

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2011

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**Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. Awards Nearly  
\$1.3 Million to Support Civil Legal Services in Wisconsin**  
**Scarce Funds Support Law-related Programs Throughout Wisconsin**

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**Madison. November 8, 2011** – The Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) announced grant awards totaling nearly \$1.3 million to agencies providing civil legal services for Wisconsin's poor and underserved in 2012. While the funding is significant, it falls short in addressing the justice gap that exists for Wisconsin's low-income population – and represents only a third of last year's funding total of \$3.7 million.

This year's devastating cuts primarily are the result of the elimination of civil legal services funding from the State of Wisconsin 2011-2013 budget earlier this year. The funding eradication comes at a time when Wisconsin's residents are suffering most from the weak economy, and is all the more disappointing when, across the nation, states such as Texas have recognized this need and have, with bipartisan support, maintained state funding for legal aid pursuant to our nation's promise of equal justice for all.

Wisconsin is now one of only four states in the nation that does not provide funding to help victims of domestic violence, people with disabilities, seniors and other vulnerable individuals and families gain access to civil legal assistance.

"While this year's grant decisions were among the most challenging we've faced due to elimination of imperative state funding, the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation is proud to award grants to these agencies. Their efforts benefit the underserved low-income segment of our population and contribute greatly to achieving WisTAF's mission," says WisTAF President Dean Dietrich.

WisTAF's partnership with grantee agencies allows for the provision of affordable legal representation in areas such as domestic abuse, housing, benefits, employment, and disability to thousands of low-income Wisconsin individuals and families – a population which has been hit particularly hard by the harsh economy.

Often times, grantees are able to use WisTAF grant awards to leverage funding from other sources as noted in the 2012 grant application submitted by Centro Legal por Derechos Humanos - a Milwaukee-based nonprofit agency providing bilingual family law legal services to low-income individuals.

"Centro Legal leverages the funds we receive from WisTAF annually to raise over \$120,000 in private fundraising. Most community foundations do not identify "legal services" as a stated

funding priority. However, we have made significant progress in educating foundations about the importance of affordable and free legal services to family and community stability; and that access to justice through the legal system should concern all citizens (not just attorneys). Grant funders require agencies to identify diverse and stable funding sources. When we list WisTAF funding on our grant applications, new funders are more willing to come on board and support us. Additionally, individuals, businesses and foundations alike want to know we are supported by the legal community. Our annual grants from WisTAF demonstrate this support."

Centro Legal is just one example of fifteen 2012 grant recipients providing low- and/or no-cost legal services to Wisconsin residents in dire need of assistance.

Grants for 2012 were awarded to the following programs:

- ABC for Health, Inc., \$50,000
- AIDS Network, \$12,000
- AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW), \$12,000
- Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse, Inc. (CASDA), \$15,000
- Catholic Charities of the Archdioceses of Milwaukee, Inc., \$10,000
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse, Inc., \$10,000
- Centro Legal por Derechos Humanos, \$20,000
- Community Justice, Inc., \$15,000
- Disability Rights Wisconsin, \$100,000
- Kids Matter, Inc., \$10,000
- Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., \$714,120
- Legal Aid Society of Door County, Inc., \$4,900
- Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee, \$100,000
- Portage County Legal Aid Society, \$10,000
- Wisconsin Judicare, Inc., \$196,980

For a description of grant recipients, see attached.

**About WisTAF.** Created by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1986, the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. is dedicated to ensuring access to civil legal services for low-income individuals and families. Through its grants program, WisTAF provides funds to legal service agencies to assist people with legal needs, such as family, housing, employment, disability and consumer issues. WisTAF receives funds for its grant programs by bringing Wisconsin's legal and financial communities together to generate revenue from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA). Other sources of funds have included the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF), the State of Wisconsin low-income civil legal services appropriation, and public sources when available. Working with its partners, WisTAF strives to keep our nation's promise of access to justice for all.

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If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with WisTAF Executive Director De Ette Tomlinson, please call 608.257.6844 or email Program Manager Becky Murray at [rmurray@wistaf.org](mailto:rmurray@wistaf.org).



