



Justice for All:  
**Minnesota's Civil Legal Aid & Pro Bono Landscape**

- A Project of the Minnesota State Bar Association  
Access to Justice Committee



# Road Map for Presentation

- Access to Justice Introduction
- Civil Legal Aid Network and Funding
- Pro Bono
- Courts
- Key Takeaways/Action Items

# Access to justice and pro bono work are very important to the legal profession

- The access to justice gap
- *Pro bono publico* – “for the public good”
- The importance of legal pro bono to the legal system

# Civil Legal Aid is Essential for Strong Communities

Civil legal aid supports basic human needs

Family

*Domestic violence, divorce, child custody, parenting time*

Housing

*Eviction, foreclosure, repairs, reasonable accommodations*

Economic Stability

*Health care, education, employment, veterans benefits, social security, consumer issues*

Civil legal aid addresses disparities in the Justice System

# Key Access to Justice (ATJ) System Stakeholders Include:



Pro bono and legal aid nonprofit organizations



Other legal nonprofits



Courts and law libraries



Private bar  
(law practices and firms of all sizes, in-house legal departments)



Bar associations and bar foundations



Community organizations



Law schools



Foundations and other institutional funders  
(general and legal-focused)



Government agencies



# Connecting to Help: Law Help MN

Award-winning online hub where clients can search for legal assistance, apply to some legal aid organizations, and find legal or community resources for their issue.

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# **Civil Legal Aid Network**

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# Network Overview



## CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS

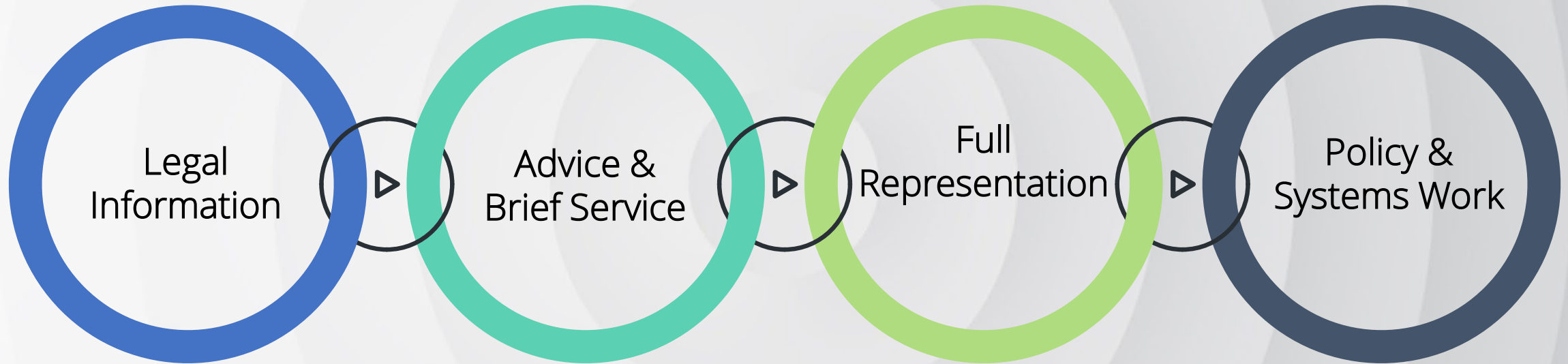
There are six regional programs providing a range of civil legal services and covering all 87 counties in Minnesota. There are also targeted service programs that meet specific population or geographic needs.

## TARGETED PROGRAMS

- Cancer Legal Care
- Children's Law Center
- Community Mediation Minnesota
- Farmers Legal Action Group
- HOME Line
- Housing Justice Center
- Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Law Center
- Legal Assistance of Dakota County
- Legal Assistance of Olmsted County
- LegalCORPS
- Legal Services State Support
- Loan Repayment Assistance Program of Minnesota
- Minnesota Disability Law Center
- Minnesota Justice Foundation
- Standpoint
- The Advocates for Human Rights
- Tubman
- Volunteer Lawyers Network

