

CIVIL LEGAL AID IN MICHIGAN

2025 Grantee Services Report

The Michigan State Bar Foundation (MSBF) provides leadership and grants to improve access for all in the justice system, including support for civil legal aid, law-related education and conflict resolution. The report explores Michigan's civil legal aid infrastructure and highlights essential services and outcomes made possible through MSBF funding. It serves as a resource for policy makers and constituents, particularly those living below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Civil Legal Needs in Michigan

The Foundation distributes annual operating grants, a critical source of funding, to Legal Aid programs to address the legal challenges faced by thousands of low-income households.



Approximately **1.7 million** **low-income** residents qualified for legal aid in Michigan.



\$40,188 annual household income for a **family of four** living below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines.



One legal aid attorney available for every **4,785** **eligible people** in Michigan.

Legal Aid Service Areas

MSBF distributed operating grants to **10 Legal Aid programs** across the state of Michigan.

Regional Programs

- Lakeshore Legal Aid
- Legal Aid of Western Michigan
- Legal Services of Eastern Michigan
- Legal Services of Northern Michigan
- Michigan Advocacy Program
- Michigan Legal Services

Statewide Programs

- Counsel and Advocacy Law Line
- Michigan Indian Legal Services
- Michigan Poverty Law Program
- Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services



For Help with Civil Legal Matters, Contact:

Michigan Legal Help www.michiganlegalhelp.org or *in Spanish* www.michiganlegalhelp.org/es
Counsel and Advocacy Law Line: (888) 783-8190

A Continuum of Services for Constituents

The Legal Aid programs coordinate services through a statewide network to assist and resolve the legal challenges faced by clients.



Michigan Legal Help Program (MLH), an online clearinghouse, is a resource that provides information on legal topics, links to forms and other self help resources. The website includes a triage and referral function through the Guide to Legal Help, a step-by-step tool directing constituents to the right resources.

In 2025, MLH had nearly 1.82 million unique visitors to its website www.michiganlegalhelp.org.



Counsel and Advocacy Law Line (CALL) is a statewide attorney staffed hotline for low-income households. CALL attorneys advise on civil matters including housing, public benefits, consumer law, domestic relations, and unemployment benefits. It provides advice to individuals and direct referrals to Legal Aid organizations.

In 2025, CALL provided legal advice and referrals for 14,457 closed cases.



Nonprofit civil legal aid organizations provide representation in complex cases and other matters requiring an attorney. Integrated within their communities, these programs work with community partners to identify people who need legal help. They also provide the infrastructure that enables volunteer attorneys to deliver pro bono services.

In 2025, private attorneys contributed 16,657 hours of pro bono assistance to low-income clients.

49,419 CLOSED CASES

A breakdown of the total number of cases closed by the Legal Aid programs funded by the Foundation.

CASES COMPLETED BY CASE TYPE

Ensuring housing stability and preventing the loss of a home	26,605
Assuring safety for families, particularly survivors in domestic relation matters	7,893
Protecting rights, including estate planning for older adults	4,963
Protecting household income from unscrupulous creditors in consumer related cases	3,847
Removing barriers to employment and protecting individual rights	3,447
Helping individuals, primarily individuals with disabilities secure federal benefits and other income assistance	1,754
Protecting rights and assuring fairness on other miscellaneous matters	910

CASES COMPLETED BY LEVEL OF SERVICE

Counsel and advice	23,883
Negotiated settlements after court filings	11,263
Brief assistance	8,918
Administrative and court decisions	4,254
Other extended services	900
Negotiated settlements pre-court filings	201

Civil Legal Aid in Action: Transforming Vulnerable Populations

Low-income households and families receive critical legal assistance to resolve the legal challenges that affect their daily livelihoods and ensure a better quality of life.

Who was Helped? A Demographic Snapshot



103,784 people in households including 44,894 children

Ethnicity of Clients



Caucasian (non-hispanic) - 35%
Black (non-hispanic) - 54%
Hispanic - 5%
Asian - 1%
Native American - 1%
Other/Unknown - 4%



Seniors
10,007



Veterans
1,477

Stories of Impact: Behind the Numbers

Maintaining Housing Stability for a Veteran



Victor, a military veteran, faced eviction from his subsidized housing due to a dispute over unpaid rent and failure to complete required recertification paperwork. Although Victor had submitted the necessary documentation and the Department of Veterans Affairs offered to assist in resolving the issue, the landlord moved forward with eviction proceedings. Legal Aid worked with Victor and the VA to negotiate a resolution that restored his tenancy, preserved his affordable rent, and waived additional fees. With legal representation, Victor was able to remain in his home and avoid eviction.

