

2024

Annual Report



ENSURING ACCESS AND FAIRNESS FOR ALL IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Campaign Leadership

We are grateful for the attorneys who have volunteered their time, expertise and unwavering dedication to increasing resources for civil legal aid programs in Michigan.

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Letter from the Presidents

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The Access to Justice (ATJ) Campaign is a critical source of funding for Michigan's civil legal aid programs. Through your generosity, thousands of low-income Michiganders have received the legal assistance they need to stabilize their lives. We are pleased to share the 2024 ATJ Campaign Annual Report, highlighting the progress made in advancing access to justice across our state.

In 2024, contributions from the legal community totaled \$1.23 million, a 2.5% increase from 2023. We are especially proud to report that 44 law firms across Michigan committed to contributing at least \$300 per attorney to the ATJ Campaign. This strong show of support demonstrates the legal community's deep commitment to Michigan's legal aid programs and the vulnerable clients those programs serve.

This support helped legal aid programs to provide critical legal assistance in over 48,000 cases. Legal aid organizations worked tirelessly to prevent evictions, protect survivors of domestic violence, safeguard seniors and veterans from financial exploitation, and remove barriers to employment. This helped to ensure income stability and security for vulnerable individuals and families. Data demonstrates that legal aid attorneys improve outcomes for our most vulnerable neighbors.

The ATJ Campaign's goal is to increase both the number of attorneys contributing and the average amount of the contribution. In 2024, only 11.2% of Michigan's attorneys contributed to the Campaign. If every Michigan attorney contributed the State Bar of Michigan Voluntary Pro Bono standard recommended minimum of \$300, the total amount raised by the ATJ campaign would increase tenfold. What a difference that would make for the legal aid organizations across Michigan and the clients they serve!

Your continued support of the ATJ Campaign moves the legal system towards achieving the goal of equal access to justice. On behalf of the State Bar of Michigan, the Michigan State Bar Foundation, our volunteer committees, and staff, thank you for your ongoing commitment and contributions to the ATJ campaign.

With sincere appreciation,



Craig H. Lubben
President
Michigan State Bar Foundation



Joseph P. McGill
President
State Bar of Michigan

Campaign Results



Based on the number of active Michigan attorneys, the per attorney average giving rate was **\$36**

thank you
to our supporters who raised
\$1.23 million
for civil legal aid
throughout
Michigan



\$457,533

Total amount of cy pres awards to the MSBF and the ATJ Campaign



44

leadership firms contributed \$300 - \$1000 per attorney

62

Law Firms and Corporate Legal Departments gave at tiered levels between \$1,000 and \$100,000

3,804

Number of Michigan Attorneys who contributed to the Campaign

Needs and Comprehensive Services

In 2024, approximately **1.7 million** low-income Michigan residents qualified for civil legal aid. Financial contributions distributed to the 14 participating programs helped over **103,150 people in households including 40,431 children.**



Partnerships

154
non profits
served

Private attorneys

Private attorneys play a vital role in expanding access to justice by partnering with legal aid organizations.

Services provided

Brief Assistance/Advice = **32,816**

Full Representation = **15,248**

48,064 *Total Cases*

Number of cases referred

1,853

Total number of hours

16,603

Legal Aid in Action

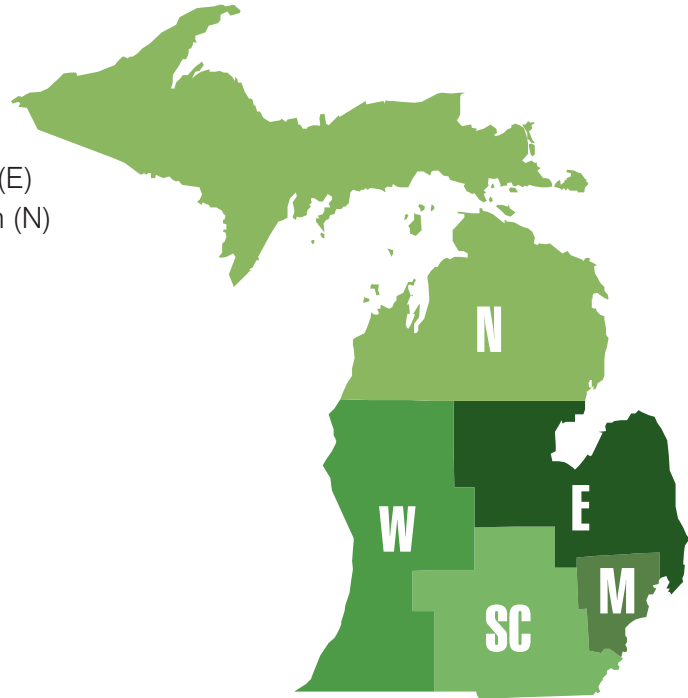
The work of Michigan's civil legal aid programs is essential to ensuring access to justice for low-income individuals and families. Thanks to the generous support of the legal community, we were able to expand the resources available to the following legal aid organizations.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

- Lakeshore Legal Aid (M)
- Legal Aid of Western Michigan (W)
- Legal Services of Eastern Michigan (E)
- Legal Services of Northern Michigan (N)
- Michigan Advocacy Program (SC)
- Michigan Legal Services (M)

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

- Counsel and Advocacy Law Line
- Farmworker Legal Services
- Michigan Community Resources
- Michigan Elder Justice Initiative
- Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
- Michigan Indian Legal Services
- Michigan Legal Help Program
- Michigan Poverty Law Program



Amplifying the Work



Legal Aid of Western Michigan staff attorney, Aaron Bainbridge, presenting to partner agency staffers at the Heart of West Michigan United Way in Grand Rapids.



