






**PROGRAM DIRECTORS:**

**Cody Nelson** | Anishinabe Legal Services   
**Jean Lastine** | Central MN Legal Services   
**Floyd Pnewski** | Judicare of Anoka County  
**Dori Streit** | Legal Aid Service of Northeastern MN 



**PROGRAM DIRECTORS:**

**Anne Hoefgen** | Legal Services of Northwest MN   
**Drew Schaffer** | Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid  
**Jessie Nicholson** | Southern MN Regional Legal Services 

April 29, 2021

***SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY***

Chair Warren Limmer, Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee  
Chair Carlos Mariani, House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee  
Judiciary Conference Committee, Minnesota Legislature

**RE: Funding Civil Legal Services in Minnesota**

Dear Chair Limmer and Chair Mariani:

We write as the executive leaders of the civil legal aid law firms that comprise the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition (“the Coalition”).<sup>1</sup> We represent families and individuals in every county in Minnesota, protecting their most basic civil legal rights and needs. We write this letter to outline the necessity of the funding we requested for Civil Legal Services in Minnesota.

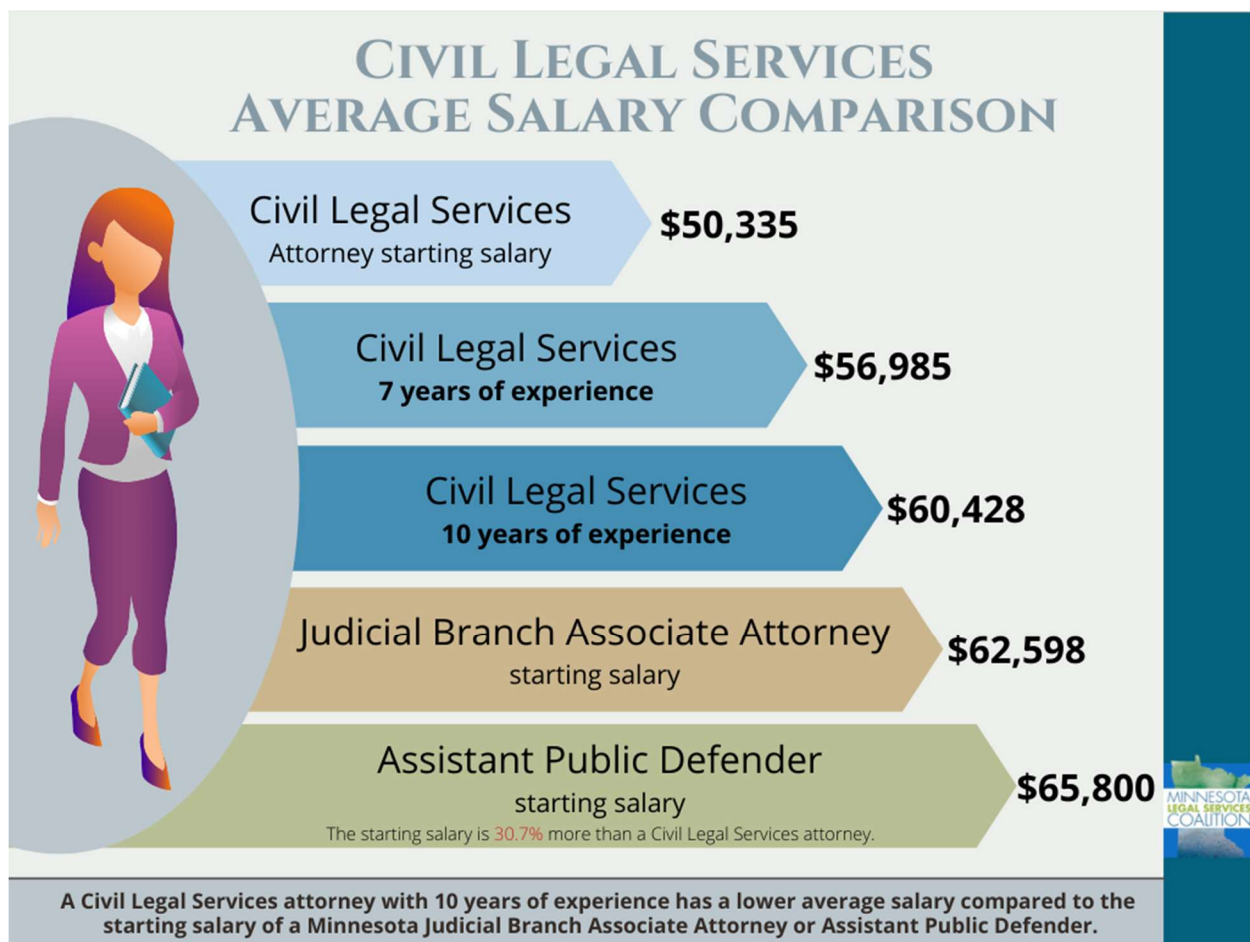
The current level of legislative funding appropriated to Civil Legal Services is \$14.72 million annually. This support is leveraged by other funds we secure through a variety of sources, including foundations, lawyer registration fees, private fundraising activities, and public and private grants, to deliver justice to Minnesotans statewide. In Fiscal Year 2020, the cumulative funding for Civil Legal Services from all sources was \$45,953,375.

This budget session, we have advocated for increases in Civil Legal Services funding of \$2,208,000 in Fiscal Year 2022 and \$3,478,000 in Fiscal Year 2023. These requested funding increases are necessary to sustain our critical legal representation services to approximately 45,000 Minnesotan households annually over the next biennium.

Minnesota’s Civil Legal Services system is experiencing a crisis. We face a growing compensation deficit in comparison to other public sector and public interest legal employers. Here is a graphic that illustrates the degree and gravity of the civil legal aid compensation deficit crisis:

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<sup>1</sup> The Coalition we lead includes seven regional civil legal aid organizations – Anishinabe Legal Services (ALS), Central Minnesota Legal Services (CMLS), Judicare of Anoka County (JAC), Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota (LASNEM), Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota (LSNM), Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (MMLA), and Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS).



The lack of necessary investment in Civil Legal Services creates a related crisis for Minnesotans in need of critical legal help. Currently, we are forced to turn away over half of people seeking legal help due to lack of necessary resources.

Equal justice is a right, not a privilege. Approving our requested increases of \$2,208,000 for Fiscal Year 2022 and \$3,478,000 for Fiscal Year 2023 will ensure that the legal system operates as a justice system for the 45,000 Minnesotan families and individuals we serve each year.

Thank you for your consideration of our funding request in this time of crisis for Civil Legal Services and the communities we serve statewide. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions about our request.

Sincerely,

/s/ **Minnesota Legal Services Coalition**

Anne Hoefgen, Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota  
Jean Lastine, Central Minnesota Legal Services  
Cody Nelson, Anishinabe Legal Services  
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