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CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
OF WISCONSIN

December 13, 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:

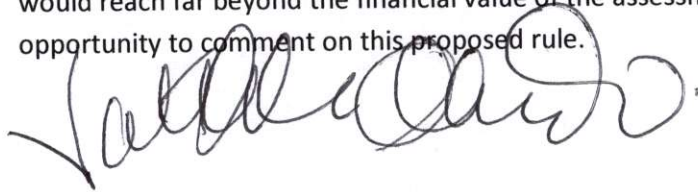
I am writing on behalf of Madison College in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. As an organization, our mission is to provide open access to high quality education for all our diverse communities. We believe that increasing access to civil legal aid is vital to the stabilization and dignity of our communities, a shared goal of the college. That shared goal plays out each day through the Law for Learners collaboration between Legal Action of Wisconsin, Ascendium Education Group and other legal service organizations state-wide. This program has meant removing legal barriers to the life-changing potential of earning a postsecondary credential, allowing students to leverage the benefits of educational attainment. This Petition would allow organizations like Legal Action of Wisconsin to strengthen partnerships, expand the numbers of Wisconsinites served who have legal barriers to education, and provide critical information and assistance to those most in need of assistance.

An individual's ability to access civil legal aid can be life changing. 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 Madison College, we understand that increasing the PILSF assessment is one critical mechanism for increasing access to civil legal aid for the populations we serve.

In serving students, we meet them where they are, on their way to where they want to be. Providing for the various needs that students have is not something we can do on our own and partnership with trusted organizations is critical to delivering holistic support services. Legal Action has been an integral founding partner of our Legal Clinic/Law for Learners initiative. Legal Action of Wisconsin, and other clinics provide foundational legal services, advice and information to our students in legal areas including the expungement of criminal records, the addressing of consumer or medical debt, bringing resolution or stability to difficult family situations, addressing housing challenges, or accessing public benefits to allow student parents to balance family, education and work responsibilities. More so, this partnership has allowed the college to help students with legal barriers realize the social, health and economic benefits that a college credential can bring to students, for sure, but to our communities, too.

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.



Valentina Ahedo

Vice President Academic Affairs, Regional Campuses & Educational Pathways
Madison College Goodman South Campus