

March 9, 2021

House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee

Attn: Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Peggy Scott

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Scott,

I am writing in support of the funding request made by Civil Legal Services for the upcoming biennium. As Executive Director of Safe Avenues, an organization serving victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault in Willmar and surrounding counties. We are proud of our partnership with Legal Aid to address a full range of services needed by the people we both serve. Staff from Legal Aid accept referrals, consult with staff, and work with us to resolve issues related to safety, housing, and income. Attorneys from Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid are professional, well-skilled, and provide advocacy for their clients. Without the assistance of an attorney, many domestic and sexual violence survivors are at a disadvantage within the justice system. Many survivors struggle to make ends meet. Legal aid is a great resource for survivors, specifically low income survivors, who otherwise would not have access to an attorney and as a result attend court proceedings alone. In addition, the justice system is often confusing and hard to understand for the average citizen. Having access to an attorney through legal aid often eases the anxiety and stress level for a survivor of violence and it provides a fighting chance for their case.

Because I can see the difference that Legal Aid makes to the people we serve, I am aware of the great importance of civil legal aid to our community, and to the entire state of Minnesota. Civil legal aid helps to close the justice gap, promote family safety, ensure individuals' basic needs are met, protects health, and helps the Court system operate more effectively and efficiently.

Due to resource limitations, civil legal aid is not able to meet the enormous demand for their services, and is not able to offer competitive salaries relative to other public sector law firms. It is important to fund civil legal aid and I fully support their funding request.

Sincerely,



Jen Johnson
Executive Director
320.235.0475 ex. 12

Safe Shelter	320.235.0962	Sexual Assault Victim Services	320.262.3829	Outreach McLeod County	320.587.7981
CJI Program	320.222.4030	Outreach Chippewa County	320.321.1199	Outreach Meeker County	320.593.0876
HVC	320.214.0799	Outreach Renville County	320.523.1015	Outreach Swift County	320.314.8500

Funding Partners