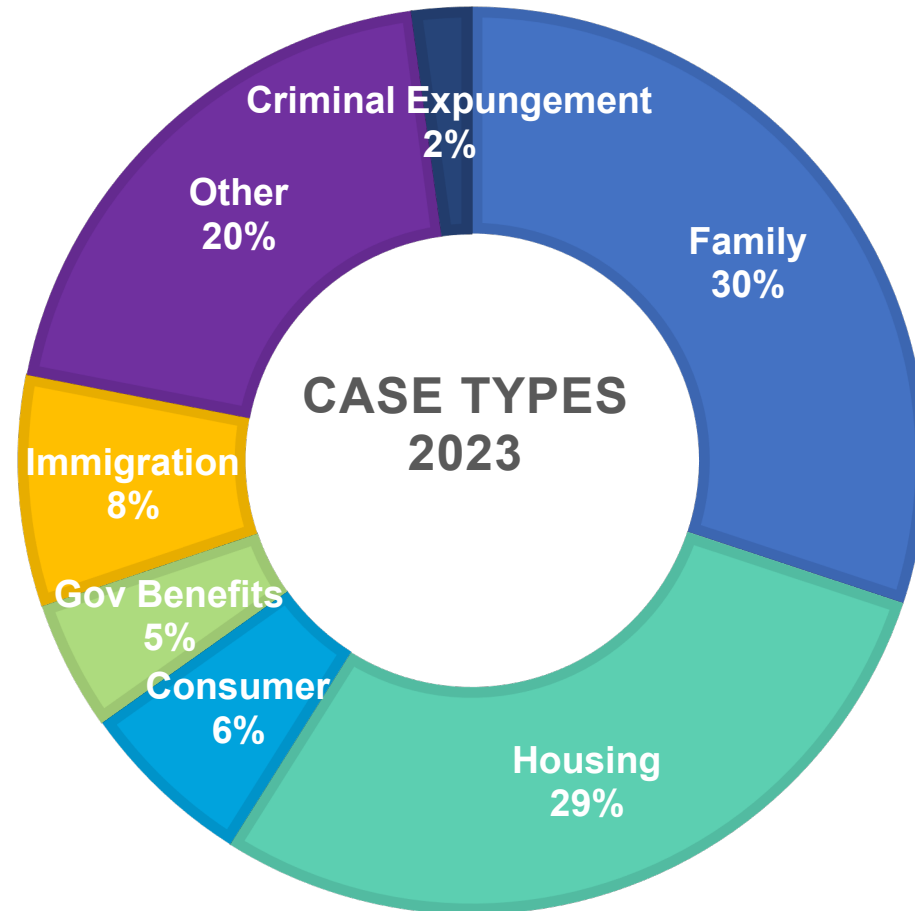


# Delivery Models Along the Continuum of Service



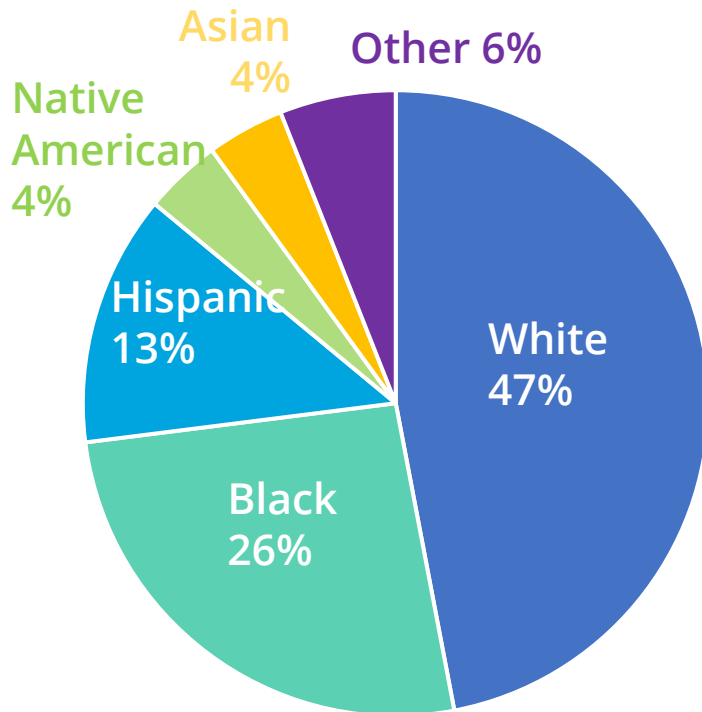
# Services Provided

■ Family ■ Housing ■ Consumer ■ Gov Benefits ■ Immigration ■ Other ■ Criminal Expungement

