

March 12, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Stinson, LLP has been involved in a six-year partnership with Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (MMLA) and the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC) in the Willard Hay and Near North neighborhoods that uses legal strategies to support and enhance economic development in North Minneapolis. Through this program, and a number of others including an Eviction Representation Program (ERP) in Hennepin County, Stinson has worked closely with MMLA and values the outstanding work that legal aid brings to our local communities. Based on these experiences, Stinson, LLP urges you to prioritize investments to ensure that Minnesota's legal system serves as a justice system for people in need. Our unique MMLA/NRRC partnership was formed to employ legal strategies to identify and prioritize community development opportunities within the NRRC service area. The majority of the NRRC residents are black, indigenous, persons of color and low income. Legal support through Community Civil Legal Services supports the community's most basic civil and human rights, families, homes, economic well-being and health. It is critically important to fund Civil Legal Services fully to overcome barriers to equal justice for all in our community.

The current level of legislative funding appropriated to Civil Legal Services is \$14.72 million annually. Even though Civil Legal Services leverages this critical investment with other funds from a variety of other sources, there is not enough investment to meet the statewide demand for civil legal aid.

Due to lack of sufficient resources, Civil Legal Services is forced to turn away over half of eligible clients who seek legal help to protect their most basic human needs. Additionally, Civil Legal Services faces an existential crisis in the compensation deficit it experiences compared to other public interest and public service legal employers.

Civil Legal Services attorneys start with salaries of around \$50,000, over \$15,000 lower than Public Defenders, who are likewise underpaid. This session, Civil Legal Services seeks increased funding of \$2,208,000 in Fiscal Year 2022 and \$3,478,000 in Fiscal Year 2023. These funding increases are necessary for Civil Legal Services to take beginning steps to address its compensation deficit crisis. Without full funding for the requested increase, Civil Legal Services will not be able to sustain its current level of legal representation services, and more Minnesotans will be deprived of a chance at justice in their legal cases.

Thank you for your consideration of our strong support for full funding of the Civil Legal Services budget request. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions about the critical value of Civil Legal Services in ensuring that justice is a reality for Minnesotans statewide.

Sincerely,
Stinson LLP



Mark Hinderks
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