistance because their income is below 125% of the federal poverty level, or about \$21,000 per year for a family of three. For every four indigent persons served, Michigan legal aid programs must turn away three because of insufficient resources to help them. This illustrates the continuing importance of IOLTA, Filing Fees and other funding that supports the services provided every day to those in need by Michigan’s civil legal aid programs.