



TENANT RESOURCE CENTER

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FILED

December 2, 2024

DEC 05 2024

CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
OF WISCONSIN

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

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 the Tenant Resource Center (TRC) in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. TRC's work is centered on supporting housing stability, particularly for populations that are most vulnerable to long-term housing insecurity. We know from our partnership with public interest attorneys that increasing access to civil legal aid is vital to the stabilization and dignity of individuals, families, and our communities. This Petition is an important step in providing that increased access.

At TRC, we understand that increasing the PILSF assessment is one critical mechanism for increasing access to civil legal aid for the populations we serve. An individual's ability to access civil legal aid can be lifesaving and the benefits carry over for generations and our wider community. 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. Yet, access to civil legal aid 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.

HOUSING JUSTICE FOR ALL

PARTNERING TO EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE FOR HOUSING JUSTICE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES

2510 WINNEBAGO ST, MADISON, WI 53704 – M-TH 9AM-6PM | 2429 PERRY ST, MADISON, WI 53713 – SA 10AM-2PM

Housing Counseling (Dane County): 608-257-0006 | Housing Counseling (Toll Free): 877-238-RENT

En Español: 608-257-0006 x1 | UW Students: 608-292-5608

Business/Administration: 608-257-0006 x0 | Fax: 608-229-1317

Email: Office@TenantResourceCenter.org | Web: www.TenantResourceCenter.org



TRC works with low-income tenants experiencing housing insecurity. We have partnered with Legal Action of Wisconsin (LAW) for many years. Experienced, dedicated LAW attorneys represent tenants with complicated, emergency rental housing matters; provide training to TRC staff; and collaborate with our team on important outreach for tenants, service providers, and court staff and judges. We formalized that partnership in 2021 when we collaboratively created the Eviction Diversion & Defense Partnership (EDDP). Through that partnership with LAW and other attorneys, we have achieved remarkable results in supporting housing stability for low-income tenants.

Before the EDDP, less than 1% of tenants were represented in eviction court in Dane County. Now, 16-25% of low-income tenants are represented by an attorney. The result of the collaborative approach to support low-income families facing the loss of their home is that 86% of evictions are dismissed. This means children stay at their school with trusted teachers, keep a stable schedule with support systems, and do not suffer the long-term health physical health, mental health, and academic consequences of eviction. There is extensive research showing that children who have experienced multiple moves or homelessness are more likely to develop various health conditions, including mental illnesses, respiratory conditions, and infections. With civil aid groups like LAW, we can help protect the overall health and wellbeing of families and individuals by providing needed legal services.

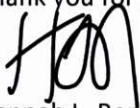
LAW has been particularly impactful for low-income tenants experiencing housing instability and concurrent civil legal issues, such as consumer debt, barriers to employment, and accessing government benefits. By providing expertise in these areas, LAW attorneys help individuals break the cycle of poverty. In addition, LAW attorneys play a crucial role in representing tenants who are facing forms of housing insecurity other than eviction. All too often, low-income tenants face housing issues such as uninhabitable conditions, discrimination, or retaliation. These issues all too often go unaddressed due to a lack of legal assistance.

At TRC, we understand that housing instability is not just an individual problem—it can destabilize entire communities, creating public health and safety concerns. Conversely, 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, foster productive communications between landlords and tenants, avoid evictions through legal defense, ensure that uninhabitable 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.

An investment in civil legal aid is an investment in justice and in the future health of Wisconsin's legal system. 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. 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.

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.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Renfro', written over a faint horizontal line.

Hannah L. Renfro
Executive Director
Tenant Resource Center