



LEECH LAKE BAND OF OJIBWE TRIBAL COURT

Paul Day, Chief Judge
Megan Treuer, Deputy Judge
Dynell Morris, Court Clerk
Tom Dahl, Judicial Law Clerk

Vacant, Associate Judge
Jacquelyn Wright, Court Administrator
Amanda Richardson, Court Clerk

March 3, 2022

House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
Attn: Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Peggy Scott

Re: Civil Legal Services Funding

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Scott,

I am writing in support of fully funding the appropriation request made by Civil Legal Services. As Chief Justice of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Court, I regularly have civil legal aid attorneys appearing in cases before me. Attorneys from Anishinabe Legal Services and Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota are professional, well-skilled, and provide zealous advocacy for their clients. The majority of attorneys providing representation to individuals before the Leech Lake Tribal Court come from civil legal aid programs.

As Chief Justice and as a former civil legal aid program Executive Director, 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, 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 I support and encourage fully funding their request.

Thank you.

Paul W. Day
Chief Justice, Leech Lake Tribal Court

Via E-Mail

March 11, 2022

Chair Jamie Becker-Finn
House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
rep.jamie.becker-finn@house.mn

Chair Warren Limmer
Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee
3221 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
Sen.Warren.Limmer@senate.mn

Re: Funding for Civil Legal Services

Dear Chairs Becker-Finn and Limmer:

As I have done in the past, I write to express my support in the strongest possible terms for continued and expanded funding for civil legal services. I know firsthand, both as a lawyer, and from my service as Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, of the immeasurable value provided to the legal system by civil legal services.

The Minnesota Legal Services Coalition provides vital civil legal aid to a wide range of Minnesotans on a statewide basis: women seeking protection from domestic violence, families struggling to stay in their homes, homeless veterans seeking the benefits they earned, disaster victims needing help to recover. Civil legal aid is essential to individuals living in rural areas that large law firms have difficulty serving because of lawyers' geographic location. In many counties across our state, civil legal aid services are the only available help for low-income Minnesotans.

My firm is among the leaders in supporting Civil Legal Services funding, both by direct contributions to organizations that are part of the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition, and the provision of hundreds of hours of volunteer legal services to individuals in desperate need of assistance. This volunteer service is not independent of the legal aid agencies supported by legislative funding of Civil Legal Services - rather, our ability to provide pro bono legal services is directly dependent on partnership with legal aid organizations, which screen cases for merit and eligibility, and train and mentor our attorneys. Any reduction in the funding provided for civil legal services will not only imperil the ability of civil legal aid organizations to serve Minnesotans in need, it will also diminish the private bar's capacity to help these individuals.

My strong advocacy for Civil Legal Services funding is not simply a matter of personal preference. It is a reasoned judgment concerning the pragmatic and economic value of investing in our courts and the organizations that make them work, based on research and considerable reflection.

I have written in the past about the imperative need to fully fund the state justice system. *The High Cost of Efficiency: Courthouse Tech and Access To Justice*, 22 No. 4 Prof. Law. 16 (ABA, 2014); *Foreword: Legal Costs in Minnesota*, 39 Wm. Mitchell L. Rev. 1 (2012); *The State of the Judiciary*, Bench & B. Minn., August 2010 at 20. Studies show that a well-functioning justice system is a positive contributor to the overall economic well-being of a state. *The Economics of Justice*, Eric J. Magnuson, et al, Defense Research Institute (2014). Simply put, businesses choose to invest in places where they will have access to a fair, efficient, and prompt system of courts to resolve their disputes.

Minnesota is fortunate to be among those places. But to maintain that position, we need to continue and in fact increase our investment in the justice system. Fully funding Civil Legal Services is a vital part of that investment.

Because of civil legal aid's ability to leverage private bar pro bono services, funding civil legal aid is money well spent. Numerous studies have shown that the effectiveness of legal aid programs results in a strong return on investment. The Minnesota Legal Services Advisory Committee's annual report details the benefits of civil legal aid in Minnesota:

https://www.mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/scao_library/documents/LSA-C-Annual-Report-FY21-FINAL.pdf.