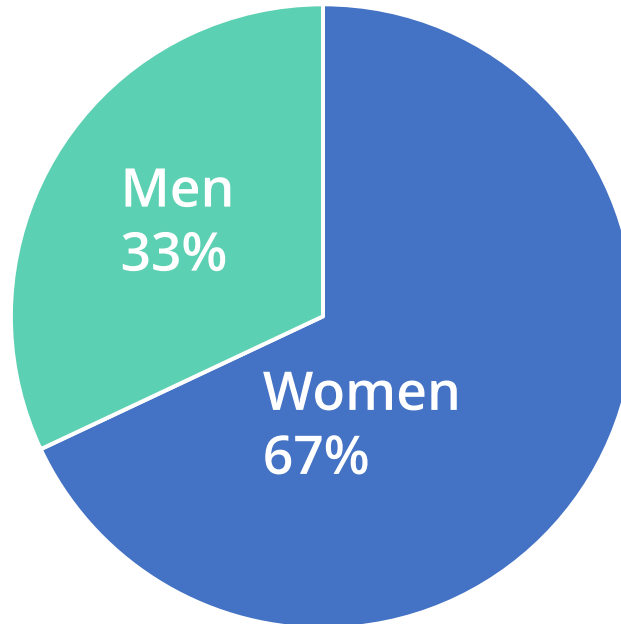


# Demographics of Clients Served

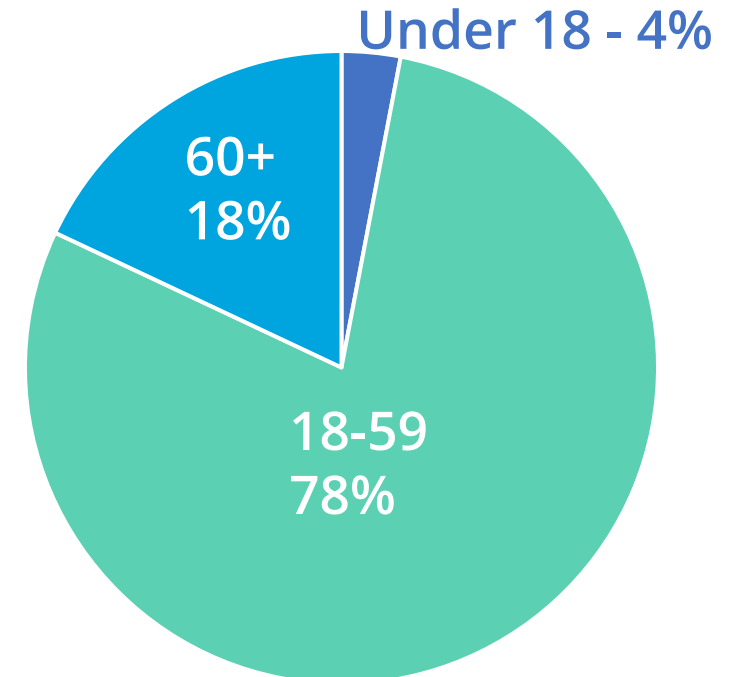
## Race



## Gender



## Age



# Screening Clients for Service

## Criteria Include:

- **Income** - Have income & asset below set limits
- **Priorities** - Usually limited to cases that protect someone's safety, stability, health, and shelter
- **Merit** – Cases are screened to see if could be a legal solution to the problem
- **Geography** – Live or have a case venued in that organization's geographic service area
- **Capacity** - The organization must not already be at caseload capacity

Different civil legal aid programs have different standards depending on requirements and restrictions from funders, policies set by their board, etc.

# Civil Legal Services Turn away rate - 2022

(Data is based on samplings from three MN Civil Legal Service programs.)



Minnesotans who apply and are eligible for legal assistance from a CLS organization.



45% receive services



28.6% are fully served  
Sample data indicates 71.4% of advice-only cases needed further services.



And I was able to get that spot  
because of Karla.

