






**PROGRAM DIRECTORS:**

**Cody Nelson** | Anishinabe Legal Services   
**Jean Lastine** | Central MN Legal Services   
**Floyd Pnewski** | Judicare of Anoka County  
**Dori Streit** | Legal Aid Service of Northeastern MN 



**PROGRAM DIRECTORS:**

**Anne Hoefgen** | Legal Services of Northwest MN   
**Drew Schaffer** | Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid  
**Jessie Nicholson** | Southern MN Regional Legal   
Services

March 4, 2021

***SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY***

Chair Jamie Becker-Finn  
559 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

**RE: Fully Funding Civil Legal Services in Minnesota**

Dear Chair Becker-Finn:

We write as the executive leaders of the civil legal aid law firms that comprise the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition (“the Coalition”).<sup>1</sup> We represent families and individuals in every county in Minnesota, protecting their most basic civil legal rights and needs. We write this letter to outline the level of investment necessary for Minnesota’s Civil Legal Services system to meet the critical legal needs of Minnesotans statewide at current demand levels, with our current eligibility requirements and case priorities.

The current level of legislative funding appropriated to Civil Legal Services is \$14.72 million annually. This support is leveraged by other funds we secure through a variety of sources, including foundations, lawyer registration fees, private fundraising activities, and public and private grants, to deliver justice to Minnesotans statewide. In Fiscal Year 2020, the cumulative funding for Civil Legal Services from all sources was \$45,953,375.

This session, we are advocating for increased Civil Legal Services funding of \$2,208,000 in Fiscal Year 2022 and \$3,478,000 in Fiscal Year 2023. These increases are necessary for Civil Legal Services to take beginning steps to address the compensation deficit crisis we are experiencing. Without the increase, we will not be able to sustain our current level of legal representation services.

We are forced to turn away over half of people who come to us for legal help due to lack of resources. To provide legal representation services to all eligible clients who seek legal help (at current demand levels, within our current case priorities), while attempting to resolve the Civil

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<sup>1</sup> The Coalition we lead includes seven regional civil legal aid organizations – Anishinabe Legal Services (ALS), Central Minnesota Legal Services (CMLS), Judicare of Anoka County (JAC), Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota (LASNEM), Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota (LSNM), Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (MMLA), and Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS).

Legal Services compensation deficit to ensure those services are sustainable, we estimate that the necessary level of annual investment over and above our current legislative appropriation of \$14.72 million would be **\$75,057,179**.

We reached this calculation using a conservative estimate of a 52% turn-away rate for eligible clients we are unable to serve due to lack of resources, along with a general estimate of funds necessary to increase our average Civil Legal Services starting attorney salary to the \$65,000-\$68,000 range.

The additional **\$75,057,179** above current funding would support proportional Civil Legal Services staffing and compensation increases for all positions, including attorneys and support staff. It would also support graduated increases year to year in our compensation schedules for all positions.

We envision implementing the Civil Legal Services staffing and compensation increases this investment would support over the course of a biennium, with immediate compensation increases for existing staff. Through the implementation period, we would continuously evaluate our priorities as our capacity to meet statewide demand increased.

Thank you for your consideration of our funding request in this time of crisis for Civil Legal Services statewide. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions about our request or the calculation included in this letter.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Minnesota Legal Services Coalition*

Anne Hoefgen, Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota  
Jean Lastine, Central Minnesota Legal Services  
Cody Nelson, Anishinabe Legal Services  
Jessie Nicholson, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services  
Floyd Pnewski, Judicare of Anoka County  
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