



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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February 13, 2017

Representative Rob Brooks
Senator Roger Roth
Members of the Joint Legislative Council

Dear Co-Chairs Brooks and Roth, and all Members of the Joint Legislative Council,

I am writing to express my support for the two bills that have come to you from the Legislative Council Study Committee on Access to Civil Legal Services: LRB-1263 creating an Interagency Legal Aid Coordinating Council and LRB-0982 relating to Grant Money for Legal Aid.

I was glad to have been a member of this Study Committee, and I appreciate Chairman Horlacher and Vice-Chair Stroebel's leadership.

Legal Action of Wisconsin is the state's largest provider of free, high-quality civil legal aid. We provide access to legal help to protect low-income Wisconsinites' livelihoods, families, health, and their homes. We have six Wisconsin offices (Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, and Racine) serving all 39 surrounding counties. Each year, our attorneys and staff help thousands of Wisconsinites from all backgrounds - including those facing the toughest of legal challenges: veterans, seniors, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, those at risk of homelessness, and ex-offenders - to effectively navigate the justice system.

The Legislative Council Study Committee on Access to Civil Legal Services was charged with reviewing the need for indigent civil legal aid and with identifying additional non-GPR sources to assure that all Wisconsin residents can access justice. The Committee heard powerful testimony from state and national experts. It confirmed that which we at Legal Action of Wisconsin know all too well: for every person we are able to help access justice, we must turn someone else away because we don't have enough lawyers to help them.

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La Crosse Office Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties
Madison Office Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk Counties
Migrant Project Statewide
Milwaukee Office Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties
Oshkosh Office Adams, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Ozaukee, Sheboygan, Washington, Waushara and Winnebago Counties
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It must be noted that, given the tremendous unmet need, a truly robust package of recommendations from this Committee would have included direct and new appropriations for indigent civil legal aid. Wisconsin is one of only a few states that do not prioritize some funding for civil legal aid). Nevertheless, the two bills in front of you represent innovative approaches that hold great promise for leveraging and utilizing existing systems and funding to increase access to justice.

We can no longer operate programs that try to address the needs of vulnerable populations without also ensuring that we're identifying and are addressing their critical civil legal needs. For example, the path to self-sufficiency and stability for many veterans and their families, is lined with health problems that require civil attorneys' interventions; the way to a family-supporting job for a single parent is civil legal aid to restore a suspended or revoked driver's license; and the safety and independence of elder abuse victims are assured because civil legal aid protected them from further victimization. For many low-income parents with children, the effort to help them get and keep jobs will falter unless civil legal aid helps them stop paycheck-swallowing garnishments, get a restraining order or divorce from an abusive partner, or corrects a criminal record that is barring the door to employment prospects. It is time to add civil legal aid to all these programs.

Both of these bills will move Wisconsin forward to ensure that civil legal needs are recognized as part of a systemic, strategic, holistic conversation about how we effectively and efficiently help Wisconsin's veterans, victims of violence and sexual assault, seniors, job seekers, and ex-offenders who are re-entering our communities. These bills can help us increase coordination and collaboration among state agencies around the delivery of civil legal aid, and permanently raise the profile of civil legal aid as part of the solution.

We hope these bills will receive broad bipartisan support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Pifer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Pifer".

David Pifer
Executive Director
Legal Action of Wisconsin