Each dollar spent on legal aid not only provides a multiplied direct benefit, but the work of civil legal aid lawyers, both full-time and volunteer, helps our justice system function more efficiently. Pro se litigants, struggling to present their issues to the courts without legal assistance, dramatically slow down the judicial process as judges have to take significantly more time in processing their cases to

ensure that the rights of all of the involved litigants are protected. Not only do civil legal service lawyers make that process more efficient, but in a large numbers of instances, civil legal service lawyers are able to explain to potential litigants the legal process and likely outcomes and facilitate resolution of disputes that never need to see the courtroom.

Funding Civil Legal Services in Minnesota should be a legislative priority. It is a smart, highly leveraged investment that pays significant dividends in helping our justice system maintain high quality, efficiency, and integrity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric J. Magnuson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "M".

Eric J. Magnuson

cc: Danielle Shelton Walczak, Executive Director
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
111 North Fifth Street, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55403



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Chief Executive Officer
Cheryl Dalby

March 10, 2022

Established in 1883, the Minnesota State Bar Association represents 13,000 attorneys who practice throughout the state. The MSBA urges you to prioritize investments in Civil Legal Services during Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024. Civil Legal Services helps poverty-stricken Minnesotans access the justice system and protect their most basic human needs—health, safety, shelter, and economic security.

It is critically important to adequately fund Civil Legal Services to meet statewide demand, overcome barriers to justice, and address a recruitment and retention crisis. At current funding levels, Civil Legal Services is able to assist less than half of eligible clients. At the same time, Civil Legal Services faces significant attorney recruitment and retention challenges due to a substantial compensation deficit with other public service lawyers. Continued funding shortfalls will deprive even more Minnesotans of an opportunity for justice.

We appreciate you considering our request to help protect the most vulnerable members of our state and increase access to justice by adequately funding Civil Legal Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Thompson".

Jennifer Thompson
MSBA President 2021-22



March 28, 2022

House Judiciary Committee Chair Jamie Becker-Finn
Minority Lead Peggy Scott
75 Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Rep. Becker-Finn and Rep. Scott,

I write in support of the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition funding request. The member programs of the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition are valued partners and collaborators in our organization's efforts to end veteran homelessness in Minnesota. We work closely with these programs to ensure that our state's veterans have access to justice in civil legal issues related to homelessness and their expertise is invaluable to our small in-house legal team.

Civil legal services are key to protecting the rights of our state's most vulnerable residents and ensuring they have access to justice and know their rights. This has been highlighted this year during the off-ramp of the eviction moratorium, and our legal aid partners have been invaluable in providing updated information on the moratorium, representing low-income veterans facing eviction or in need of repairs to ensure their units meet habitability standards, and referring veterans to our organization for supportive and financial assistance.

Due to resource limitations, civil legal services is not able to meet the demand for their services, and are also unable to offer competitive salaries relative to other public sector entities. It is critical to fully fund civil legal services to ensure they can continue meeting our communities' essential needs. We are grateful for their continuing efforts to ensure low-income veterans across the state of Minnesota have access to high-quality legal services.

Sincerely,

Neal Loidolt
CEO/President
Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans



**IMMIGRANT
LAW CENTER**
— of MINNESOTA —

Representative Jamie Becker-Finn, Chair
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Peggy Scott, GOP Lead
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
335 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 29, 2022

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Republican Lead Scott:

My name is Glenn Leitch, and I am the Treasurer of the Board of Directors of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM), the leading provider of free, comprehensive immigration legal services and education to Minnesota's immigrant and refugee communities. I am also the former Executive Vice President of Supply Chain for Hormel Foods and the former President of Jennie-O Turkey Store, where I had the privilege of working with New Americans at every level of these companies. I am also a long-time resident of Willmar, Minnesota, where immigrants and refugees have enriched our community over the last few decades.

I have had the pleasure of working with attorneys and paralegals over much of the past 40 years, most often in the capacity as a beneficiary of their knowledge and a customer of their services, often in a corporate setting. More recently, as a board member for ILCM, I have witnessed some exceptional legal work by a talented and dedicated staff. These professionals provide services that are extraordinarily important to ensure that we are supporting Minnesotans with proper representation. For the immigrant community, this can often be the difference between remaining a family unit or being separated.

