

**Washington State Judicial Branch
2025-27 Biennial Budget
Legal Aid Capacity and Infrastructure Preservation and CLEAR Hotline Staffing**

Agency: Office of Civil Legal Aid

Decision Package Code/Title: 1J – Civil Legal Aid VRA

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The ability to maintain civil legal aid service throughout Washington is hampered by significant increases in costs and increasing workforce scarcity. In addition, the CLEAR hotline which is managed by the Northwest Justice Project (NJP) and provides critical services to ensure legal aid is available in all areas of the state, is unable to meet current demand with the existing resources. This package preserves existing legal aid client service delivery capacity and infrastructure at NJP and their subcontracted legal aid providers, addresses the retention challenges associated with public service attorney workforce shortages by promoting equitable benefit offerings across legal aid programs, and better equips NJP’s CLEAR hotline to meet increasing client demand.

Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$3,643,000	\$6,559,000	\$10,202,000	\$8,473,000	\$10,489,000	\$18,962,000
Total Expenditures						
	\$3,643,000	\$6,559,000	\$10,202,000	\$8,473,000	\$10,489,000	\$18,962,000

Package Description:

In 2015, the Washington State Supreme Court published its comprehensive [Civil Legal Needs Study](#) (CLNS) documenting the depth and breadth of the civil justice gap experienced by low-income individuals and families throughout Washington State.

Responding to the CLNS findings, the bipartisan legislative Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee prepared and published a [Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan](#) (CJRP) in 2016. The CJRP outlined a multi-year strategy to reinvest in civil legal aid capacity to achieve a “minimum access” objective of 1 FTE civil legal aid attorney (or pro bono service commitment) for every 5,000 people living at or below 125% of the federal poverty level. The Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) presented the CJRP to the Legislature through a series of budget requests beginning in

2017. Between 2017 and 2020, the Legislature responded with consistent significant increases in funding necessary to make progress toward the “minimum access” objective. This funding enabled the OCLA-contracted [Northwest Justice Project](#) (NJP) to establish a physical presence in all geographic areas of the state and to upgrade client service capacity in areas disproportionately understaffed on the basis of poverty population percentages. While “minimum access” had not yet been achieved, this progress was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency efforts by the Office of Civil Legal Aid to address critical pandemic-driven legal problems such as unemployment, domestic violence, access to income assistance, employment conditions for essential workers, etc.

Since the pandemic, the national “justice gap” (the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs) has increased. According to the April 2022 report by the Legal Services Corporation, 92% of the civil legal problems of low-income Americans did not receive any or enough legal help.¹ While the next Washington State Civil Legal Needs Survey is only in the planning phase, legal aid attorneys on the ground observe similar trends in Washington as seen nationally.

Legal services in Washington are provided through a network of providers, including Northwest Justice Project (NJP) and other regional and specialized non-profit organizations. As the largest statewide civil legal aid provider, NJP addresses the general civil legal needs of low-income people through its statewide legal hotline ([CLEAR](#)), statewide self-help legal resources website ([WashingtonLawHelp](#)), and 21 regional and satellite client service offices throughout the state. In addition, NJP subcontracts a portion of funds made available through its contract with OCLA to the Legal Foundation of Washington to support the state-eligible civil legal aid efforts of sixteen (16) local programs that recruit, train, support, and refer clients to volunteer private attorneys and four (4) legal aid providers that have unique expertise in providing legal aid services to members of specific demographic cohorts (TeamChild) or have expertise in certain areas of legal representation (Unemployment Law Project, Solid Ground Benefits Legal Assistance, and Benefits Law Center).²

Recognizing that civil legal needs experienced by low-income individuals and families in Washington have only increased in recent years, this network of legal aid providers faces demand for services at rates beyond what existing resources are able to supply, making it critical that existing capacity and infrastructure be maintained. Any erosion to service delivery detracts from the previous legislative commitment to build a legal aid system that meets “minimum access” for low-income residents, a goal that is still yet to be met. This package includes three components which ensure existing legal aid services are maintained and client access strengthened: 1) a vendor rate adjustment for NJP and the subcontracted legal aid providers to address increased costs related to personnel, overhead, and infrastructure; 2) funding to improve the benefit offerings at subcontracted legal aid providers to address issues of recruitment and retention in the face of a workforce

¹ Home | The Justice Gap Report (lsc.g https://justicegap.lsc.gov/

² Hereinafter “subcontracted legal aid programs”

shortage; and 3) additional staffing at the statewide CLEAR hotline to better meet existing demand and improve access to the legal education, advice, and referrals.

