

WisTAF: Awards \$3.3 million in Civil Legal Aid grants

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MADISON — The Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) today announced \$3.3 million in civil legal aid grant awards that will be used by 19 nonprofit organizations in all regions of Wisconsin to protect people’s safety, livelihood, housing, and independence in the face of legal challenges. The funds will be distributed in 2022 and 2023.

“Think of grandparents raising their grandchild but needing official guardianship. Or, consider a victim of domestic violence who wants to protect herself and her family. Landlords and tenants often want to negotiate better solutions than eviction. These are cases handled regularly by Wisconsin civil legal aid providers. These organizations play a crucial role for our state,” said April Rockstead Barker, chairperson of the WisTAF Board of Directors.

The grants announced today are an example of civil legal aid, a strategy for addressing a longstanding hole in the justice system. While many people know of the Constitution’s guarantee of an attorney in criminal cases, there is typically no such guarantee outside of criminal law: an area broadly known as civil law.

However, civil law encompasses measures most people take for granted such as protecting their fundamental housing, employment, and medical care needs. A person who can’t afford a lawyer often struggles to navigate the legal system’s complexities. This struggle makes justice and stability elusive, and often creates costs for taxpayers in the form of courtroom inefficiency or the emergency services and public support needed when challenges fester.

Research shows low-income people’s civil legal needs typically go unmet, due to lack of resources or awareness. The COVID-19 pandemic has ballooned those

needs, while decreasing funding from key sources.

Nonprofit law firms and others use WisTAF's grants to offer advice, full legal representation, and access to online and in-person information to those who couldn't otherwise afford a lawyer.

"So much thought has gone into passing legal protections that are supposed to be available to everyone. We should make sure people can in fact access those protections, especially when the stakes are high," said Rebecca L. Murray, executive director of WisTAF.

WisTAF, a nonprofit organization established by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, is the state's channel for general civil legal aid funding. In 2020, providers used WisTAF grants to assist more than 10,000 clients spread across every county in the state.

The grant awards announced today come from two of WisTAF's civil legal aid grant programs:

- Direct Legal Services (DLS) allows providers flexibility to help low-income people address barriers to self-sufficiency. It is WisTAF's oldest and largest grant program. In 2020, the most common types of cases were those related to housing (29 percent), family law (11 percent), and guardianship issues (9 percent).
- The Foreclosure Prevention/Community Redevelopment Legal Assistance (FP/CRLA) program catalyzes innovative practices to help low-income individuals and families stay in their homes and achieve financial stability. Simultaneously, providers in this program work at the community level to empower and stabilize groups facing disadvantage.

Seventeen organizations received DLS grants for 2022, while six organizations received FP/CRLA grants for both 2022 and 2023. Details are provided below.

[WisTAF](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works with civil legal aid organizations in the state to increase access to justice. WisTAF oversees funds and invests in services to help people resolve legal problems.

ABC for Health	\$63,000 (DLS 2022)	Statewide	Madison
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee	\$21,000 (DLS 2022)	Dodge, Fond du Lac, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha counties	Fond du Lac, Fontana, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Waukesha
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse	\$15,000 (DLS 2022)	Adams, Buffalo, Chippewa, Clark, Crawford, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Marathon, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Portage, Richland, Trempealeau, Vernon, and Wood counties	Eau Claire, La Crosse, Loyal, Wausau
Center Against Sexual & Domestic Abuse (CASDA)	\$25,800 (DLS 2022)	Ashland, Bayfield, and Douglas counties	Superior
Centro Legal	\$35,000 (DLS 2022)	Milwaukee and Waukesha counties	Milwaukee
Community Justice, Inc.	\$18,900 (DLS 2022) \$9,450 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$6,545 (FP/CRLA 2023)	Dane, Dodge, Crawford, Columbia, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Juneau, Lafayette, Marquette, Rock, Sauk, and Waushara counties	Madison
Disability Rights Wisconsin	\$123,014 (DLS 2022)	Statewide	Green Bay, Madison, Menasha, Milwaukee, Rice Lake
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin	\$15,750 (DLS 2022)	Statewide	Janesville, Madison
Kids Matter, Inc.	\$44,000 (DLS 2022)	Milwaukee and Waukesha counties, limited services statewide	Milwaukee
Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc.	\$745,148 (DLS 2022) \$525,000 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$363,591 (FP/CRLA 2023)	39 counties in southern Wisconsin	Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, Racine
Legal Aid Society of Door County	\$11,000 (DLS 2022)	Door County	Sister Bay, Sturgeon Bay
Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee, Inc.	\$111,896 (DLS 2022) \$186,900 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$129,438 (FP/CRLA 2023)	Milwaukee County	Milwaukee, Wauwatosa
LOTUS Legal Clinic, Inc.	\$20,000 (DLS 2022)	Statewide	Brookfield
Metro Milwaukee Mediation Services	\$42,000 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$29,087 (FP/CRLA 2023)	Statewide	Milwaukee
Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish DBA Catholic Multicultural Center	\$10,500 (DLS 2022)	Columbia, Dane, Grant, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Jefferson, LaFayette, Marquette, Rock, and Sauk counties	Madison
Portage County Legal Aid Society	\$23,783 (DLS 2022)	Portage County	Stevens Point
Vivent Health	\$25,000 (DLS 2022)	Statewide	Appleton, Beloit, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Kenosha, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee, Superior, Wausau
Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center	\$21,000 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$14,544 (FP/CRLA 2023)	Winnebago County	Oshkosh
Wisconsin Judicare	\$192,209 (DLS 2022) \$262,500 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$181,795 (FP/CRLA 2023)	33 counties in northern Wisconsin, and Native American clients statewide	Wausau
TOTALS	\$1,501,000 (DLS 2022) \$1,046,850 (FP/CRLA 2022) \$725,000 (FP/CRLA 2023) \$2,547,850 (Total - grants announced today that will be distributed in 2022)		
GRAND TOTAL	\$3,272,850 (Total - all grants announced today)		