

Legal Aid Services of Oregon

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Press Release

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PORTLAND, OR. A second round of funding cuts in less than a year has forced Legal Aid Services of Oregon (LASO) to close its Oregon City office, which has served low income people with their civil legal problems in Clackamas, Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman counties for over 40 years. The office closure will be effective the end of March, 2012. After that, these counties will be served through the Portland office.

Oregon's statewide legal aid programs implemented a 16% reduction in force, resulting in the loss of 35 FTE effective October 31, 2011. Congressional budget cuts in November to the Legal Services Corporation, a major source of funding for LASO, required Oregon's legal aid programs to quickly absorb an additional \$620,000 in cuts by January 1, 2012. The cuts come at a time when Oregonians continue to face daunting challenges from the economic crisis and more Oregonians are eligible for free legal services. According to Tom Matsuda, LASO's Executive Director, "The cuts would have been deeper, but LASO's management and union agreed to state-wide wage and benefit reductions for all employees in 2012 in order to avoid even more layoffs and better preserve client service. Because of the deep cuts we have already had to take, we could not absorb further cuts without closing an office."

"We are committed to meeting the civil legal needs of low-income clients throughout Oregon, including the region previously served by the Oregon City office. But, there is no doubt that budget cuts will reduce the numbers of clients we can help" says Matsuda.

Oregon's legal aid programs provide civil legal services to low-income Oregonians with high priority civil needs---food, shelter, medical care, income maintenance, and safety from harm. Oregon's legal aid programs provided free direct assistance to over 25,000 clients last year, with thousands more helped through legal aid's pro se materials, self-help programs and pro bono projects. About 40% of legal aid's services are devoted to helping victims of domestic violence obtain restraining orders and deal with custody and child support. Legal aid programs now have offices in 17 communities.

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