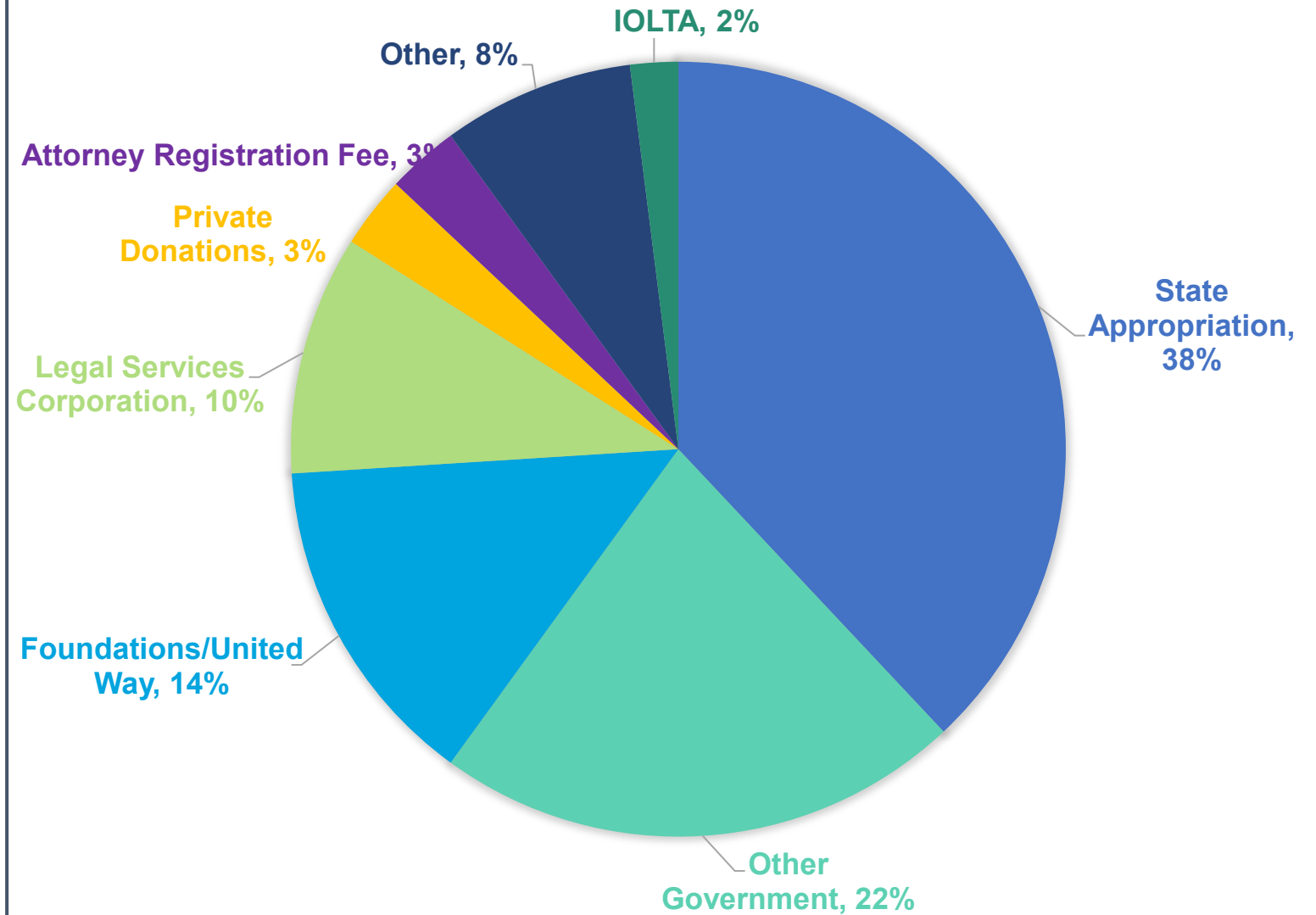


# **Legal Aid Funding**



# Civil Legal Aid Revenue Fiscal Year 2023

- Multiple revenue streams
- Some highly unpredictable





**Individual  
Donations  
from  
Lawyers are  
Important  
and All  
Donations  
are  
Appreciated!**

**\$25**

- Phone advice for one client

**\$100**

- Writing a letter for a client to give their landlord

**\$250**

- Staffing a brief advice clinic

*We're counting  
on you!*



**CHECK THE BOX  
FOR LEGAL SERVICES**

Uniform Pro Bono  
Reporting

MN Lawyer  
Registration Rule 25

# Key Takeaways



Still turning away majority of eligible clients.

