

Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services

Strengthening the Delivery of Civil Legal Help to Vulnerable Tennesseans

www.tals.org

What is Legal Aid?

America has a long history of providing legal help to people with low-income in civil (ordinary private matters rather than laws regulating criminal, political, or military matters). For a complete history of civil legal aid, see this article from the [National Legal Aid and Defenders Association](#).

Legal aid programs assist eligible low-income Tennesseans with legal advice and counsel on civil matters – such as domestic violence, housing matters, health insurance appeals, public benefits, unemployment, and consumer matters. Eligibility is typically determined by measuring family income and assets of a potential client. Federal funding, provided by the Legal Services Corporation limits income amounts to 125% of the Federal Poverty Rate. Utilizing other funding streams, organizations are often able to assist certain individuals at higher income or asset levels. In addition, Tennessee has a vibrant and growing array of pro bono activities where private attorneys assist low-income and working Tennesseans.

Currently, in Tennessee, there are over 10 non-profit agencies that provide legal assistance to the low-income. In addition, clinical programs can be found at three of the state's law schools and an extensive network of pro bono programs exists. Innovative new methods for delivering legal information and limited advice, such as <http://www.onlinetnjustice.org/> and <http://legalinfotn.org> are also in development.

Since 1964, the United States government has supported its commitment to "equal justice under the law" with federal funding for civil legal assistance to low-income people. As of 2011, the federal appropriation of \$329 million represents less than half the resources devoted to civil legal services in the U.S. State-based civil legal services systems in all 50 states rely in varying degrees on funding sources that include national, state and local governments, Interest on Lawyer Trust Account (IOLTA) programs, foundations, attorney fees and private attorney resources.

LSC gives grants to independent, local programs -- in 2007, 138 programs with more than 900 offices nationwide. Grants are awarded through a competitive process. The size of each grant is based on the number of people living in poverty in a given state or geographic service area. In Tennessee, LSC supports Legal Aid of East Tennessee, the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, West Tennessee Legal Services, and Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.

Existing funding resources, however, are not enough as documented in the groundbreaking report, Documenting the Justice Gap: The Current Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans, which LSC released in September 2005. The Justice

Photos

Wondering about the 'Natural Allies' photo? See the 2013 Publication: "Natural Allies: Philanthropy and Civil Legal Aid" [here](#). This is a publication regarding the social and economic value of funding civil legal aid made by the Public Welfare Foundation and the Kresge Foundation.

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