

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 presents this “Justice For All” report to illustrate the important work supported by IOLTA and Filing Fees funds awarded by the Foundation to civil legal aid programs. These nonprofit agencies closed more than 53,000 cases in 2007, helping low-income families throughout Michigan stay safe from family violence, prevent homelessness, access medical care, obtain child support and resolve other critical civil legal needs.

Legal aid programs also handle many non-case matters that help clients avoid legal problems or prevent them from getting worse, such as publishing materials, providing information on web sites, conducting educational sessions on legal topics and training staff in other nonprofits to spot legal issues to be able to direct their clients to assistance earlier. These agencies also support pro bono programs which facilitated more than 36,000 hours of free legal help to low-income persons from volunteer lawyers in 2007.

Reaching every county in Michigan, the legal aid programs profiled in this report handled 89% of cases without going to court or to other forums. 67% of those served got legal advice and counsel to help mitigate or solve problems; 16% received brief services (such as completing forms, making calls to resolve disputes or reviewing documents); 6% were referred to human service providers or to others providing the legal services they needed; and 11% were represented in litigation, negotiated settlements or administrative processes.

Legal aid programs also participate in state planning; collaborate on statewide technology, pro bono and fundraising strategies; work together in joint telephone hotline systems; share training opportunities with each other; and work 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. To donate, see www.atjfund.org.

These efforts provide high quality services for many people who would otherwise have no where to turn. But the need still far outpaces available resources. Nearly 2.5 million persons in Michigan qualify for free legal assistance because their income is below 200% of the federal poverty level, or about \$28,000 per year for a family of two. A 2005 study found that for every four indigent persons served, Michigan legal aid programs must turn away three because of insufficient resources to help them. This emphasizes the continuing importance of IOLTA, Filing Fees and other funding to assure that Michigan’s civil legal aid agencies can continue to make a difference every day for vulnerable populations. The Michigan State Bar Foundation is pleased to help support these services through grants to nonprofit civil legal aid programs for the critically important work highlighted in this report.