## 2012 Grant Recipients

### **ABC for Health, Inc.**

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ABC for Health, Inc. (ABC) is a Wisconsin-based, nonprofit, public interest law firm dedicated to the statewide representation of individuals and families, particularly those with children with special health care needs. ABC helps its clients obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage and services. ABC is widely recognized by the public, the legal community and the media for providing clients with assistance and litigation for consumer cases related to health care coverage disputes and access to appropriate health services. Legal services include Medicaid eligibility appeals, preservation of due process rights in administrative hearings, and challenges of private insurance denials in state and federal courts. ([www.safetyweb.org/](http://www.safetyweb.org/))

Funding granted: \$50,000

### **AIDS Network**

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AIDS Network's Legal Services Program provides free legal representation, advice and referral to low-income individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Wisconsin. The program is one of several direct consumer service programs administered by AIDS Network, Wisconsin's designated AIDS Service Organization for 13 southern Wisconsin counties. AIDS Network's mission is to provide support and opportunities for individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS, and to prevent the spread of the infection through testing and public education. ([www.aidsnetwork.org](http://www.aidsnetwork.org))

Funding granted: \$12,000

### **AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin**

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AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) is dedicated to providing quality medical, dental, mental health and social services for all people with HIV disease. Integral to the care and treatment of people with HIV disease is the provision of legal services that fight for the rights of those who are often society's most marginalized. ARCW attorneys handle social security disability appeals, estate planning, powers of attorney, advanced health care directives, bankruptcy and consumer issues, insurance assistance, HIV discrimination cases, landlord/tenant issues, referrals for tax assistance, domestic violence and family law issues, and specific needs of the Hispanic population including immigration referrals and public benefits assistance. ([www.arcw.org](http://www.arcw.org))

Funding granted: \$12,000



## 2012 Grant Recipients (continued)

### **Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse, Inc.**

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Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse, Inc. (CASDA) has been providing supportive services to individuals hurt by domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse since 1988 while advocating for a community effort to end violence. CASDA's legal program provides direct civil legal services to low-income individuals who have been affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. The program serves clients in northwestern Wisconsin, including Douglas, Ashland, and Bayfield Counties. ([www.casda.org](http://www.casda.org))

Funding granted: \$15,000

### **Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Inc.**

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The mission of the Legal Services for Immigrants (LSI) Program of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is "to serve those in need, to advocate for justice and to call upon others to do the same." LSI, initiated in 1999, is the only attorney-based nonprofit immigration law firm in Wisconsin. The law practice focuses on immigrant families, with a special priority being advice, counsel and legal representation to immigrant victims of domestic violence by staff and pro bono attorneys. LSI serves clients in ten of the state's most densely populated counties, which include a disproportionate percentage – an estimated 75% – of Wisconsin's 75,000 to 90,000 undocumented immigrants. ([www.archmil.org](http://www.archmil.org))

Funding granted: \$10,000

### **Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse, Inc.**

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Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse's mission is to proclaim Christ's gospel of life and promote human dignity by alleviating poverty and strengthening individuals and families. This mission is accomplished through diverse programming including immigration services, emergency support services, adoption services, financial counseling, domestic abuse services, services for children with disabilities, and ministries including the HIV/AIDS Ministry.

Funding granted: \$10,000



## 2012 Grant Recipients (continued)

### **Centro Legal**

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Centro Legal provides low and no-cost direct legal representation to qualifying individuals who are using the Milwaukee County Courts as part of their efforts to transition out of poverty to lives of greater safety and stability. Centro Legal attorneys provide complete representation in all matters related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and property division. In addition, Centro Legal has two supplemental program components aimed at identifying the legal needs of individuals and educating the community. The first program is a free consultation service which allows the agency to provide advice, information, and referrals to individuals with legal questions and to better identify which individuals are most in need of direct representation. Centro Legal staff attorneys also teach a family law information class at local service agencies. Audiences include both potential clients and agency case workers. ([www.centrolegalwisconsin.org](http://www.centrolegalwisconsin.org))

