

LEGAL AID — FORWARD POLICY FOR WISCONSIN

What good are laws in protecting your rights and liberties if you can't afford a lawyer? Our safety, economic well-being, and independence are safeguarded by the civil legal system — but it's hard to obtain enforcement of those safeguards without expert assistance. Civil legal aid, or legal aid, provides information for everyone, and legal representation and advice for those who couldn't otherwise afford it.

JUSTICE FOR ALL

By assuring fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of income, legal aid helps people to **overcome systemic injustices** including poverty and racism, achieving goals such as:

- Secure and remain in **safe, stable housing**
- Obtain and protect **health care** coverage
- Secure safety from **domestic violence**
- Remove barriers to **employment**
- Learn how to access **unemployment compensation**



“The opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.”

Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*.

“Without access to quality representation there is no justice.”

U. S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Remarks for Legal Services Corporation 40th anniversary.

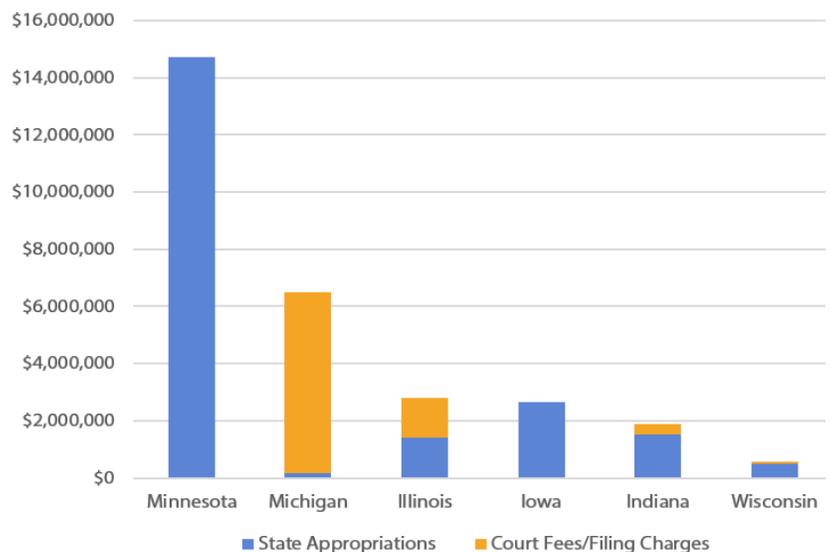
NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

Demand is skyrocketing. Average monthly inquiries to the *Wisconsin Free Legal Answers* portal doubled this year as needs ballooned.

Funding is squeezed. Annual revenue from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA), a key support, is projected to drop 50 percent, or \$750,000, between 2019 and 2021.

Opportunity knocks. Prior to COVID-19, Wisconsin's legal aid providers, funders, and advocates already began organizing as never before. The field is exceptionally prepared to promote and support public and private partnerships.

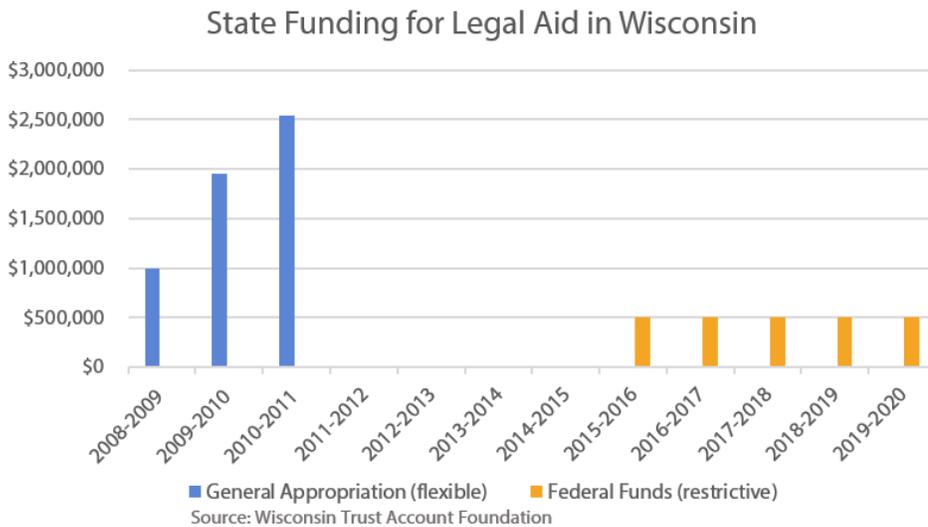
Civil Legal Aid Support in Wisconsin and Closest Neighboring States



Graph shows funding mechanisms with available comparative data. Source: Information provided by state IOLTA programs..

BOOSTING LOCAL ECONOMIES

When people achieve legal outcomes leading to stability, health, and self-sufficiency, our state as a whole receives a benefit — a return on our investment.



\$6

Public costs saved in New York State for every \$1 of public civil legal services funding.

\$6.61

Amount recovered for clients in Wisconsin for every \$1 of state civil legal services funding in the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

POVERTY, RACISM, AND SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE

Legal aid serves people experiencing **economic disadvantage**, including a disproportionate number of **people of color**, due to systemic racial disparities in so many areas relating to poverty law. In addition:

- ➔ Wisconsin providers incorporate **community lawyering**, a noted anti-racism strategy and tool for moving disadvantaged areas from poverty to prosperity.
- ➔ When injustice is systemic, it's hard to anticipate every barrier that may frustrate our corrective measures. Legal aid offers a failsafe: **expert problem-solvers who answer to the client** — whatever injustice they're facing, regardless of our capacity to predict it.

LOOKING WIDER

Frequent coverage by mainstream media sources has highlighted the need for civil legal aid during 2020.

Bipartisan support for legal aid is evident in:

- ➔ agreement at the federal level on Legal Services Corporation funding
- ➔ funding decisions in other states
- ➔ stakeholder conversations in Wisconsin

Recent eviction moratoria suggest a similar consensus.

We now have a rare opportunity — by increasing investments and removing restrictions on funding for civil legal aid — to move Wisconsin from behind to “Forward!” on making justice for all a reality.