

MICHIGAN INDIAN LEGAL SERVICES

2008 MILS Office Locations: Traverse City and Dexter

MILS Service Area: Statewide

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



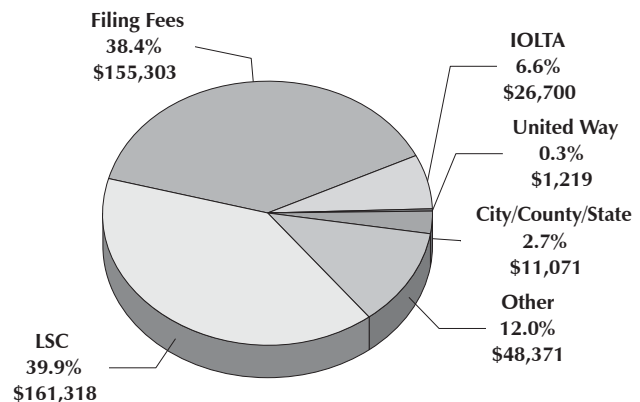
MILS provides civil legal services to low income Indian individuals and tribes to further self sufficiency, overcome discrimination, assist tribal government and preserve Indian families. MILS has offices in Dexter and Traverse City and uses a toll-free number to take client calls and transfer them directly to an MILS staff attorney in either office.

A child living in Michigan was denied further medical assistance under the Medicaid program because she was born in Canada. After MILS documented that the child was over 50% Indian and presented legal research that this blood quantum made the child eligible under the law, the child was approved for the continued medical assistance she needed under the Medicaid program.

MILS attorneys travel to reservations and urban Indian centers to assist clients. Tribes provide MILS with use of their telephone line or Internet connection so MILS can use technology to more efficiently provide statewide services and immediately help clients while meeting with them in the field. In 2008 MILS successfully argued two cases in the Michigan Court of Appeals that significantly advanced the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in Michigan. Also in 2008, MILS began a pilot project to provide criminal representation in one tribal court using a funding source directed for that purpose. The criminal defense project is significant because tribes are not required to provide attorneys for indigent defendants in tribal court because the US Bill of Rights is not binding on tribal courts.

In 2008, MILS won a significant victory in the Michigan Court of Appeals for an Indian mother who had consented to a temporary guardianship for her child. She soon tried to terminate the arrangement, but the guardians sought sole custody of the child. The appellate court found that the trial court erred in failing to return the child when the mother revoked her consent to the guardianship, as is permitted under the ICWA, and the mother and child were reunited.

MILS Sources of Funding for 2008: \$ 403,982



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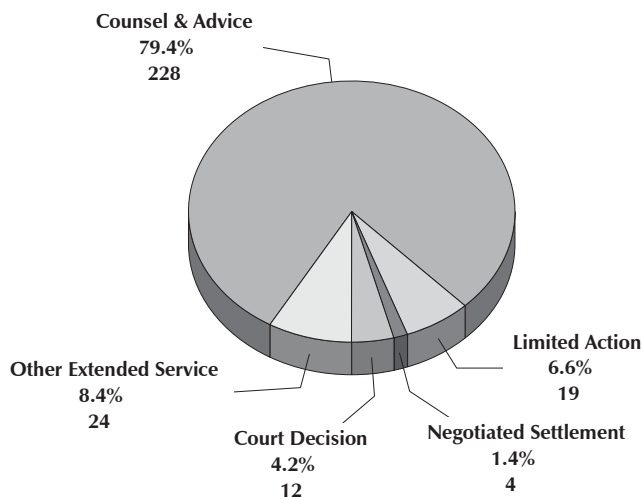
Community Outreach and Collaboration. MILS continues to partner with other agencies in the Michigan Tribal/State Partnership which gathers state and tribal social workers from most tribes and many county Family Independence Agencies to discuss ways to improve compliance under the ICWA and encourage better care for Indian children. Various human services agencies and staff often rely on MILS to provide expertise when issues arise concerning the removal of Native American children from their homes and families. MILS and the Department of Human Services continue to work together to train tribal and state social workers and attorneys on the operation of the ICWA. MILS has published an online manual on the ICWA and also distributes a paper brochure on the ICWA. The MILS executive director is a founding member of the Legal Services Computer Committee and MILS has participated in a number of projects for the LSCC, including the Pika Case Management System project.

Client Age	
18 & Under	1
19-59	267
60 & Over	16
Groups	3
Total	287

Pro Bono Support. Because of the specialized nature of MILS' work, it is not always possible to engage general pro bono attorneys to assist MILS clients directly. Typically, MILS encourages other Indian law practitioners to assist clients in need of pro bono services. On occasion, MILS seeks advice and counsel from the Michigan Litigation Assistance Partnership Program (MI-LAPP) and pro bono programs of the American Bar Association. Two MILS attorneys provide pro bono services at a weekly clinic at the Third Level Crisis Center in Traverse City. MILS receives financial donations from attorneys through the Access to Justice Fund.

Client Ethnicity	
White	17
Black	3
Hispanic	1
Native American	260
Asian	0
Other	6
Total	287

MILS Types of Service in 2008



MILS Cases Closed in 2008: 287

