



2111 8th Street South, Suite 102 Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
360 Grand Avenue, Suite 300, Wausau, WI 54403
111 E 4th St, Suite 5, Marshfield, WI 54449
503 S Center Avenue, Suite 1, Merrill, WI 54452
W 3620 Artisan Dr., Glen Flora, WI 54526

FILED

December 10, 2024

DEC 17 2024

Clerk of Supreme Court
Attention: Deputy Clerk – Rules
PO Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

**CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
OF WISCONSIN**

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

To the Justices of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin:

I am writing on behalf of Judicare Legal Aid in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. As an organization, our mission is to increase 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 and protects the rights of crime victims, and helps to extricate survivors of domestic violence from abusive situations so they can achieve safety and independence.

Access to legal help is distressingly difficult, particularly for low-income Wisconsinites. While one in seven Wisconsin residents are financially eligible for civil legal aid, legal aid providers are only able to provide help for 7% of the civil legal problems faced by Wisconsin's low-income residents. The gap between the need for services and their availability holds individuals and families back from achieving safety, stability, and economic security. At North Central CAP, we understand that increasing the Public Interest Legal Services Fund is one critical mechanism for increasing access to civil legal aid for our community and all of Wisconsin.

At our organization, we see how housing instability can spiral a family deeper into poverty. We also know that the impacts can extend far beyond one household, destabilizing entire communities and creating public health and safety concerns. Achieving housing stability is a key component of breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving economic security. Civil legal aid providers play a critical role in helping low-income tenants understand their rights, resolve disputes with landlords, secure habitable housing, and stay housed. Unfortunately, we know that for every tenant who can access legal help,



2111 8th Street South, Suite 102 Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
360 Grand Avenue, Suite 300, Wausau, WI 54403
111 E 4th St, Suite 5, Marshfield, WI 54449
503 S Center Avenue, Suite 1, Merrill, WI 54452
W 3620 Artisan Dr., Glen Flora, WI 54526

many more are turned away simply due to lack of capacity of civil legal aid providers.

We also see the crippling impacts consumers face due to ballooning interest rates, unexpected medical debt, unfair debt collection practices, predatory lenders, and programs or companies that promise to help but ultimately spiral individuals deeper into poverty. The civil legal aid providers we have worked with provide legal expertise that can play a key role in helping individuals resolve consumer debt issues and get back on their feet. Unfortunately, we know that for every low-income consumer who can access help for their civil legal problem, many more are turned away due to lack of capacity.

There are far more low-income Wisconsinites with civil legal problems than there are lawyers to help them. The reality is that many of those people face multiple legal problems concurrently. An investment in civil legal aid is an investment in justice and the future health of Wisconsin's legal system. Supporting an increase in PILSF moves us toward a future of due process for every Wisconsinite and recognizes the leadership role the legal profession can take in closing the justice gap. We hope the legal community will pave the way for increased access to justice through this investment in civil legal aid.

Therefore, we urge you to adopt Petition 24-05 to increase the PILSF assessment fee, 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 in support of this proposed rule.

Diane Sennholz
Executive Director
North Central Community Action Program, Inc.