

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legal Assistance Relief Fund will expand access to legal aid in Unemployment benefits cases

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Legal aid organizations across Michigan recently received funding to help individuals seeking legal assistance in unemployment benefits cases. The Unemployment Legal Assistance Relief Fund (Relief Fund) is administered by the Michigan State Bar Foundation (MSBF) and was created through recent class action settlements. MSBF provides leadership and grants to improve access to the justice system and supports Michigan's civil legal aid programs.

With the creation of a Relief Fund, more help is available to provide free legal advice and representation for unemployment insurance claimants across Michigan. MSBF distributed Relief Fund dollars to several longstanding legal assistance programs as part of a pilot program that expands access to free legal aid in unemployment cases. Lakeshore Legal Aid's Counsel & Advocacy Law Line (CALL), the Michigan Advocacy Program (MAP), Legal Aid of Eastern Michigan (LSEM), Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM), and The Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice have collaborated to ensure that assistance is available for claimants in every Michigan county.

Michigan's legal aid organizations provide free civil legal help for those unable to afford an attorney. Unlike in criminal cases, attorneys aren't provided for low-income parties in civil cases, including public benefits cases, such as unemployment insurance. The need for affordable legal assistance continues to outpace the attorneys and funding available to assist Michigan individuals and families. The recently distributed Unemployment Relief Fund dollars will help ensure that more unemployment claimants receive the assistance they need.

Any individual seeking legal assistance with an unemployment benefits case should contact CALL at (888) 783-8190 to speak with an attorney. If needed, CALL will refer cases to its partner legal aid programs for additional advice or representation. CALL's free legal hotline and triage services are available Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 9am-5 pm; Wednesdays from 9am-6pm; and Fridays from 9am to 1pm.