

Minnesota Civil Legal Services (CLS)



ENSURING FAIRNESS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS A FUNDAMENTAL AMERICAN VALUE.

When we say the Pledge of Allegiance we close with “justice for all.” We need Civil Legal Services to ensure that the very principle our founding fathers envisioned remains alive: **justice for all, not the few who can afford it.**

WHAT IS CIVIL LEGAL AID?

Civil legal aid is free legal assistance to low-income people who have civil legal matters. These problems are non-criminal, such as health care, housing, employment, family, consumer, and education.

There are very limited circumstances where a person has a right to a lawyer in a civil case. This leaves millions of people no option other than to navigate the civil justice system alone.

Civil legal aid is a combination of services and resources that helps those who face some of the toughest legal challenges: economically vulnerable, homeless, children, veterans, seniors, disabled people, and survivors of domestic violence – to effectively understand and enforce their rights in matters that impact their basic well-being.

WHO ARE WE?

The Minnesota Legal Services Coalition (MLSC), is an association of Minnesota regional civil legal services programs who provide service to individuals in all 87 Counties in Minnesota, including:

- Anishinabe Legal Services (ALS)
- Central Minnesota Legal Services (CMLS)
- Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota (LASNEM)
- Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota, Inc. (LSNM)
- Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (MMLA)
- Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

WHAT DO WE DO?

Civil legal aid services include:

- Legal representation
- Legal advice
- Legal clinics
- Self-help resources
- Easy-to-understand forms
- Community outreach and education
- LawHelpMN.org
- Pro Bono volunteers
- Legal Kiosk Project

WHO DO WE HELP?

Civil legal aid provides a range of services, some of which are available to anyone, regardless of income. Civil legal service providers typically represent people who are at 125% of Federal Poverty Guidelines or below.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES CLIENT STORIES



Jada* contacted CLS after fleeing a domestic violence relationship. Soon after they arrived at the homeless shelter, her daughter disclosed physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Homeless, scared, and vulnerable, she turned to legal aid for help. Legal Aid represented Jada through complicated and intense court procedures. Jada now has sole custody of both of her children and is empowered knowing she is able to keep them away from their abusive father.



CLS helped an African American woman remain in her home and preserve generational wealth. Our client was caught up on her first mortgage but had never paid on a second mortgage from years ago taken out to help out her ex-husband's brother's business. The original loan was \$43,000 but was in arrears at nearly double that amount due to interest. MMLA helped the client file a lawsuit contesting the foreclosure. The lender agreed to settle the case by giving her a loan modification which would give her 30 years to pay the mortgage at 6% with monthly payments that were affordable to her of about \$400.



A client came to CLS due to a bad reference from a former landlord. CLS investigated and found the former landlord had discriminated against the client in terminating her lease due to abusive conduct by her ex-partner. CLS filed a federal fair housing act case and landlord settled, agreeing to pay \$45,000 and train its staff on discrimination laws.



CLS represented a disabled mother of three in a complicated custody action in a case where the other parent's stalking, abusive behavior, mental health and drug use were a danger to the family. CLS advocates filed a motion to modify custody of the older child, and responded to the other parent's custody petition filed after the client and children fled the shared home for safety. Ultimately, the cases went to trial and CLS' client was awarded sole legal and physical custody of the children, subject to the other party's supervised parenting time at a center.



A 69-year-old client came to CLS looking for help with a housing expungement. The eviction on her record interfered with her ability to find housing and she was homeless. The CLS attorney discovered she did have a good case for expungement and the attorney assisted her in appealing the denial of her application. In the process of preparing for the appeal, the attorney learned that the client was eligible for Elderly Waiver services. Within a couple weeks she was in an assisted living apartment where she can receive services. Without the attorney's assistance, the client would likely still be homeless.



A retired, disabled veteran called CLS because he was worried about garnishment. As a previous victim of identity theft, he was unsure of whom to trust. The attorney discovered George was in debt because he was in a cycle of payday loans. The attorney advised George how to get himself out of the loan cycle and how to protect his veteran's benefits from garnishment. Knowing the right process to follow – and that the information was coming from a reliable source – gave him peace of mind and empowered him to advocate for himself and protect his limited income.