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December 11, 2024

FILED

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

DEC 17 2024

CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
OF WISCONSIN

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 Vital Strategies in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment.


Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. Our overdose prevention program works to strengthen and scale evidence-based, data-driven policies and interventions to create equitable and sustainable reductions in overdose deaths. We began funding projects and providing technical assistance in Wisconsin in 2021. We believe that increasing access to civil legal aid is vital to the stabilization and dignity of communities and currently provide sub-grant funding to Legal Action of Wisconsin. 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 support. Such social determinants of health impact overdose risk and mitigation of that risk.

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.

Vital Strategies supports Legal Action of Wisconsin to address the civil legal concerns of individuals at high risk of a drug overdose, including those who are in abstinence-based recovery. With its on-the-ground legal support in Wisconsin, Legal Action is able to remove legal barriers and stressors that can derail recovery and increase the likelihood of overdose. Their unique approach reaches those most affected by the overdose crisis, offering immediate legal assistance. While Vital Strategies and Legal Action of Wisconsin have demonstrated the value of this approach, Vital's funding for Legal Action will expire in 2026, when our work in the state ends. Without additional investment, these gains could be lost.

We urge you to adopt Petition 24-05 to increase the PILSF assessment, which would increase the provision of civil legal services. 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,


Daliah Heller, PhD MPH
Vice President

Reimagine Public Health