While all attorneys have fact-based learning skills, ILCM attorneys and support staff also carry with them extraordinary compassion and commitment. This commitment often means they need to hold on to a case for years as the judicial process moves slowly. A client is often solely dependent on the skill and perseverance of the attorney on their case to navigate a complex system. And while these exceptional skills are evident, these attorneys are compensated well below market rates for attorneys in the business world. Having seen both sides work, I would suggest that the market rates should be far more closely aligned than they are today.



**IMMIGRANT
LAW CENTER**
— of MINNESOTA —

We know that immigrants are essential to our Minnesota workforce of the present and of the future. Having attorneys compensated at a rate that keeps them in their roles for longer periods of time will help ensure the best outcomes for their clients, and for Minnesota as well. We also want to ensure that talented individuals who support public sector endeavors, and who love what they do, are not drawn away solely with compensation as the reason.

As an added note, I also happen to be fairly well versed in the cost of law school today, as I have had 2 children and one daughter-in-law graduate from Minnesota law schools in the past few years. We know we need attorneys to ensure proper representation, and we also know that graduate school brings additional financial burdens to most students. Additional financial support will not only assist the obvious need here, but will in all likelihood ensure that more attorneys are able to make this type of work their career choice. Skills they gain through greater longevity will not only assist their client base, but will also show a return on investment for Minnesota in the years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Glenn Leitch



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10065 - 3rd Street NE
Blaine, MN 55434

March 29, 2022

House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
Attn: Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Peggy Scott

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Minority Lead Scott,

As the Executive Director of Alexandra House, Inc., I am writing this letter to strongly encourage your support of increased funding to legal aid service providers throughout the state. The services they provide to the community are vital to all citizen but are especially critical to the victims of domestic and sexual violence. An increase in funding would directly impact their ability to provide family law legal services to victims/survivors who need legal services but are without the financial means necessary to hire an attorney.

As the only comprehensive domestic and sexual violence service provider in Anoka County, Alexandra House is in the unique position to provide insight on the growing and unmet need for family law legal services among the clients we serve. Judicare of Anoka County, our local legal aid provider, has done a tremendous job of attempting to meet this need, though with ever-tightening budgets and increased demand for services, this has been and continues to be a challenge. Many in need are inevitably turned away. Family law legal assistance is critically important to the victims/survivors we serve. Victims need free legal representation to assist them in gaining immediate safety from abuse by way of a protection order and longer-term assistance in securing their future through legal representation in dissolution, custody, or child support matters.

Alexandra House has witnessed the enormous impact legal aid services have had on our clients. We are fortunate to have worked closely with Judicare of Anoka County for decades. For over 15 years, Alexandra House has partnered with Judicare, Central Minnesota Legal Services, and the Anoka County Attorney's Office on the Order for Protection Project. The OFP Project, which provides legal representation to petitioners in their protection order proceedings, has had an enormous impact - effectively lessening a victim's fear and intimidation of the court process, ensuring relief such as child support or parenting time plans that prioritize the safety of the petitioner and her/his children and making it possible for petitioners who have a legal basis for seeking child support to successfully secure it within their final orders. Legal representation has also enhanced victim safety, because well-written and detailed orders improve law enforcement's ability to enforce and the system's ability to hold accountable those who violate them.

The contributions of Judicare and Central Minnesota Legal Services has ensured the success and sustainability of this invaluable project and represents their commitment to providing legal assistance to victims of domestic violence in Anoka County. These services were even more critical this past year due to the pandemic. In the early days of COVID, Anoka County District Court greatly limited in-person services, postponing many hearings while shifting others to virtual platforms. Due to the rapidly changing court processes and practices and resulting challenges brought about by COVID, having



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legal representation made all the difference to the clients we serve, many of whom may not have followed through without this assistance.

We partnered with Judicare on a Minnesota Legal Services Coalition-led initiative called the Minnesota Legal Kiosk Project. Through creation of a statewide network of kiosks, we now can provide our clients the ability to apply online for legal aid assistance, meet with their legal aid attorney, and attend court virtually. These community-based kiosks make it possible for clients who face technology or transportation barriers to have a healthy and safe experience interacting with legal aid attorneys and the civil legal system. This Project will have positive benefits for our clients throughout the pandemic and beyond.

I urge you to support increased funding to legal aid service providers in Minnesota. Increased funding will enhance their capacity to serve low-income individuals, particularly in family law, where the unmet need is so great.

Sincerely,

Connie Moore
Executive Director