1. Vendor Rate Adjustment and Addressing Infrastructure Costs

This decision package seeks a vendor rate adjustment to address increases to known and measurable personnel and operating costs that, if unaddressed, will result in significant client service capacity losses at NJP and further erode the client service capacity and infrastructure of the subcontracted legal aid providers that receive funding made available through NJP's OCLA-authorized subcontract with the Legal Foundation of Washington (LFW). Additionally, shared infrastructure components, including case management software, malpractice insurance, and interpretation and translation services for clients with limited English proficiency, have experienced substantial cost increases. This package seeks funding to address these rising expenses.

Vendor Rate Adjustment

The vendor rate adjustment for NJP and the subcontracted legal aid providers is necessary to maintaining current professional infrastructure. NJP's workforce is unionized - represented by the Office of Professional Employees International Union – Local 8. NJP's initial Collective Bargaining Agreement in 2022-2024 required NJP to pay various increases including COLAs (averaging 3.5%-4%) and experience increases (averaging 1.5%). Bargaining on the 2025-2027 CBA will begin in Fall 2024, and similar staged increases are expected. CBA terms require cost of living increases based on the August CPI-W³ for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue region. The first half of 2024 saw annual CPI-W for this region increase by an average of 4.1%. Non-personnel costs have also increased, with cumulative rates of inflation between 2022 and 2024 at 7.4%.

Subcontracted legal aid providers are also facing similar increased costs.⁴ Most of these subcontracted programs are small non-profits that have seen substantial rises in personnel and overhead costs over the past biennium. High inflation is particularly challenging for small organizations with limited buying power. Overhead costs, such as rising commercial rents (with programs seeing increases as high as 10%), reduce the funds available for personnel. Additionally, personnel costs are also rising due to necessary cost-of-living adjustments (at 3-4%) and step increases (1-2%) needed to maintain competitive wages. This decision package requests vendor rate adjustments in FY26 and FY27 to help these programs maintain client service capacity despite rising costs, supporting equitable treatment across legal aid providers.

Shared Infrastructure Expenses

The OCLA-authorized subcontract with the Legal Foundation of Washington includes funding to support essential shared infrastructure components necessary for providing high-quality, equitable legal aid. These components include case management software, malpractice insurance, and interpretation and translation

³ CPI-W measures Consumer Price Index rates for Urban Wage and Clerical Workers.

⁴ The OCLA authorized subcontract between NJP and LFW allows state legal aid funding to help underwrite eligible civil legal aid services provided by the subcontracted legal aid programs. The FY 2025 subcontracted amount is \$4,107,000.

services. These services are purchased as large-volume contracts to offer them free of charge to smaller subcontracted legal aid providers, which would find them prohibitively expensive to purchase individually. Between 2021 and 2023, the costs of these infrastructure components have increased significantly: Legal Server case management by 67%, malpractice insurance by 66%, and interpretation services by 64%. This package requests \$127,274 per year beginning in FY 26 to cover these increased costs.

2. Equitable and Competitive Benefit Offerings

Currently, the 20 subcontracted legal aid programs each offer unique benefit packages to their employees. Healthcare costs, which have risen by over 7% annually in the past biennium, averaged \$8,497 per employee in FY 24 and are expected to continue rising in coming years.⁵ This increasing cost is significant for all employers and some programs cannot afford healthcare for full-time staff. Few programs are able to offer other fringe benefits such as retirement savings, Health Savings Accounts, tuition assistance/loan reimbursement or Dependent Care Savings Accounts. As a result, they struggle to retain and recruit legal staff compared to larger legal aid organizations, criminal justice agencies, and government legal positions that offer better benefits. Over 50% of programs have lost staff in the past year who have taken other jobs due to more competitive compensation packages. A documented shortage of public service attorneys makes this turnover even more challenging as programs struggle to fill open positions. Ensuring competitive benefits improves the ability of programs to recruit and retain legal staff, which is critical to maintaining client service delivery levels, as it avoids long lasting vacancies. This package requests \$500,000 per year beginning in FY 26 for fringe benefit improvements across the 20 subcontracted legal aid providers.

