

Louisiana's Civil Legal Aid Funding Crisis

Vote YES on House Bill 453

Louisiana has the 3rd highest poverty rate in the nation. Of the estimated 920,000 Louisianans living below poverty, 20% of them will have at least one civil legal problem annually. More than 147,000 of those individuals will go without legal assistance.

What is Civil Legal Aid?

Civil legal aid is free legal advice, representation or other legal assistance provided to low-income and vulnerable people who cannot otherwise afford legal help. The responsibility for meeting the civil legal needs of Louisiana's poor falls primarily upon a network of nonprofit organizations. These programs come to the rescue of constituents who cannot afford the legal help they need in life-changing situations. **In 2016, Louisiana's civil legal aid organizations assisted constituents in 26,437 legal matters.**

Funding free civil legal aid will:

- **Protect families and children** (domestic violence victims, Child in Need of Care cases)
- **Provide economic stability** (public benefits, consumer protection, tax education)
- **Preserve housing** (foreclosure prevention, landlord-tenant disputes, successions)
- **Ensure legal help for vulnerable populations** (disaster victims, veterans, the homeless, and persons with disabilities)

Why Support Free Civil Legal Aid?

Civil legal aid is a smart investment for Louisiana's budget. The Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) 2016 Social Return on Investment Analysis (SROI) shows that for every \$1 invested in Louisiana's civil legal aid services, the programs deliver \$8.73 in immediate and long-term, consequential financial benefits. Investing in civil legal aid is a powerful way to help people solve critical problems and prevent events that are harmful and expensive for Louisiana and its citizens.

Approximately 48% of funding for Louisiana's legal services programs comes directly from federal funding. Recently, **the White House** released a framework for the FY18 federal budget that **recommends the elimination of the Legal Services Corporation**. Gutting civil legal aid will devastate families and vulnerable people in Louisiana.

Louisiana last supported civil legal aid in 2011. The largest appropriation granted was \$500,000. **A small increase to the annual registration of the 16,000 notaries required to pay a yearly renewal fee would generate significant funds that can be dedicated to supporting civil legal aid.**

Notaries are an integral part of Louisiana's civil legal community because of the powers afforded them. These powers are far greater than signature notaries in other states, and include preparation and execution of:

**contracts • wills • trusts • acts of sale • matrimonial agreements • prenuptial agreements
affidavits of small succession • provisional custody agreements • donations • mortgages • acts of adoption**

Notaries have the power to set their own fees, and currently pay only \$25 a year to be licensed for **ALL of the privileges they have**. This is one of the lowest annual licensing fees in the state. For example: licensed florists, dieticians, and social workers are required to pay \$100 a year.

The Louisiana Legal Community Supports Civil Legal Aid in a Variety of Ways

- The Louisiana Bar Foundation, financially supported and led by volunteer Louisiana attorneys, awarded **\$6.3 million** in grants to non-profit organizations providing free civil legal aid to Louisiana's poor in the 2016-17 fiscal year.
- The Louisiana State Bar Association annually contributes over **\$500,000**, \$24.50 per attorney, for access to justice related issues.
- In 2016, Louisiana attorneys provided more than 87,000 hours of reported pro bono legal services, equating to almost **\$11 million** of donated services.

House Bill 453 would ask notaries to do their part in supporting the Louisiana civil legal aid community with a modest increase to the annual registration fee.



The Access to Justice Commission is a collaboration between the Louisiana Supreme Court, Louisiana State Bar Association and the Louisiana Bar Foundation. The Commission is committed to assuring that Louisianans, regardless of their economic circumstance, have access to equal justice under the law. For more information contact ATJCommission@lsba.org.