Funding granted: \$20,000

### **Community Justice, Inc.**

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Community Justice, Inc. (CJI) serves low-income families and individuals by providing direct legal services in a broad range of substantive areas, including family law, mental health, housing, consumer, discrimination, and unemployment. CJI works collaboratively with social service providers, the courts, local, state, and national bar associations, private pro bono attorneys, as well as law students and law schools to further develop innovative efforts that are delivering more legal services to clients in need and inspiring the next generation of public interest attorneys. ([www.communityjusticeinc.org](http://www.communityjusticeinc.org))

Funding granted: \$15,000

### **Disability Rights Wisconsin**

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Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is a private, nonprofit corporation, designated as the state's official Protection and Advocacy system, since 1977, for children and adults with disabilities. DRW provides legal services and other advocacy throughout the entire state on behalf of people with developmental and physical disabilities, and people with mental illness. DRW is recognized throughout the state as the primary provider of legal services to people with disabilities. DRW is also often the only viable source of impact litigation and class action on behalf of persons with disabilities. ([www.disabilityrightswi.org](http://www.disabilityrightswi.org))

Funding granted: \$100,000



## 2012 Grant Recipients (continued)

### **Kids Matter Inc.**

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Kids Matter Inc. is a private, nonprofit corporation that provides legal services and other advocacy for children in foster and kinship care in the greater Milwaukee area. Kids Matter also provides legal support throughout the state. Direct civil legal representation results in clients obtaining or retaining the basic fundamentals of life including food, shelter, clothing, protection from abuse, health care, education, employment and opportunities for future development. ([www.kidsmatterinc.org](http://www.kidsmatterinc.org))

Funding granted: \$10,000

### **Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc.**

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Legal Action of Wisconsin's (LAW) mission is to provide creative and effective legal representation in order to achieve justice for low-income people and others to whom it would otherwise be denied. LAW advocates for empowerment and systematic change to help clients realize their basic right to a decent quality of life, and strives for active client and community participation in carrying out its mission. Serving 39 counties in southern and northeastern Wisconsin, LAW's primary programs are family; housing; public benefits; consumer; education and employment; elimination of legal barriers to employment; homelessness prevention; domestic violence victim assistance; migrant farm worker legal assistance; and legal assistance to seniors. (<http://www.legalaction.org>)

Funding granted: \$714,120

### **Legal Aid Society of Door County, Inc.**

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Legal Aid Society of Door County, Inc. is a charitable non-profit 501(C)(3) organization formed in 1988 to promote and the availability of indigent legal services for residents of Door County Wisconsin. Since its inception, its objectives are to encourage pro bono services from the legal community, and to organize and promote public awareness of the need for legal services for low income residents.

Funding granted: \$4,900



## 2012 Grant Recipients (continued)

### Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee

Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee is one of the nation's oldest public interest law firms. It was founded in 1916 "to do all things necessary for the prevention of injustice." The Society's programs provide comprehensive representation in all major areas of civil law including family law, consumer and bankruptcy, housing, litigation, public benefits, civil rights, tax controversies, and municipal forfeitures. The Society also serves as the court-appointed advocate for battered, abused, and neglected children; as court-appointed counsel in civil mental commitments; and as court-appointed guardian ad litem in judicial reviews of protective placements. ([www.lasmilwaukee.com](http://www.lasmilwaukee.com))

Funding granted: \$100,000

### Portage County Legal Aid Society

Portage County Legal Aid Society (PCLAS) is a non-profit corporation, established in 1994, that uses volunteer attorneys to provide initial screening sessions, brief service meetings, assistance with pro se representation, and, when needed, full legal representation to low-income people residing in Portage County. The most common types of cases include family law matters (divorce, child custody, or child support), bankruptcy, and landlord/tenant issues. The Society's goal is to provide high quality pro bono civil legal aid to low income residents of Portage County, Wisconsin.

Funding granted: \$10,000

### Wisconsin Judicare, Inc.

Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. (WJ) is a non-profit law firm dedicated to providing equal access to justice for northern Wisconsin residents. WJ is the civil legal service provider for Wisconsin's northern thirty-three counties and eleven federally recognized Indian tribes. From its inception, Wisconsin Judicare has emphasized utilization of the private bar to represent low-income persons and provide eligible clients the freedom to choose their attorneys. ([www.judicare.org](http://www.judicare.org))

Funding granted: \$196,980