3. Additional Staffing for CLEAR Hotline

Since 1996, NJP's CLEAR system (CLEAR, CLEARsR, *CLEAR*DV, CLEAR*ASL) has served as the primary gateway for low-income residents in Washington State, excluding King County, to access free legal help. CLEAR provides centralized access to legal advice, education, limited legal services, self-help materials, and referrals for further representation when available. Despite significant client demand, staffing levels for CLEAR, which include 15.5 FTE attorneys, an attorney manager, and two assistant attorney managers, have remained stagnant for over a decade.

CLEAR is a critical component of the legal aid delivery system both as an initial access point for additional referrals and to increase access in regions where other legal aid providers aren't available. Recognizing that existing legal aid resources are insufficient to meet the demand for services, and still far short of "minimum access," CLEAR services are necessary to ensure access across the state. While the Civil Justice Reinvestment

⁵ On September 12, 2024, the Seattle Times reported that premiums on the individual health insurance marketplace will increase by an average of 10.7% in 2025. While group and employer paid plans may see different rates of change, there are consistent budget drivers increasing these costs for all insurance providers: more services used and increasing costs of prescription drugs and delivering care. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-health-insurance-rates-will-increase-an-average-of-10-7-in-2025/es>

effort focused on staff attorneys in particular regions of the state, it did not increase funding for CLEAR, leaving this necessary component disproportionately undercapitalized as demand continued to increase.

Each CLEAR attorney currently serves an average of 315 clients annually, but the CLEAR hotline receives over 205,000 calls per year and an additional 21,000 online applications. Efforts have been undertaken to expand “online intake” and improve caller experience through technological advances, but CLEAR’s accessibility is severely hampered by limited staffing. Increasing staffing at CLEAR improves access to clients who also receive referrals to the network of subcontracted legal aid providers, more effectively pairing clients with other existing resources. To address the extreme demand and improve service accessibility, this decision package seeks funds for an additional 11 attorneys and 4 intake staff.

Describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.

The scope and substance of legal problems experienced by low-income people in Washington State were most recently documented in the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study. The study reflected areas of legal need that aligned with the areas of law that are authorized under RCW 2.53.030(2). State civil legal aid funding under RCW 2.53 supports a comprehensive system that annually provides information, self-help assistance, advice, brief services, and extended legal representation to tens of thousands of low-income clients and their household members, addressing some of their most pressing legal problems.

The funding requested in this decision package will maintain civil legal aid service statewide despite significant increases in costs as well as increasing workforce scarcity. With the ongoing rise in demand for civil legal assistance following the COVID-19 pandemic, this funding will prevent a loss of existing capacity, ensure shared infrastructure remains available, improve recruitment and retention rates, and better align CLEAR's staffing resources with current demand.

- In calendar year (CY) 2023, NJP provided direct legal assistance and representation to 12,888 individual households, and volunteer and specialty legal aid providers assisted 15,128 individual households. With the proposed vendor rate adjustments, similar service numbers would be achieved in FY 26 and FY 27.
- With increased capacity, CLEAR would be able to serve an additional 1,890 client in FY 26 and 3,780 in FY 27. Recognizing that legal advice benefits families and household members, the collective impact would enable CLEAR to assist an additional 14,000 individuals over the biennium.
- Improved benefit packages would allow subcontracted legal aid providers to offer more equitable compensation packages, reduce turnover, and recruit competitively amidst a shortage of public service attorneys. This would enhance client service numbers, which have suffered due to vacancies and turnover since 2022.
- Increased funding for shared infrastructure costs, such as malpractice insurance, legal case management software (Legal Server), and interpretation/translation services, would allow them to continue to be available at no cost to small legal aid programs despite increasing costs.

- Legal Server access ensures accurate and secure storage and organization of case files and client information, consistent with ethical rules, and supports the electronic transfer of cases between programs for seamless referrals.
- Malpractice insurance is crucial for all attorney staff and protects clients through uniform coverage, while also encouraging private attorneys to volunteer pro bono. In 2022 and 2023, the subcontracted legal aid programs reported a total of 33,487 hours of pro bono services. With continued malpractice insurance coverage, similar numbers would be achieved in the FY 26-27 biennium, thereby expanding access to free legal resources statewide.
- Interpretation/translation services help ensure language is not a barrier to access, and the rising costs reflect successful outreach to communities with limited English proficiency.

Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why this was the best option chosen.

There are two principal publicly funded underwriters of civil legal aid in Washington State – the Office of Civil Legal Aid and the federal [Legal Services Corporation](#) (LSC).