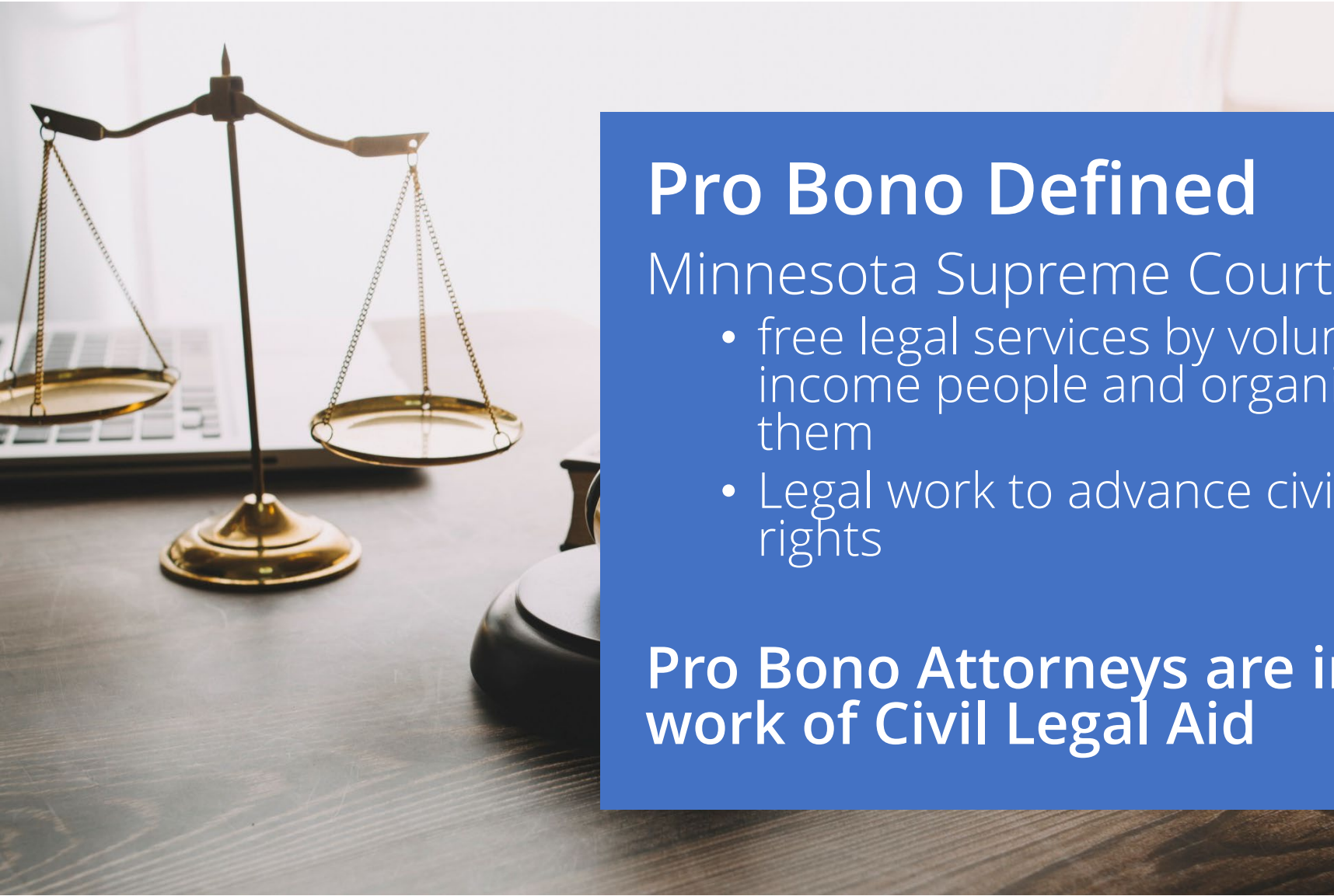


Importance of increasing other revenue to reduce turndown rate and increase diversity of funding for healthy nonprofits.



# **Pro Bono**





## Pro Bono Defined

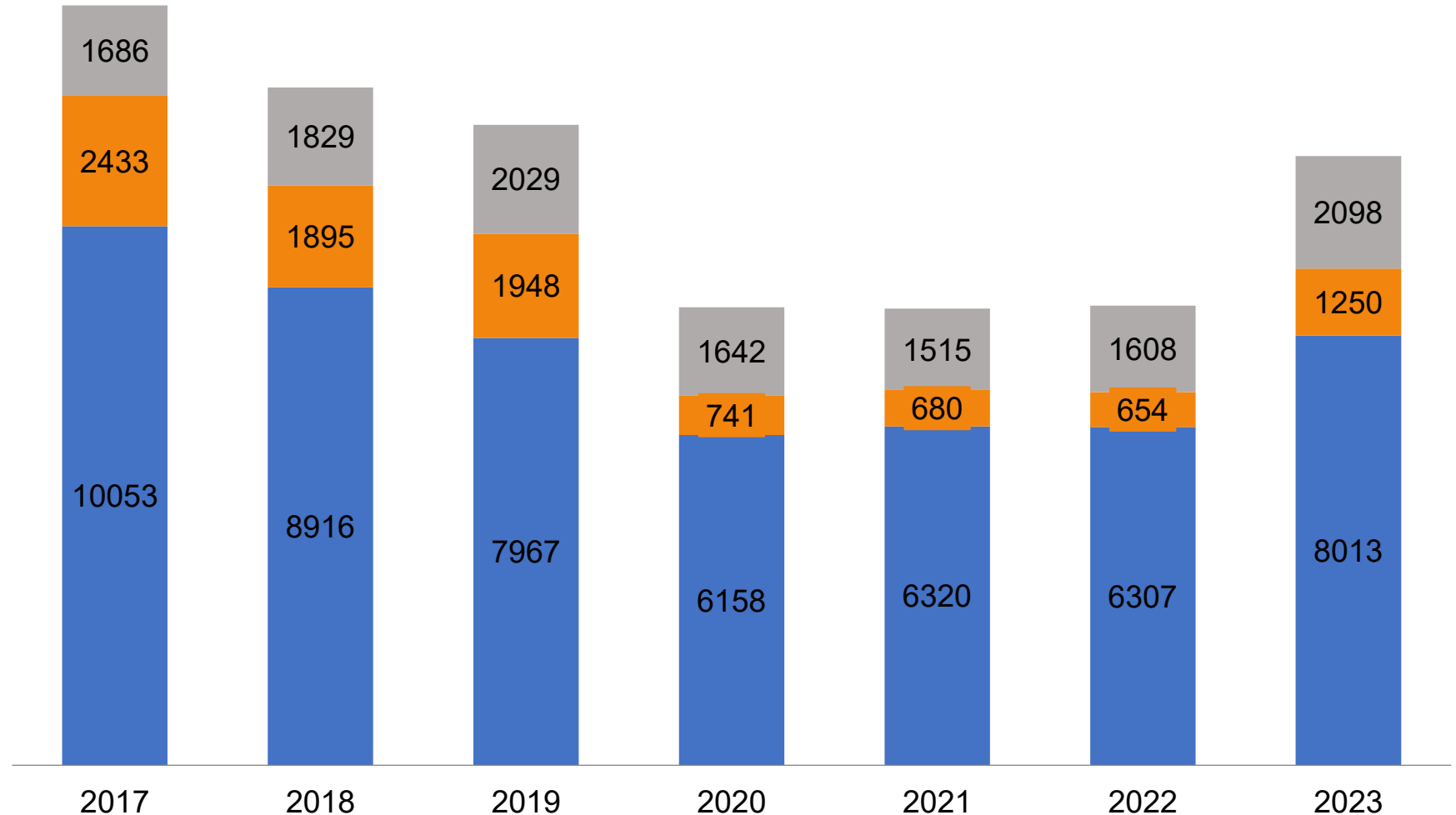
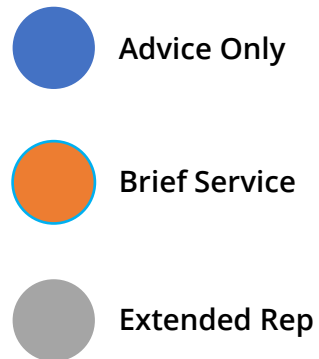
### Minnesota Supreme Court Rule 6.1

