

Oregon State Bar
House of Delegates Resolution
Resolution in Support of Adequate Funding for Legal Services to Low-Income Oregonians
Passed 10/28/2022

Whereas, providing equal access to justice and high quality legal representation to all Oregonians is central to the mission of the Oregon State Bar;

Whereas, equal access to justice plays an important role in the perception of fairness of the justice system;

Whereas, programs providing civil legal services to low-income Oregonians is a fundamental component of the Bar's effort to provide such access;

Whereas, since 1998, pursuant to ORS 9.572, the Oregon State Bar has operated the Legal Services Program to manage and provide oversight of funds allocated by the State of Oregon for legal aid. This is done in accordance with the Bar's Standards and Guidelines, which incorporate national standards for operating a statewide legal aid program;

Whereas, Oregon's legal aid programs do not have sufficient resources to meet the civil legal needs of Oregon's poor;

Whereas, the health and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are disparately impacting people from Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) communities, and low-income communities;

Whereas, assistance from the Oregon State Bar and the legal community is critical to maintaining and developing resources that will provide low-income Oregonians meaningful access to the justice system.

Resolved, that the Oregon State Bar;

(1) Strengthen its commitment and ongoing efforts to improve the availability of a full range of legal services to all citizens of our state, through the development and maintenance of adequate support and funding for Oregon's legal aid programs and through support for the Campaign for Equal Justice.

(2) Request that Congress and the President of the United States make a genuine commitment to equal justice by adequately funding the Legal Services Corporation, which provides federal support for legal aid.

(3) Work with Oregon's legal aid programs and the Campaign for Equal Justice to preserve and increase state funding for legal aid and explore other sources of new funding.

(4) Actively participate in the efforts of the Campaign for Equal Justice to increase contributions by the Oregon legal community, by establishing goals of a 100% participation rate by members of the House of Delegates, 75% of Oregon State Bar Sections contributing, and a 50% contribution rate by all lawyers.

(5) Support the Oregon Law Foundation and its efforts to increase resources through the interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program, and encourage Oregon lawyers to bank with financial institutions that are OLF Leadership Banks, meaning that they pay the highest IOLTA rates.

(6) Support the Campaign for Equal Justice in efforts to educate lawyers and the community about the legal needs of the poor, legal services delivery and access to justice for low-income and vulnerable Oregonians.

(7) Encourage Oregon lawyers to support civil legal services programs through enhanced pro bono work.

(8) Support the fundraising efforts of those nonprofit organizations that provide civil legal services to low-income Oregonians that do not receive funding from the Campaign for Equal Justice.

Presenters:

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Background

The mission of the Oregon State Bar is to serve justice by promoting respect for the rule of law, by improving the quality of legal services and by increasing access to justice. One of the three main functions of the bar is to 'advance a fair, inclusive, and accessible justice system.

The Board of Governors and the House of Delegates have adopted a series of resolutions supporting adequate funding for civil legal services in Oregon (Delegate Resolutions in 1996, 1997, 2002, 2005–2021). This resolution is similar to the resolution passed in 2020.

The legal services organizations in Oregon were established by the state and local bar associations to increase access for low-income clients. The majority of the boards of the legal aid programs are appointed by state and local bar associations. The Oregon State Bar operates the Legal Services Program pursuant to ORS 9.572 to distribute the state statutory allocation for civil legal services and provide methods for evaluating the legal services programs. The Campaign for Equal Justice works collaboratively with the Oregon Law Foundation and the Oregon State Bar to support Oregon's legal aid programs. The Bar and the Oregon Law Foundation each appoint a member to serve on the board of the Campaign for Equal Justice.

Oregon's legal aid program consists of three separate non-profits that work together as part of an integrated service delivery system designed to provide high-priority, free, civil legal services to low-income Oregonians in all 36 Oregon counties through offices in 18 communities. There are two statewide programs, Legal Aid Services of Oregon (LASO) and the Oregon Law Center (OLC); and one county wide program, the Center for Non-Profit Legal Services (Jackson County). Because the need is great and resources are limited, legal aid offices address high priority civil legal issues such as safety from domestic violence, housing, consumer law, income maintenance (social security, unemployment insurance, and other self-sufficiency benefits), health, employment and individual rights. In 2021, about 24% of legal aid's cases were family law cases, usually helping victims of domestic violence. Another 37% of cases were related to maintaining housing. All of these programs work to stretch limited resources through pro bono programs and self-help materials. Last year legal aid directly served 15,556 clients. An additional 200,000 Oregonians were served through impact litigation. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of Oregonians were served through administrative advocacy. Legal aid's website, www.oregonlawhelp.com received over 467,000 unique visitors a year. Additional Oregonians who were victims of wildfires received vital self-help information and referrals through legal aid's disaster service website, <https://oregondisasterlegalservices.org>.

Last year 13% of lawyers contributed to the Campaign for Equal Justice each year, but in some Oregon regions (Central Oregon, Jackson County, and Lane County, for example), participation is as high as 30%. Prior to the pandemic over 20% of OR lawyers contributed to the CEJ.