In FY24, federal appropriations for legal aid were \$560 million, flat funding from the prior year. Despite significant national efforts led by the Legal Services Corporation’s Board of Directors and championed by a bipartisan Congressional Access to Legal Aid Caucus, this amount fell far short of the \$1.576 billion LSC identified as the amount necessary to fully fund legal aid and close the “justice gap” nationwide.⁶ In Washington, the \$9,324,138 allocation did not increase funding above baseline levels and falls far short of that necessary to maintain the current basic client service footprint here in Washington State, where LSC funding represents less than 30% of total general field support at Northwest Justice Project (the only program in Washington to receive LSC funding).

[The Legal Foundation of Washington](#) (LFW) distributes funding generated through IOLTA (interest on lawyers trust accounts) contributions as well as private donations raised through the statewide [Campaign for Equal Justice](#) (which raises about \$2M/yr). LFW funding can and does play an important role in helping support the legal aid system, but all available funds are invested in and help support the current delivery system. LFW does not have additional funds to address these structural needs. These funds are inherently fluctuating, and do not provide the stability year after year needed to address the steadily increasing costs that, if unaddressed, will result in significant erosion of the basic civil legal aid system’s current capacity.

The best option to address these needs and ensure stable and consistent services is to increase the funding amounts of these ongoing contracts. Outside funding sources are already allocated, and OCLA has no agency reserves.

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

Vendor Rate Adjustment and Shared Infrastructure Costs

Failing to provide additional funding, while experiencing known cost increases, results in reduced service capacity. This loss of civil legal aid will substantially harm individuals and families across the state,

⁶ [Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request | LSC - Legal Services Corporation: America's Partner for Equal Justice](#)

undermining legislative commitments made post-2015 CLNS to support the Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan and ensure minimum access to legal aid. Failure to fund the vendor rate adjustment will result in rising costs exceeding budgeted amounts, potentially necessitating reductions in legal staff capacity (e.g., layoffs, redeployments, retirements, furloughs, or office closures) to remain within budget. Both unionized and non-unionized providers face fixed and unavoidable personnel-related cost increases due to collective bargaining agreements and employment policies mandating step increases and cost of living adjustments. These factors lead to budget shortfalls as costs surpass available funding.

Absent a vendor rate adjustment, the financial shortfall projections for NJP indicate significant deficits in the coming biennium. In FY 26, expected expenses of \$25,954,433 versus flat funding of \$24,832,685 will result in a shortfall of \$1,121,748. In FY 27, expected expenses of \$27,124,238 versus flat funding of \$24,832,685 will result in a shortfall of \$2,291,553. To address these shortfalls, NJP would need to reduce staff by 8.9 full time attorneys in FY 26 and another 9.3 in FY 27. This reduction will immediately and detrimentally affect thousands of Washingtonians over the biennium, as based on historical caseloads, losing 18 attorneys means NJP will handle over 1,200 fewer cases in FY 26-27.

Subcontracted legal aid programs will also proportionately reduce the number of clients served without the vendor rate adjustment. Although individualized program impacts are challenging to predict due to shared funding among 20 individual programs, a reduction in service to over 800 households is expected.

These reductions will significantly affect low-income children and adults who will lose access to vital legal protections for fundamental human needs. Historically, family safety and housing cases comprise 65-70% of cases annually, with consumer and health/public benefits cases accounting for another 20%. As a result:

- **1,400 individuals** facing domestic violence or housing threats will lack attorney assistance for court protections.
- **More than 400 individuals** will be deprived of legal help to prevent consumer abuse and access public benefits or health care.

All of these services are supported by shared infrastructure, purchased at volume rates and provided without additional cost to the programs. Without additional funding, these services may no longer be offered for free, forcing programs to either cover the costs themselves or go without them entirely. Since these programs lack alternative funding to pay for these expenses, they would face difficult choices between necessities such as malpractice insurance, case management software, and interpretation/translation services. The absence of any one of these critical components could compromise their ability to deliver high-quality legal aid effectively.

Benefits Package:

Failing to provide additional funding to improve benefit packages would lead to increased turnover at legal aid organizations, prolonged vacancies that result in fewer clients being served, and inequitable compensation offerings between similarly situated employees across the legal aid delivery landscape. The shortage of attorneys across Washington State has significantly impacted all sectors, with the public service sector bearing the brunt of these shortages. While public defender shortages have made frequent headlines, civil legal aid

organizations have also faced high turnover and challenges in recruiting and retaining legal staff.⁷ This crisis is particularly acute in rural areas, as highlighted by the Washington State Bar News, which describes the rural attorney shortage as reaching critical levels.⁸ Efforts such as new programs through Gonzaga University and other state law schools aim to mitigate these shortages by encouraging more attorneys to serve in underserved regions.⁹ However, the persistent difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels in civil legal aid continues to jeopardize access to justice for low-income individuals, exacerbating the challenges faced by already vulnerable populations.

