

LBF Highlights Social and Economic Impact of Civil Legal Aid

By Edmund J. Giering IV, 2025-26 LBF President



As president of the Louisiana Bar Foundation, I am honored to lead an organization that has served as a trusted authority and the largest funder of civil legal aid in Louisiana for almost 40 years. Our long-standing commitment to responsible stewardship and our deep-rooted partnerships in all 64 parishes enable us to connect thousands of residents with much needed assistance each year.

I am pleased to announce that in April, our Board of Directors approved \$9.9 million in annual sustaining grants for the 2025–26 fiscal year, with a total of \$14.6 million in funding anticipated. These funds—combined with the dedication of countless volunteers—serve as a testament to the Louisiana Bar Foundation’s ongoing commitment to making our civil justice system accessible to all.

Civil legal aid provides free legal assistance for non-criminal matters—helping individuals navigate issues such as domestic violence, veterans’ benefits, elder care, child welfare, housing, and employment. Unlike in criminal cases, there is no constitutional right to an attorney in civil proceedings. This makes civil legal aid a critical safeguard, ensuring equal access to justice and upholding the rights of those who otherwise could not afford legal representation.

When people lack access to civil legal aid, the consequences ripple through individuals, families, and entire communities. Unresolved issues such as eviction, foreclosure, or unsafe housing can result in increased homelessness, placing added pressure on shelters and emergency services. Victims of domestic violence may remain in dangerous situations without access to restraining orders or custody protections, risking further harm. Financial instability can stem from unjust job loss, wage theft, or denied unemployment benefits, weakening local economies and increasing dependence on public aid. Educational barriers, particularly for children with disabilities, limit long-term opportunities. Denial of access to health care, Medicaid, or disability benefits worsens health outcomes and overburdens hospitals. Inequality grows when only those who can afford legal representation receive fair treatment, eroding trust in the justice system and perpetuating poverty.

Additionally, unrepresented individuals slow down court processes due to unfamiliarity with legal procedures, straining already burdened public systems. These unresolved legal issues can destabilize families and communities for generations,

contributing to cycles of poverty, poor education, and chronic insecurity. Ultimately, civil legal aid is essential not only for ensuring individual justice but also for promoting stability, fairness, and equity across society.

Given these far-reaching consequences, investing in civil legal aid is not just a moral imperative, it’s a smart and cost-effective strategy. That’s why I’m proud to share that the 2023–24 Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis for Civil Legal Aid Services in Louisiana revealed an impressive return: for every \$1 invested, the citizens of Louisiana received \$13.28 in immediate and long-term financial benefits. This equates to a total net value of \$162,988,000 generated through civil legal aid efforts during the year, based on the number and types of legal matters handled.

In fiscal year 2023-24 Louisiana’s civil legal aid organizations assisted in over 100 types of civil legal issues including family law, housing, healthcare, consumer protection, public benefits, employment, and community support issues. By helping people resolve legal problems early and fairly, civil legal aid prevents crises that are far more expensive to address later, such as homelessness, emergency medical care, child welfare interventions, and prolonged court proceedings. Civil legal aid plays a vital role in stabilizing families, reducing dependency on public assistance, enabling workforce participation, and supporting the broader economy. It also strengthens public trust in our legal system and serves to break cycles of poverty and insecurity that can persist across generations.

We hope this analysis raises awareness of the tangible value of civil legal aid and encourages continued investment in these essential services. Civil legal aid is a wise investment because when people understand their rights and can access justice, the entire community benefits. Empowering individuals to improve their lives strengthens our economy, enriches our communities, and builds a more just and stable Louisiana.

Community Services Analysis was engaged to conduct the SROI analysis of more than 45 Louisiana civil legal aid organizations for the 2023-24 fiscal year. SROI measures the financial value created by the organization through delivery of services to the community. SROI is an internationally standardized and accepted process for measuring and understanding the financial impact of social service organizations. For a summary and to view the full report go to www.RaisingTheBar.org.