



Justice for All

Making Our Court System Work for All Montanans

CHILDREN • SENIORS • VETERANS • THE DISABLED • MINIMUM WAGE WORKERS • VICTIMS OF ABUSE

Civil Legal Aid

For over 50 years, Montanans providing civil legal aid to their neighbors have:

- Helped domestic violence survivors escape abuse
- Fought scams on consumers, especially seniors
- Preserved housing and improved housing conditions
- Helped returning veterans rebuild their lives

“Ernest” received a letter early in the winter informing him his monthly rent would double, effective the next month. As a 74-year-old disabled veteran living in federally subsidized, low-income housing, Ernest would have to spend over 70% of his social security income to meet the doubled rent, leaving him very little for other basic necessities. Ernest knew he couldn’t afford it and was afraid he would be evicted and homeless in the middle of Montana’s harsh winter.

He contacted MLSA to ask for help keeping a roof over his head. An MLSA attorney requested a reasonable accommodation for Ernest at the housing authority. With MLSA’s help, Ernest now pays an affordable rent of 30% of his income. Grateful for his attorney’s assistance, Ernest wrote a thank you letter:

“The Case settled in my favor, and I don’t have to worry about being homeless. I am a 74-year-old Veteran, and I could not move if had wanted to. Your service was terrific.”

Having Your Day in Court

Equal justice for all?



188,687 Montanans – 18% of our state’s population – qualify for civil legal aid at or below 125% of the federal poverty level.

(Federal poverty level is \$24,250 for a family of four.)



Since 2009, total case filings in District Courts have increased by nearly 20%. Many people are left to navigate the justice system on their own.



Current resources can help only 1 in 10 Montanans of limited means with their civil legal needs.



At least half of these Montanans have a civil legal problem each year that they do not address.



The Montana Justice Foundation can fund only about half of the needs of Montana programs requesting financial assistance.

The legal system is complicated. Getting people the legal help they need gives everyone a fair chance to be heard and helps our courts manage their caseloads.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission
WEB: courts.mt.gov/supreme/boards/a2j
EMAIL: atjcommission@mt.gov

Let’s fulfill our nation’s promise of justice for all.

The Path to Equal Justice

\$9,645,345

Total economic impact of civil legal aid on Montana's economy in 2013¹

Montanans from many organizations work together to help their neighbors, but many people still have to navigate complex legal situations on their own.

Self Help: Court Help Program

Provided more than 93,000 customer services between November 2011 and July 2018, almost 70% of which went to families earning less than \$24,000 per year. *(Does not provide legal advice.)*

93,177

SERVED SINCE NOVEMBER 2011

Volunteer Attorneys: Pro Bono Services

More than 1,900 Montana attorneys provided 164,909 volunteer hours in 2017.

164,909

HOURS VOLUNTEERED

Free On-Line Legal Forms: MontanaLawHelp.org

More than 6,000 self-help forms completed in 2017.

6,000

SELF-HELP FORMS COMPLETED

Elder Wills: Montana Aging Services Bureau (DPHHS)

Handled 609 cases for elder Montanans in 2017.

609

CONSULTATIONS FOR SENIORS HANDLED

General Civil Legal Aid: Montana Legal Services Association

- Is a national leader in innovative technology methods to increase access and efficiency.
- Provides a low-cost, rural service delivery model by using centralized attorneys serving clients in every single county.
- Helped 9,033 Montanans in 2017 with only 18 MLSA attorneys.

18 → 9,033

LAWYERS MONTANANS HELPED

Montana Justice Foundation: Grants

Awarded \$323,100 statewide in 2018 to legal aid, domestic violence, CASA, and mediation programs.

\$323,100

GRANT FUNDS AWARDED

What Could State Funding Do?

By equalizing civil filing fees to provide people with legal help, Montana can:

- Provide court-based pilot mediation programs for family and landlord-tenant cases,
- Increase direct legal services by up to 40% for Montanans of limited means,
- Promote volunteer and reduced-fee services by Montana lawyers to help their neighbors navigate complex legal issues,
- Return economic benefit to communities by helping secure financial stability for families, child support for domestic violence survivors, and hard-earned benefits for veterans and people with disabilities,
- Improve the efficiency of the courts for all court users.

215%

Return on investment in civil legal aid in Montana

1. 2015 Report on the Economic Impact of Civil Legal Aid to Montana