The inability of legal aid organizations to offer competitive compensation packages is a significant factor contributing to high turnover rates and recruitment challenges. Civil legal aid positions often offer lower salary rates and less attractive benefits compared to other public service roles. For instance, the starting salary for an Assistant Attorney General (AAG) in Washington is \$76,752 statewide. In regions where civil legal aid positions start as low as \$63,000, public defense and prosecutor positions offer starting salaries of \$79,512. This disparity in compensation packages makes it difficult for legal aid organizations to attract and retain qualified attorneys, even those committed to public service. As a result, many legal aid attorneys leave for better-paying positions, further exacerbating the staffing shortages and undermining the ability of legal aid organizations to serve their clients effectively.

CLEAR Hotline

Without additional staffing, hundreds of individuals in need of legal services will continue to call CLEAR without being able to connect to a staff attorney for legal advice, education, and referrals. In 2023, CLEAR handled 3,506 cases, but many more callers received a message that the hotline was “at capacity” and were advised to call back later. Without further investment, the number of cases handled by CLEAR will remain static, while increasing demand will lead to additional calls and longer wait times. If this request for funding is not met, an estimated 14,000 individuals seeking legal services from CLEAR over the biennium will be unable to access the help they need.

OCLA Agency Staffing

Funding is requested for OCLA to include dedicated agency staffing for this program. Historically this contract was managed and overseen by the agency director, but over the last biennium OCLA has made necessary improvements to staffing given the size and complexity of this program, including .5 FTE Program Manager and .5 FTE Program Counsel. This is the single largest contract OCLA operates, and between the size of the primary contractor (Northwest Justice Project with 21 offices and 340 staff statewide) and the subcontracted providers (20 organizations in total), this contract requires significant monitoring and oversight. Previously, no dedicated funding for agency staffing was requested. As a result, the Program Manager position in FY 2024 and FY 2025 was covered by OCLA’s general fund. When a new Program Counsel was hired in FY 2025, funding this essential position required a downward amendment to previously obligated contract funds, decreasing the

⁷ [Attorney shortage continues in courts around WA, with new proposals on the table | Crime And Courts | yakimaherald.com, KUOW - Lawyer shortage creates potential constitutional crisis,](#)

⁸ See e.g., [President's Corner > The Rural Attorney Shortage is Turning Into a Crisis in Washington State - Washington State Bar News \(wabarnews.org\).](#)

⁹ New program through Gonzaga, state law schools aims to narrow attorney shortage in Central Washington | The Spokesman-Review.

services the contractor could provide. From FY 2026 onwards, OCLA will no longer have sufficient general funds to cover program staff. This request seeks dedicated funding for the necessary staffing to manage the contract, which includes 0.5 FTE Program Manager, 1.0 FTE Program Counsel, and 0.5 FTE Administrative Assistant. Securing this funding ensures OCLA can fully contract with the Northwest Justice Project and its subcontracted providers without reducing service funding for administrative purposes.

Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?

No. The purpose of this vendor rate adjustment is to protect current legislatively authorized levels of basic civil legal aid services in Washington State. Full funding of this request will not result in any expansion or change in program services. Funding for equitable fringe benefits does not expand programs but addresses an industry weakness that threatens the ability of programs to staff existing positions. Increases to CLEAR involve no programmatic changes in scope or services. Additional staffing only scales the existing program to more effectively meet existing demand.

Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:

Staffing Assumptions

Job Title	#s of FTE Round to Nearest Tenth				Workload Assumptions/Description
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
Program Manager	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	Provides program oversight, personnel management, drafts and amends contracts
Program Counsel	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Performs oversight and monitoring functions, collaborates with system partners
Program Support Staff	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	Performs contract administration, invoice processing, and other administrative tasks

Use Standard Costs?

No.