Michigan Indian Legal Services attended the Administration of Native Americans National Conference.



Legal Services of Northern Michigan (LSNM) staff attorney, Regan Richards, assisting a community member at LSNM's Free Divorce Clinic in Grayling, Michigan.



Lakeshore Legal Aid staff at the Equal Justice Conference, hosted in Detroit Michigan.

CLIENT SUCCESS STORIES



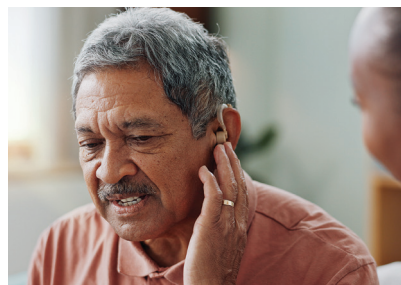
After a sudden rent hike of more than 32%, a single mother of three, called Legal Aid for help. She lived in subsidized housing and the increase was based on a child support order that was inconsistently paid and not reliable. In addition, the apartment did not provide the required 30 day notice of the rent increase. Legal Aid assisted her in writing a letter, explaining that proper notice was not given and the circumstances regarding child support. The management company agreed, rent was adjusted back to a level she could afford, and she was able to remain in her home.

Legal Aid helped a veteran with significant health challenges secure his Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits after an initial denial. The veteran, a former welder, struggled with cognitive impairments from a head injury, heightened sensitivities that made crowds and driving overwhelming, and other related conditions that severely limited his ability to work. After a hearing, benefits were awarded retroactive to 2022. The decision provided him with financial stability.



A father reached out to Legal Aid to ensure the safety of his child by seeking full custody while his mother struggled with substance abuse. Legal Aid helped him secure full custody of the child, and recognizing the undeniable love the mother had for the child, a parental visitation plan was established with increased parental time as long as she could maintain her sobriety and treatment. A social worker at Legal Aid supported the visitation by arranging for a car seat to avoid transportation barriers and ensure the safety of the child. Both parents received co-parenting guidance, empowering them to navigate their new roles as parents, while prioritizing their child's well-being.

Legal Aid provided legal assistance to an older man with a hearing impairment, who was at risk of losing his healthcare benefits and land. When his home was destroyed in a devastating fire he was forced to move into an apartment but because of the land, was later deemed to have multiple residences disqualifying him for Medicaid. In addition, the local Township assessed his fire-damaged house as a dangerous structure and planned to demolish it at his expense. The bill for the demolition was one he could not afford. With the assistance provided by Legal Aid, he was able to sell his property and invest the sale proceeds. As a result, his Medicaid benefits were restored and his future protected.



Quote from client

"My lawyer... was an amazing lawyer and I'm very grateful to have had her represent me! She was very professional, and articulated everything to me so I had a clear understanding of what was going on, what to expect, and constantly made sure I understood everything!...Words can't explain the joy I had when everything worked out in our favor!"

Investing in Justice

“

At Miller Canfield, we believe that access to justice should never depend on income. Our longstanding support of the Access to Justice Fund reflects our deep commitment to pro bono service and our responsibility as legal professionals to help close the justice gap. We are proud to stand with Michigan's legal community in ensuring that more individuals and families can receive the legal help they need—when they need it most.”

Michael Palizzi, CEO, Miller Canfield



“

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Corporate Counsel supports the ATJ Campaign because community service and helping people is a very important part of what we do every day. I believe it is our responsibility as a corporate citizen to get more corporate legal departments to contribute to the Access to Justice Fund. It's an opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of those who need access to justice, ensuring that our legal system works for everyone. It is an embodiment of why I became an attorney in the first place—to help people that need it.

*Nicole M. Wotlinski
Vice President, Deputy General Counsel,
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan*



“

I can't imagine the stress of trying to represent myself in a matter that involves one of the most important aspects of my life such as my children or my home. The legal system is complicated - even for those of us who have gone to law school. Legal aid programs do a fantastic job of helping the most vulnerable people in our community navigate that complicated process. But the number of clients who need civil legal services, far outweighs the capacity of the legal aid programs. I feel a deep sense of responsibility to do what I can to help bridge that gap.

Melissa Neckers, Miller Johnson



”

2024 Events



(L to R) Charles Borgsdorf, Elizabeth Janovic and Jennifer Engelhardt at the Access to Justice Holiday Social, hosted by Goethel Engelhardt in Ann Arbor.



(L to R) Matt Vicari, Richard Hillary, Justice Elizabeth Welch, Craig Lubben, Thomas Behm, Jennifer Bentley at the 2024 One Billable Luncheon in Grand Rapids.



(L to R) Thomas Behm, Pam Cross, Paul McCarthy, Suanne Watt Stay, Tom Kuiper and Matt Wikander at the West Michigan Happy Hour hosted by Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge in Grand Rapids.

2024 ATJ Campaign Leadership Firms

Thank you to the 44 leadership Firms.

The tiers reflect the per attorney amount given to the ATJ Campaign by firms in 2024.

\$1,000 and above per attorney

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The Googasian Firm
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in **all legal matters**
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