- free legal services by volunteer attorneys to low-income people and organizations that serve them
- Legal work to advance civil and other human rights

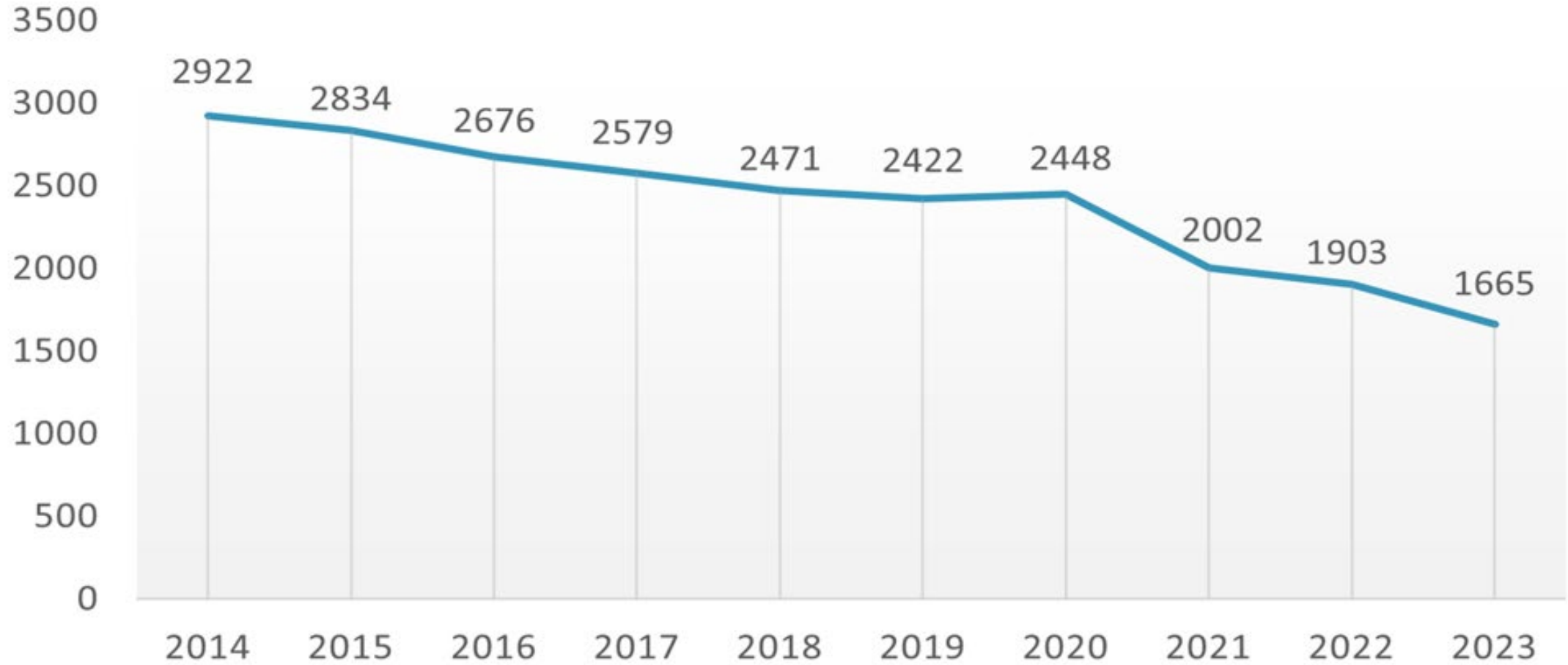
**Pro Bono Attorneys are integral to the work of Civil Legal Aid**