If No, Explain Additional Costs	Round to Nearest \$1,000				Description/Assumptions
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
Salaries and Benefits	\$324,000	\$324,000	\$324,000	\$324,000	0.5 FTE Program Manager 1.0 FTE Program Counsel 0.5 FTE Program Support Staff
Contracts	\$3,281,000	\$6,197,000	\$8,111,000	\$10,127,000	Vendor rate adjustment including fringe benefit adjustment and inflationary increase for infrastructure expenses

Goods and Services	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	Necessary goods and services to support program staff at OCLA
Travel	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$13,000	Travel by OCLA staff is necessary for regular site visits and monitoring of the 21 recipient programs under this program
Equipment	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	Necessary equipment to support program staff at OCLA

How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?

Fair and Effective Administration of Justice

N/A

Accessibility

The clients served by this funding are among the most vulnerable in the state, facing barriers such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and disability. Between 2022 and 2023, NJP and its subcontracted organizations assisted over 50,000 low-income individuals (earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level). During this period, 15% (7,500) of clients were Limited English Proficient, requiring services in over 27 different languages, including sign language and indigenous languages such as Mixteco. Additionally, 8,027 individuals identified as having a disability. Without this funding, these clients would face significant barriers to accessing essential legal services.

Access to Necessary Representation

To effectively assert their legal rights, many individuals require the representation of civil legal aid attorneys or need advice and resources to represent themselves. This funding supports a wide range of legal aid services, including comprehensive representation, advice, brief services, and resources for self-represented litigants. Without access to these services, far fewer individuals would be able to assert their rights and advocate for critical issues such as housing, public benefits, safety, and family matters.

Commitment to Effective Court Management

N/A

Sufficient Staffing and Support

Agency administrative costs are included in this decision package to reflect the necessary staffing and support for a contract of this size. As OCLA has grown as an agency, existing staff positions were tasked with increasingly broad responsibilities. In FY 24 and FY 25, OCLA has prioritized sufficient staffing for this program, which includes 0.5 FTE program manager, 1.0 FTE program counsel, and 0.5 FTE administrative support. However, prior vendor rate adjustments for this program did not include OCLA administrative costs, requiring the agency to absorb staffing costs in other ways, including a reduction in previously obligated funds to the contractor for FY 25. The request for administrative funding in this

package allows the agency to ensure proper staffing for appropriate fiscal and programmatic oversight while ensuring the full contract amount is available for services.

How does the package impact equity in the state?

Address any target populations or communities that will benefit from this proposal.

Consistent with OCLA's [OCLA Statement of Purpose and Commitments](#), this package advances equity by acknowledging disparities in rates of poverty and in legal needs across Washington State, and working to deploy free legal aid attorneys to communities with the highest barriers to access. In Washington State 8.7% of individuals who identify as white live below the poverty level. For other races, such as Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, or individuals who identify as multi racial, rates of poverty are experienced much higher, between 11.5% and 18%.¹⁰ Additionally, the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study (CLNS) highlighted that low-income BIPOC individuals encounter civil legal issues more frequently than their white counterparts. This disparity underscores the critical need for targeted support and resources to address legal barriers that perpetuate inequality.

In 2023, 42% of the clients served by NJP and pro bono and specialty providers identified as a race other than White. This statistic reflects intentional efforts by the programs to reach underserved communities, partnering with community groups, and providing services with cultural sensitivity and in clients' primary languages.

By increasing funding and support for civil legal aid through this proposal, BIPOC and other underserved communities stand to benefit significantly. Improved access to legal representation and advocacy can help mitigate the impact of systemic inequalities, empower individuals facing legal challenges, and promote equitable outcomes across Washington State.

Describe whether and, if so, how the agency received community input and engagement.

OCLA worked closely with the [Equal Justice Coalition](#) in developing this request. The EJC is composed of representatives from NJP, [The Pro Bono Council](#), all subcontracted legal aid organizations, as well additional organizational members of the [Alliance for Equal Justice](#).

Which target populations or communities would be disproportionately harmed by this proposal.

Explain why and how these negative equity impacts will be mitigated.

Equity of access would only be increased by this proposal. NJP and all subcontracted organizations work continually to assess and correct disproportionate access and service numbers, build relationships with community and 'by and for' organizations, and identify how legal aid can decrease barriers created and perpetuated the legal system as a whole.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

No.

¹⁰ [S1701: Poverty Status in the Past ... - Census Bureau Table](#)

Stakeholder response:

This request is strongly supported by the entire Alliance for Equal Justice, the Access to Justice Board, the Equal Justice Coalition. No opposition is anticipated.

Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?

No.

Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?

No.

Are there impacts to state facilities?

No.

Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?

See attached budget sheet.

Are there information technology impacts?

No.

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