

MICHIGAN LEGAL SERVICES

MLS Office Location: Detroit

MLS Service Area: Statewide

Service Population: 1,532,175 individuals living at or below 125% of the poverty level



In 1996, MLS conducted eight task force meetings for legal services attorneys around the state in the areas of public benefits and housing law; approximately 50 program staff from across the state attended. MLS also produced training materials and information concerning updates in the

law for legal services programs. During 1996 MLS provided support to field programs through Task Forces, trainings, and individual advice on cases or issues. MLS also co-counseled cases and projects

with field program staff. Form pleadings produced in mini-trainings at Task Force meetings helped reduce duplication of efforts. MLS also engaged in litigation and advocacy to address legal issues related to homelessness, hunger, and health and mental health care as well as activities on behalf of client groups, such as efforts to make the reverted housing inventory available to low income families and non-profit groups. IOLTA and Filing Fees funding were critical to the continued operation of MLS in the wake of a 100% cut in 1996 federal funding for MLS.

Approximately 70 residents of a single room occupancy hotel were threatened with lock-outs as a result of condemnation and land clearance activities for a major city redevelopment project. MLS intervened to assure occupants' rights to relocation assistance payments and secured payments for each household, providing some income to these residents to assist them with resettlement.

To benefit from a winter shut-off prevention plan, more than 5,000 AFDC recipients were required to participate in a program offered by a gas utility provider who installed high efficiency gas furnaces. The furnaces produced dangerous fumes which could back draft into homes. MLS assisted private counsel by filing an amicus brief to successfully establish a class in order to require the utility provider to correct the venting problems with these furnaces for all recipients required to participate in the program.

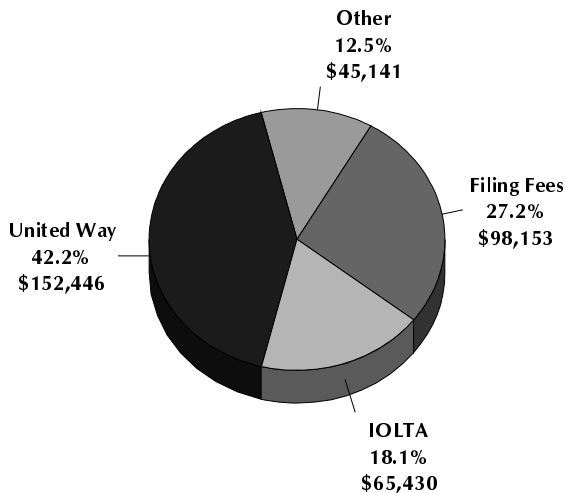
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Community Outreach and Collaboration. In 1996, MLS conducted specialized trainings for various client groups, such as public housing residents, homeless services and emergency shelter providers. In June, 1996, MLS trained at a Housing Preservation Conference for legal services attorneys and housing advocates in the Midwest. MLS also presented a training to 500 public housing residents concerning their relocation rights to help the tenants to make better choices among relocation options and negotiate to protect their opportunities to live in affordable and safe housing. For years MLS has also collaborated with a number of community-based and state-wide organizations. Projects with these organizations vary from representing them in court actions as plaintiffs or as amici to working on joint approaches to advocacy at local, state and federal levels, and developing referral networks for shared resources to better serve client needs.

Pro Bono Support. Private Attorneys have been intensively involved in most of the major litigation of MLS in either amicus or co-counsel efforts. This model is not traditional. Attorneys are not enrolled in an on-going panel which accepts cases, but instead are selected and encouraged to participate based upon background, skill and likely interest in the issues litigated for particular cases. Pro bono attorneys and their firms have made substantial contributions of time and resources which has been critical for addressing major cases requiring extensive discovery. This has assisted MLS in handling complex individual or class litigation which affects thousands of persons. Accordingly, MLS does not track the number or demographics of individual clients because the cases often benefit many. For example, some 5,000 persons were assisted by MLS' work in the winter protection plan case reported on the previous page.

MLS Sources of Funding for 1996: \$ 361,170



MLS Funding