# Pro bono trends

Number of MN Pro Bono Cases Closed by LSAC Grantees



## Active Pro Bono Attorneys at LSAC Grantees Statewide



# Why Volunteer?

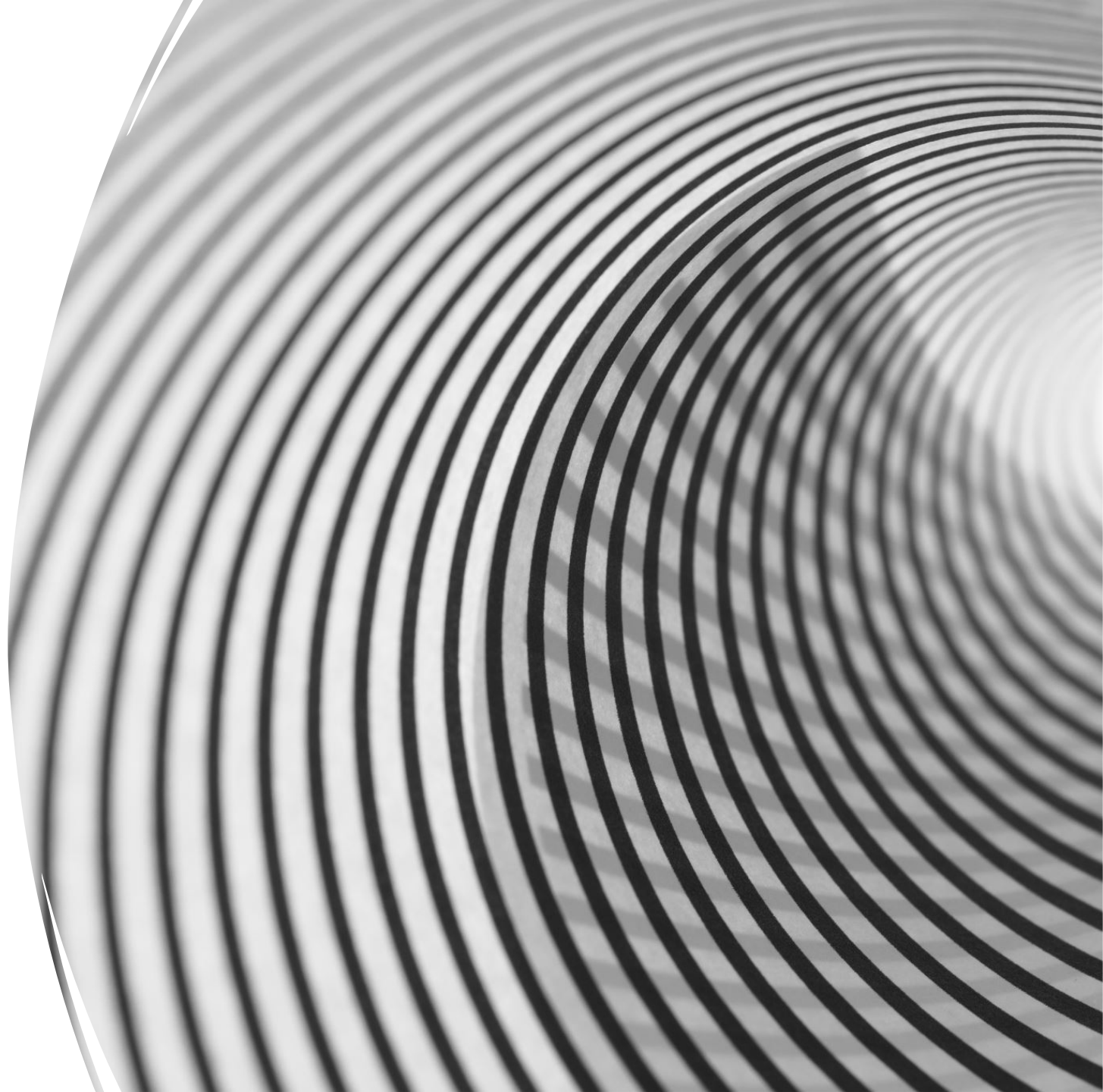
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- Lawyers are officers of the court.
- It can change lives.
- Lawyers have a professional responsibility to provide 50 hours of pro bono service per year. Minn. Rule of Prof. Conduct 6.1
- Pro Bono qualifies for up to 6 CLE credits per reporting cycle. Minn. CLE Rule 6(c)
- It helps develop skills.
- You don't have to do it alone.



Be  
Intentional

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# Consider - Yourself

- What are you passionate about?
- What do you want?
  - Skills
  - Networking
  - Give Back, Help
- What is your schedule/working style?
  - Flexible/regularly scheduled?
  - Short but meaningful/start to finish?
  - Remote only/in person
- Employer boundaries/support
- What support do you need?

