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CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
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*Life is an ECHO—What you send out, you get back!
Proud United Way Blackhawk Region Agency Partner*

October 28, 2024

Clerk of Supreme Court
Attention: Deputy Clerk-Rules
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

RE: Petition 24-05 Adjustment to Attorney Assessment for Public Interest Legal Services Fund

Dear Chief Justice Ziegler and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court:

I am writing on behalf of ECHO, Inc. in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. As an organization, our mission is dedicated to meeting housing, food and other basic human needs and addressing the barriers to self-sufficiency. We believe that increasing access to civil legal aid is vital to the stabilization and dignity of our communities. This Petition is an important step in that direction.

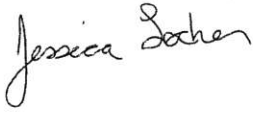
An individual's ability to access civil legal aid can be lifesaving. Civil legal aid keeps people in their homes and in family-sustaining jobs, empowers individuals and families by resolving consumer debts and ensuring rightful access to income supports, secures support for and protects the rights of crime victims, and helps to extricate survivors of domestic violence from unsafe situations so they can achieve independence and thrive. Access to civil legal aid, however, is distressingly difficult. While one in seven Wisconsinites are eligible for civil legal aid, only 7% of the civil legal problems facing Wisconsin's low-income residents receive any legal help. The gap between the need for services and their availability holds families back from achieving safety, stability, and economic security. At ECHO, we understand that increasing the PILSF assessment is one critical mechanism for increasing access to civil legal aid for the population we serve.

At our organization, we understand that housing instability can spiral a family into the depths of poverty. We also understand that it is not just an individual problem—housing instability can destabilize entire communities, creating public health and safety concerns. Contrarily, achieving housing stability is a key component of breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving economic security. We depend on our civil legal aid partners to help low-income tenants understand their rights as renters, foster productive communications between landlords and tenants, avoid evictions through legal defense, ensure that inhabitable conditions are properly repaired, and help tenants navigate the variety of civil legal issues that arise as a low-income renter. Unfortunately, we know that for every tenant who can access representation for their civil legal problem, many more must be turned away simply due to lack of capacity.

There are far more low-income Wisconsinites with civil legal problems than there are legal aid lawyers to serve them, and many of those individuals face multiple concurrent civil legal problems. An investment in civil legal aid is an investment in justice and in the future health of Wisconsin's legal system. Supporting an increase in the PILSF assessment ensures due process for every Wisconsinite and recognizes the important role of the legal profession in closing the justice gap. We are grateful that the legal community generously shares in this responsibility.

Therefore, we urge you to adopt Petition 24-05 to increase the PILSF assessment, which would increase the provision of civil legal services to low-income Wisconsinites. The positive impact of the Petition would reach far beyond the financial value of the assessment itself. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on this proposed rule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Locher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Locher
Executive Director
ECHO, Inc.