Restoring Financial Security

After suffering a stroke, Jackie became severely disabled and moved into long-term care. During the transition to a new facility, her Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (RSDI) benefits were discontinued, threatening the financial security she depended on to meet her basic needs. A long-term care ombudsman referred Jackie to Legal Aid. Legal Aid investigated her case and filed an appeal demonstrating good cause. Her case was reopened and Jackie was awarded her full RSDI benefits and nearly \$18,000 in retroactive payments, providing the financial stability needed to support her ongoing care and daily needs.



2025 Successful Case Outcomes

Legal aid programs achieved **positive outcomes in 97.34% of all legal matters** when clients received legal representation.



98.83%
HOUSING MATTERS



92.12%
FAMILY CASES



95.65%
EXPUNGEMENT



90.91%
UNEMPLOYMENT

Investing in Access to Justice Across Michigan

The Foundation provides funding for civil legal aid and access to justice initiatives across Michigan.

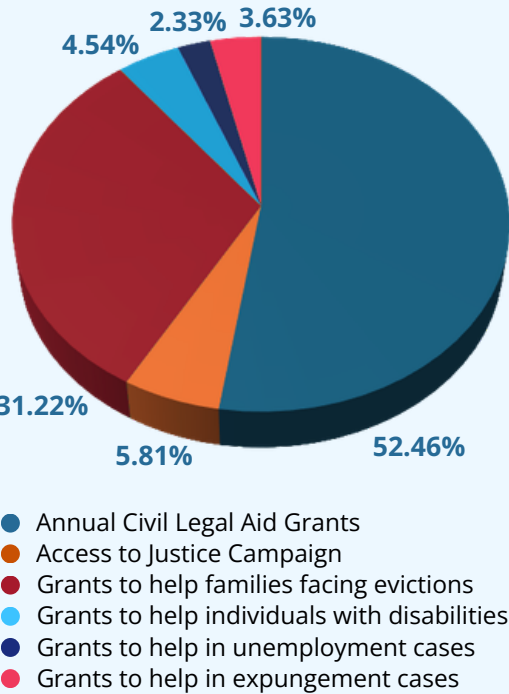
Civil Legal Aid Grants

Annual operating grants totaling **\$10.8 million** funded through the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) Program and a portion of Filing Fees pursuant to MCLA 600.1485.

Access to Justice (ATJ) Campaign

In 2025, the legal community raised approximately **\$1.2 million** including cy pres awards to support legal aid programs. The ATJ Campaign is a statewide, collaborative fundraising effort administered by the Michigan State Bar Foundation (MSBF) and operated in partnership with the State Bar of Michigan (SBM), to increase resources for 14 civil legal aid programs across the state. 100% of the donations received are distributed to the participating programs based on poverty populations and need.

\$20.6 million invested in civil legal aid



Special Grant Initiatives

Funds administered by the Foundation from MSHDA and MDHHS



\$6,446,893
Families facing evictions



\$937,500
Individuals with disabilities



\$480,769
Unemployment claims and cases



\$750,000
Expungement cases



Administration of Justice Grants

The Foundation also funds innovative projects to improve the administration of justice. Project grants totaling **\$421,354** were awarded to the following legal aid programs.

- Autism Alliance of Michigan - \$50,000
- Citizens for Prison's Reform - \$30,000
- Freedom House - Detroit - \$15,000
- Justice Speaks Legal Aid - \$52,500
- Legal Aid of Western Michigan - \$33,854
- Michigan Legal Help - \$160,000
- Michigan Community Resources - \$80,000

2025-2026 Leadership

Officers

President
Craig H. Lubben
Vice President
Hon. Victoria A. Roberts
Treasurer
Richard K. Rappleye
Secretary
Thomas R. Behm

Ex-officio

Chief Justice Megan K. Cavanagh
Michigan Supreme Court
Lisa J. Hamameh, President
State Bar of Michigan
Erika L. Bryant, President-Elect
State Bar of Michigan

Directors

Heidi A. Alcock	Hon. William B. Murphy	Richard A. Soble
Thomas W. Cranmer	Michael L. Pitt	Jeffery V. Stuckey
Steven G. Howell	Lee B. Reimann	Nicole M. Wotlinski
Jason P. Klingensmith	Robert F. Riley	

MSBF Staff

Jennifer S. Bentley, *Executive Director*
Traci Thrana Kuiper, *Chief Financial Officer*
Devon Meier, *Chief Development Officer*
Eleanor H. Avsharian, *Director of IOLTA and Special Initiatives*
Mary Gladstone-Highland, *Director of Grants*
Efua K. Hayford-Wilson, *Manager of Communications*
Michelle Maier, *Finance Associate*
Katie Pike, *Impact Gifts Manager*
Liz Sempsrott, *Executive Assistant*
Kiera Tierney, *Development Associate*