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CLERK OF SUPREME COURT  
OF WISCONSIN

December 13, 2024

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

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 Legal Action Wisconsin AND Judicare Legal Aid in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. As an organization, the mission is to Legal Action of Wisconsin's mission is to deliver exceptional civil legal services and structural change advocacy, free of cost, to those most in need. I 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.

I am a volunteer attorney with both of these organizations, as well as a member of the State Bar of Wisconsin Legal Assistance Committee. In addition, I have established legal clinics on the Northcentral Technical College (NTC) campus, both with the statewide Law for Learners Program and on my own accord. From 2007-2020, I was Legal Director at the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL) in Chicago. I have dedicated most of my career to the provision of legal services to those in need. I am all too keenly aware that the funding for legal aid does not come anywhere close to meeting the needs for those with civil legal issues, but who lack the means to afford private legal representation.

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 Legal Action Wisconsin and Judicare Legal Aid, they 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.

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

1000 W. Campus Drive  
Wausau, WI 54401-1899  
888.682.7144 | 715.675.3331  
[www.ntc.edu](http://www.ntc.edu)



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, I urge you, on behalf of Legal Action Wisconsin, Judicare Legal Aid and the hundreds of the thousands of Wisconsinites in need of legal services, but who lack the means to afford legal services, 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.

Thomas Wendt  
Program Director and Full Time Faculty-Legal Studies/Paralegal Program  
Northcentral Technical College