

What is the Hawaii Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable?

The Roundtable is a pilot project of the Department of Human Services, Access to Justice Committee, and the Hawaii Justice Foundation. It is funded by a grant from the National Center for State Courts from October 2018 - June 2019.

Roundtable goals include:

- Increase collaboration and efficiency across state departments
- Identify programs that would be more effective, efficient, and produce better outcomes by adding legal services to the supportive services provided
- Leverage federal funds to increase access to legal aid for Hawaii's most vulnerable
- Identify 2-3 projects that achieve one or more of the above goals

In Hawaii, there is only 1.15 legal aid attorneys per 10,000 people in poverty. Research shows that many low- and moderate-income people experience civil legal problems but do not understand that their issues have a legal solution, hindering government's goal of matching people with the right services. Ensuring access to legal aid not only prevents financial hardships for those who seek help, it can also conserve public dollars by preventing problems like homelessness or health issues that can be more costly and harmful to individuals and the public.

WHAT IS CIVIL LEGAL AID? Civil Legal aid is free legal assistance to low- and moderate-income people who have civil legal problems. Civil legal aid helps people access basic necessities such as health care, housing, government benefits, employment, and educational services¹

HOW CAN CIVIL LEGAL AID HELP? The type of legal assistance available through civil legal aid programs includes:

- Accessing basic necessities including government benefits and disaster services (SNAP, TANF, SSI, disability, veterans, FEMA); housing (foreclosure, eviction, unsafe housing, subsidized housing benefits); and health care (Medicaid, Medicare, Affordable Care Act)
- Ensuring safety and stability including individual safety (domestic violence, stalking or other harassment, elder abuse, child abuse and neglect); family law (child support, adoption, guardianship, divorce); and keeping children and youth in school (student discipline hearings, accommodations)
- Supporting individuals' economic security including employment (proper payment for work performed, securing drivers/professional licenses, accommodations for people with disabilities); taxes (filing and obtaining low-income tax credits); and consumer protection (consumer fraud and scams, predatory lending, and unfair debt collection practices)²

WHAT TYPE OF SERVICES DOES CIVIL LEGAL AID PROVIDE? Civil legal aid refers to free legal advocacy and/or legal information for low- and moderate-income people to help address the civil legal problems they may face. Aid can range from services at self-help centers and downloadable court forms to full legal representation. It also includes:

- Community education delivered via workshops, telephone help lines, medical-legal partnerships, and online information, all of which help people understand their rights and responsibilities, when legal assistance may be needed and where to find it
- Direct services by legal aid attorneys and pro bono volunteers such as legal advice to help identify legal issues and possible solutions
- Identifying and addressing systemic issues such as comprehensive data collection and helping to identify solutions to problems faced by a large number of people³

WHICH FEDERAL FUNDS DOES THE STATE RECEIVE THAT ALLOW SPENDING ON LEGAL AID? Many block, formula, and reimbursement funds intended to help low-income and other underserved populations, including the Community Development Block Grant, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act formula funds, Victims of Crime Act Victim Assistance Formula Grant program, and Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement funds

Endnotes

¹ White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable, <https://www.justice.gov/lair/file/828346/download>

² Ibid

³ White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable, Civil Legal Aid 101, <https://www.justice.gov/lair/file/828346/download>