

# MICHIGAN POVERTY LAW PROGRAM

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MPLP Office Locations: Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids

**Service Area:** Statewide

**Service Population:** Legal services programs in Michigan



1997 was the first year for MPLP, which is a partnership of the Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project, the University of Michigan Law School, and Legal Services of Southeastern Michigan created to provide support services to legal services programs and other advocates throughout

the state. MPLP's services include case consultation, substantive law task forces, publications, training sessions, a brief bank, technology support, legislative tracking and advocacy, and direct representation on statewide issues. During 1997, MPLP responded to more than 200 requests for assistance, established an effective task force system, published more than 100 issue alerts, and planned or participated as trainers in more than 10 major training events attended by about 700 participants. In 1997, MPLP hired staff, located office space, established an advisory board, developed a budgeting system and budgets, and determined program priorities, case acceptance policies, and case procedures. MPLP convened task forces in four areas: housing, public benefits, family law, and technology. MPLP also constructed its web site.

MPLP participated with other agencies in responding when hundreds of children lost disability (SSI) benefits in Michigan. Results included the Social Security Administration reissuing notices of denials so families could appeal and establishing a toll-free number (listed on the denial notices) for families to seek assistance and be referred to local lawyers. More than 100 pro bono lawyers were trained to represent these children. MPLP staff also represented SSI kids from referrals throughout the state.

The Michigan Hemophilia Foundation asked MPLP to assist individual low-income class members in a national class action lawsuit filed to obtain money damages for hemophiliacs who had received HIV-tainted blood products. Specifically, MPLP was asked to advise low-income class members about how accepting various settlement options would affect their eligibility for continued assistance such as Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid benefits. MPLP East staff members participated in panel discussions open to all class members and then consulted with individual clients and their attorneys.

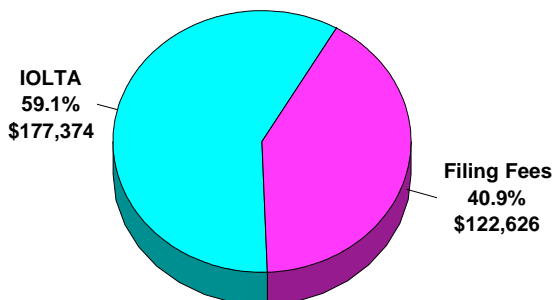
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**Community Outreach and Collaboration.** Through improved training, information sharing, and case-specific support, MPLP has worked to create greater local program advocacy capacity throughout the state. In addition to these improvements in direct advocacy, there is a stronger statewide voice on important issues affecting low-income people. MPLP hosted the first legal services "roadshow" since 1990. More than 60 advocates from across the state attended this four-day training event. MPLP also visited eight regional legal service providers to discuss MPLP's available services. Among other materials, MPLP published a major revision of the *Michigan Residential Landlord Tenant* (3rd ed.). MPLP also participated in national discussions about provision of legal aid. Through its outreach efforts, MPLP identified two unmet service needs: consumer law and elder law. MPLP planned to better address these needs across the state. Legal aid staff and pro bono lawyers served on MPLP's task forces and advisory board. MPLP also developed its website so that advocates from around the state can access MPLP information and services.

**Pro Bono Support.** MPLP worked with the State Bar to develop and support the Michigan Litigation Assistance Partnership Program (MI-LAPP), which refers complex cases and matters to large law firms recruited statewide. These cases included those that federally funded programs are no longer permitted to handle or for which they do not have sufficient resources. In 1997, MI-LAPP recruited three large firms and referred about 15 cases. MPLP also helped plan the "Kids SSI" program, which has recruited and trained pro bono lawyers to handle appeals from terminations of Supplemental Security Income benefits to children due to 1996 changes in the federal children's disability standard. These programs developed significant new pro bono resources and were the first to approach pro bono needs from a statewide perspective.

**MPLP Sources of Funding for 1997: \$ 300,000**



**MPLP Funding**