- Scope
  - Advice, Limited Scope, Full Representation, Policy
- Topic/Level
  - Entry-level?
  - Family, housing, OFP/HRO, Immigration, so many to choose from!
- Organizations:
  - MSBA's website has a query. Go to [www.mnbars.org](http://www.mnbars.org). Click on about us>access to justice>Access to Justice>pro bono

# Consider - Your Options





## VLN Volunteer Opportunities Overview

VLN Program	Volunteer Opportunity	Time Commitment*	Advice	Limited Services	Full or extended representation	Good for entry level volunteers
Family Law	Full representation in adoption, custody and dissolution	10 – 50+ hours, depending on case			X	X (for certain cases)
	Special Immigrant Juvenile Status	10+ hours			X	X (for certain cases)
	Phone Advice	2 hour shift	X			
	Courthouse Clinic (in person only)	2+ hour shifts		X		
	Limited Scope (trial prep or draft papers)	2-5 hours		X		
	Mentoring	10+ hours				
Civil	Legal Access Point Clinic (in person only)	2 hour shift		X		
	Phone Advice	1-2 hour shift	X			X (Conciliation Court)
Landlord/Tenant	Housing Court Clinic (in person or remote)	~4 hour shift		X		X
	Phone Advice	2 hour shift	X			
	Eviction Expungement	2-10 hours			X	X
	Rent Escrow	10+ hours			X	
Criminal Record Expungement	Phone Advice	1 hour shift, plus prep time	X			X
	Walk-in clinic (in person only)	2-4 hours		X		X
	Full Representation	10+ hours			X	X
Immigration	Phone Advice	2 hour/shift	X			
	Legal Clinic (in person)	2+ hour/shift	X			
	Extended Legal Services (Pro Se Defensive Asylum)	5+ hours			X	X
	Full Representation (U-Visa, DACA renewals, TPS, Naturalization, AOS)	10+ hours			X	X (for naturalization)



## Final Thoughts

- Create a habit
- Invite a friend
- Be the change you want to see in the world (Ghandi).



# **Courts**



# 2024 Statewide Pro Se Case Data

## Family

Petitioners Had Attorneys in  
39% of cases

Respondents Had Attorneys in  
32% of cases


## Eviction

Landlords Have Attorneys in  
84% of cases

Respondents Have Attorneys in  
26% of cases

# Court Access Initiatives

## Government Center and Family Justice Center Self-Help Centers



The Self-Help Centers are in place to assist self-represented people as they seek to gain important information and services about their legal problem. Legal information includes court forms and tools to assist with the completion of court forms as well as answers to general questions about court process and procedure.

There are dedicated phone lines available Monday-Friday 10 AM to 3 PM at 651-478-8757.

In person assistance is available Monday-Friday 8 AM to 4:30 PM.

Pro bono lawyers frequently staff free legal assistance clinics at the self-help desks to ensure that people who are unable to afford hiring an attorney can receive legal guidance and advice on their legal issues.

The most common topics at the Government Center are Harassment Restraining Orders and Criminal Expungements.

The most common topics at the Family Justice Center are Divorce and Custody matters.



# Court Access Initiatives

- MNDES (Minnesota Digital Evidence System). Establishes a simple, secure, way of managing digital exhibits meant to replace email, network drives, or digital storage devices. Allows users to upload exhibit files without having to visit the courthouse. This initiative is mandatory state-wide.
- Digital accessibility (beginning in 2025 thru 2026). This initiative is purposed to ensure that all external digital content (outward facing public websites, emails, and basic applications) are accessible to people with disabilities.
- A major overhaul is planned concerning the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District website (mncourts.gov). The objective is to streamline all content favoring the use of plain language as well as the general improvement of the ability to link directly to needed content more efficiently.



# Hennepin County Law Library

Helped 5000+ patrons in 2024 through experienced reference staff and online & print resources for attorneys and pro se patrons.

Piloting “Westlaw Remote Patron Access” which allows non-attorneys and attorneys doing pro bono work to access Westlaw (primary law plus Minnesota Practice) from home.

Works closely with the Court’s self-help center and local legal nonprofits (Tom Walsh, Executive Director of VLN sits on the law library board).

Offers free livestream and on-demand CLE courses that appeal to both attorneys and non-attorneys.

The best way to support public law libraries is to use their services!

# Supportive Supreme Court Rules

## **CLE for Pro Bono**

MN CLE Rule 6(c)

## **Uniform Pro Bono Reporting**

MN Lawyer Registration Rule 25

## **Eased Conflicts for Limited Scope**

MN Supreme Court Rule 6.5

## **Emeritus & Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Practice Rules**

MN Lawyer Registration Rule 7D; MN Bar Admission Rule 10D (respectively)

## **Supportive Limited Scope and Remote Access Rules**

Rule 6.5 and April 2022 MN Supreme Court Order

# Key Takeaways/Action Items

## What can you do now?

Commit (or continue your commitment) to pro bono work.

Help foster the culture of pro bono and access to justice in your professional circles.

Support your preferred legal aid organization or bar foundation with your time, money, or influence.

Continue to support legal aid funding at the federal and state level.



**Thank you!**

