

LEGAL AID PROGRAMS SAVE THE STATE MONEY

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Legal aid secures about \$4 million each year in new child support orders, primarily on behalf of families on Public Assistance, thus, reducing the burden of such assistance on taxpayers;

Disabled Minnesotans obtain over \$5 million each year in new federal disability benefits with legal aid's help, reducing the burden on state and local government funds;

Legal aid helped prevent homelessness in an estimated 2,650 cases last year. According to the Wilder Foundation, one-third of homeless families go to public-subsidized shelters. The cost of an average stay is as much as \$4,480 per family, thus, **legal aid saves government about 3.96 million dollars in shelter costs**;

Of the 35,411 cases the Coalition programs handled last year, only 10.5% of the cases went to full hearing. **3,072 of these cases were settled without further litigation or screened out for lack of merit.** At an estimated cost of \$1,378.38 per civil case, based on court statistics, this means that **legal aid saved at least \$5.1 million in court time.** As noted by Supreme Court Chief Justice (and former state legislator) Kathleen Blatz, legal aid helps "the judicial system be more cost-effective by providing preventative education materials, successfully resolving most matters through informal or formal negotiations, and advising people against bringing non-meritorious cases."

In addition to saving the state at least \$18,000,000 in hard money, the state also saves "soft (more difficult to measure exactly) dollars" in the following areas:

- A recent analysis by economists of Department of Justice (DOJ) statistics on declines in domestic abuse in the 1990s stated, "**Legal services are the only service that decreases the likelihood women will be battered. Since legal services help women achieve economic power and self-sufficiency, they are a good place to spend public money.**"
- **Legal aid's work in preventing domestic violence saves lives and prevents physical injury**, thus, helping to save on law enforcement costs and other societal costs which are incurred when there is violent death or injury;
- **Legal aid advances public safety**, not only by preventing domestic abuse problems, but as noted by the 1996 report of the Joint Legal Access in Funding Committee, (appointed by the Minnesota Supreme Court at the direction of the Legislature), legal aid cases stabilize families in crisis, prevent abuse, prevent deprivation of basic needs and school instability. These have been identified by Governor Pawlenty's Chief of Staff, Charlie Weaver and Senator Ellen Anderson, as risk factors in producing violent crime. Weaver and Anderson noted that "preventing just five people from committing violent crimes would save the state \$4,000,000 in prison and corrections costs."
- Legal aid, working with the police and other community partners, helped to create child safety and visitation centers, **protecting kids and reducing the incidence of police calls related to address domestic abuse in visitation situations** and in many of its cases, legal aid helps to keep kids in school, reducing truancy and delinquency and, thus, saving on public dollars.
- **Legal aid also helps to reduce the expenditure of public dollars through community education, brief service and other representation work** which empowers persons to solve their own problems, helps divert *pro se* cases from the court system, helps to repair substandard housing and assists adults to move from welfare to work by overcoming legal obstacles.
- The Committee of the Minnesota Supreme Court concluded that, **legal aid is a core government service and an essential part of the justice system**, and is an excellent long-term investment for Minnesota's taxpayers.