

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 highlighting the important work supported by IOLTA and Filing Fees funds awarded by the Foundation to nonprofit civil legal aid programs. These agencies closed more than 53,000 cases in 2008, helping low-income families in every county in Michigan.

With help from legal aid programs, indigent families throughout the state were able to stay safe from family violence, avoid homelessness, access medical care, obtain child support and address other critical legal needs. The agencies profiled in this report handled 85% of cases outside of court or other forums, with 69% receiving legal advice and counsel to help mitigate or solve problems; 16% benefitting from limited action (such as completing forms, making calls to resolve disputes or reviewing documents); 11% being represented in litigation, negotiated settlements or administrative processes, and 4% obtaining other extensive services.

Legal aid programs also handle many non-case matters that help clients avoid legal problems or prevent the problems from getting worse, such as publishing educational materials, providing information on web sites, conducting 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 37,000 hours of free legal help to low-income persons from volunteer lawyers in 2008.

These programs also 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 partner with the Foundation and the State Bar of Michigan on the Access to Justice Campaign to raise endowment and operating funds for legal aid (to make a donation, see www.atjfund.org). Through a grantee input process, these agencies helped the Foundation identify priority needs for a special 2008 grant cycle to support statewide strategies, such as statewide support for immigration legal services to the poor and a seven program collaborative foreclosure assistance project reaching all parts of the state.

Over 3 million persons in Michigan qualified for free legal assistance in 2008 because their income was below 200% of the federal poverty level (\$28,000 per year for a family of two). For every four indigent persons served, Michigan legal aid programs must turn away three others because of insufficient resources. This emphasizes the importance of IOLTA, Filing Fees and other funding to help Michigan’s civil legal aid agencies keep making a difference for vulnerable populations. The Foundation is pleased to support these services through grants to nonprofit civil legal aid programs for the critically important work illustrated in this report.