

THE JUSTICE IN GOVERNMENT PROJECT

GETTING RESULTS WITH LEGAL AID
American University | Justice Programs Office



The big idea behind The Justice in Government Project is simple: **many government programs aimed at increasing opportunities for education, employment, housing, health care, and improving public safety and family stability are more effective and efficient when they include legal aid** alongside other supportive services. Government programs help people remove barriers to getting a job, escape domestic violence, halt elder abuse, respond to disasters, secure appropriate benefits, and more. Too often those programs do not include legal aid, but could achieve even better results and cost savings if they did.

We collaborate with several states including AZ, CA, HI, MS, SC, and WI, **to achieve stated policy priorities with existing federal block grant funds that allow spending on legal aid.**

This can include enhancing services to jobseekers using American Job Centers, addressing unmet legal needs of crime victims, helping children of a parent with opioid use disorder, and ensuring veterans access benefits to which they're entitled.

We don't come close to meeting the legal needs of low- or moderate-income people, the elderly, those with disabilities, and others who can't afford legal help. Unlike criminal cases, where there is typically a constitutional right to counsel, there is no right to a lawyer in most civil cases, even when a home, job, custody of a child, or healthcare are in jeopardy.

Legal aid can help:

- End veteran homelessness
- Address crime victims' unmet needs
- Remove obstacles to employment
- Lower health care costs
- Protect people from consumer fraud
- Help children leave foster care faster

Studies show...

-  For **homeless veterans, five of their top eleven unmet needs involve legal assistance**, according to a Department of Veterans Affairs survey about combined needs of male and female homeless veterans.¹
-  **Legal advocacy can reduce domestic violence substantially—as much as 21 percent**—even more than access to shelters or counseling services.²
-  Having **legal representation doubles the rate of adoptions** and increases the speed of children leaving foster care.³
-  **Setting aside a record of conviction increases employment and wages and reduces recidivism.** Women's wages increased 41 percent within a year of receiving the set-aside.⁴

Justice for all improves lives and sustains our democracy. While some people know that civil legal aid serves those same ends, too few realize how civil legal aid also makes government more effective, efficient, and fair. JGP works to turn that secret into common knowledge.

¹ <https://va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/CHALENG-2017-factsheet-508.pdf>

² <http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/SupportingSurvivors.pdf>

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740912001399>

⁴ <http://ccresourcecenter.org/2018/02/27/michigan-set-asides-found-to-increase-wages-and-reduce-recidivism/>



JUSTICE PROGRAMS OFFICE
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

<https://www.american.edu/spa/jpo/jgp.cfm>  facebook.com/aujpo/  [AU_JPO](https://twitter.com/AU_JPO) (202) 885-2875

4801 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Suite 508 Washington DC 20016-8159