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State Board of Civil Legal Aid

Agency Profile 1

<https://www.mncourts.gov/lac>

AT A GLANCE

- Civil Legal Services attorneys, staff and volunteers handle legal matters for Minnesota’s most vulnerable people for no charge. With expertise and compassion, Civil Legal Services provides basic legal protections so clients can achieve security, self-sufficiency, and access to opportunity.
- There is one Civil Legal Services attorney for every 5,564 eligible clients, compared with one private practice attorney for every 203 Minnesotans above legal aid income guidelines.
- 53 percent of clients represented are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, 18 percent are seniors, 30 percent are people with disabilities, and 67 percent are women.
- In 2023, CLS provided legal representation and advice to 47,708 households consisting of more than 114,593 people throughout all 87 Minnesota counties.
- CLS provided education and self-help services to more than 600,000 people counting unique visitors to the www.LawHelpMN.org website.

PURPOSE

Effective July 1, 2025, Civil Legal Services (“CLS”) will be administered by the newly created State Board of Civil Legal Aid rather than the Supreme Court Legal Services Advisory Committee. Planning is underway for this transition, with the legislation directing that court staff currently employed to support the advisory committee transfer to the State Board of Civil Legal Aid upon the effective date. The primary focus of this new judicial branch agency will be to ensure access to high-quality civil legal services in every Minnesota county. The full legislative language related to the State Board of Civil Legal Aid can be found in Minnesota Session Laws, Chapter 123, Article 11 (2024).(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2024/0/Session+Law/Chapter/123/>).

The statewide CLS network is a core function of the justice system. CLS delivers justice to vulnerable Minnesotans and increases efficiency in the civil legal system. CLS focuses on resolving civil legal matters that directly affect the basic human needs for economic security, personal safety, shelter, and household sustenance. All CLS clients have low incomes, live with disabilities, or are elderly.

The Supreme Court has administered CLS funding since July 1, 1982, when the legislature created the Legal Services Advisory Committee. By statute, 85 percent of the general fund support is distributed on a poverty population basis to the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition (“the Coalition”), six regional civil legal aid organizations that provide legal representation in every county. The remaining 15 percent of general fund support is awarded on a competitive basis to additional qualified CLS organizations through a grantmaking process.

BUDGET

The State Board of Civil Legal Aid will become a new agency in fiscal year (FY) 2026 and does not have any historical budget data at this time.

STRATEGIES

CLS opens the doors of the justice system to the most vulnerable people in communities statewide. CLS creates strong and stable families and communities by helping people find solutions to civil legal disputes and delivering legal representation and advice. CLS is continuously innovating and expanding the www.LawHelpMN.org website, most recently by redesigning the site to include an online triage portal for people seeking legal help and information. The self-help resources on the website include plain language fact sheets and easy-to-use legal forms. The website is used by the court system, public libraries, social service agencies, and the general public.

Additionally, in 2021, CLS implemented a first -in-the-nation statewide network of technology access points to ensure access to civil legal aid, legal information, and remote hearings at state district courts for all Minnesotans.

CLS priorities include:

- Preserving housing stability and preventing homelessness due to improper eviction or foreclosure;
- Helping victims of domestic violence achieve safety;
- Maximizing the ability of people who are elderly or have disabilities to live safely and independently in their community;
- Ensuring that Minnesotans have health care and financial security; and
- Protecting people from financial exploitation.

An essential part of the state’s domestic violence intervention system, CLS gives legal help to women and children served by the state’s network of domestic violence shelters and support programs. CLS has a similar relationship with social service systems that address homelessness or independent living for seniors or people with disabilities. The CLS partnership with the Minnesota Judicial Branch is also critical. CLS creates efficiencies in the state court system by redirecting cases that are without merit or can be resolved in another manner, and by ensuring efficient use of the courts when CLS clients come before a judge. CLS also creates efficiencies by providing essential infrastructure to leverage and support volunteer attorneys through training, mentoring, and Minnesota Legal Advice Online. CLS has implemented a coordinated intake and referral process, including the statewide toll-free phone number 1-877-MY-MN-LAW, which directs callers to intake hubs for screening and service delivery across all CLS funded organizations.

RESULTS

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Legal representation cases closed	Quantity	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	The number of cases closed by CLS staff and pro bono attorneys have increased by 17 percent since 2020, including a seven percent increase from 2022 to 2023	47,708 cases closed in 2023
Dollar benefits achieved for clients	Result	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	The dollar benefits resulting from legal representation of low-income Minnesotans has ranged from \$17,107,754 in 2020, to \$20,280,871 in 2021, to \$19,100,975 in 2022, to \$21,670,805 in 2023	\$21,670,805 in benefits achieved for clients in 2023

Measure name	Measure type	Measure data source	Historical trend	Most recent data
Staff turnover rate	Quality	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	After receiving additional funding in 2022-2023 to improve employee retention through salary increases, CLS went from a statewide staff turnover rate of 37 percent in 2021 to 20 percent in 2023. Because the 2023 data did not include a full year with the salary increases included, the board expects to see another reduction in the turnover rate in 2024.	Staff turnover rate decreased by 46 percent since 2021
Outcome measures - housing	Result	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	CLS grantees track designated client outcomes at the end of full representation cases. These rates have been similar year over year.	91 percent of clients in housing cases closed in 2023 were in a better position to keep or find housing
Outcome measures - safety	Result	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	CLS grantees track designated client outcomes at the end of full representation cases. These rates have been similar year over year.	87 percent of clients in domestic violence cases closed in 2023 were physically safer
Outcome measures - consumer	Result	Annual data collection from CLS grantees	CLS grantees track designated client outcomes at the end of full representation cases. These rates have been similar year over year.	80 percent of clients in cases with a financial impact closed in 2023 were less likely to be harassed by creditors

Minn. Stat. §§ 480.242 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/480.242>) provides the authority for grantmaking to the Civil Legal Services network.