



## Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid

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### INTRODUCTION

Recognizing that “the provision of civil legal aid services to indigent persons is an important component of the state's responsibility to provide for the proper and effective administration of civil and criminal justice,” the Washington State Legislature established to manage the then-small state investment in civil legal aid services to low-income people in Washington State. In the years since the Legislature has greatly expanded the scope of OCLA’s responsibilities. The Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) is an independent judicial branch agency established by the Legislature to administer and oversee the delivery of state-funded civil legal aid services to eligible low-income people in Washington State.

### CIVIL LEGAL AID PROGRAMS

Through legislative directives embodied in OCLA’s enabling statute (RCW 2.53.010 et seq.) and pursuant to an interagency agreement with the Department of Commerce, Office of Crime Victims Advocacy, OCLA underwrites and oversees the following programs pursuant to which contracted attorneys and organizations provide direct civil legal aid services to eligible low-income people throughout Washington State:

1. Statewide General Civil Legal Aid Program: This program serves as the backbone and provides the infrastructure for the entire statewide coordinated civil legal aid system. Through a master contract with the statewide Northwest Justice Project and OCLA-approved subcontracts that help underwrite state-eligible legal assistance by 16 volunteer attorney programs and 4 specialized providers of legal aid services, more than 20,000 individuals receive information, advice, assistance, or representation each year to help them address the range of civil legal problems most recently outlined in the [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#). Core components of this system include the statewide legal aid hotline ([CLEAR](#)), the self-help resources and related media website ([WashingtonLawHelp.org](#)), 21 regional and satellite legal aid offices that provide access to clients in every corner of the state.
2. Appointed Counsel Program for Children in Dependency Cases (Children’s Representation Program or CRP): Pursuant to RCW 13.34.212(1) and (3) and RCW 2.53.045, OCLA administers a program that provides effective representation promoting the stated and legal interests of children and youth in

dependency and termination cases. OCLA contracts with private attorneys and law firms to provide representation that is consistent with practice, caseload, and training standards adopted at Legislative request by the Washington State Supreme Court's Commission on Children in Foster Care. Long assigned to underwrite such representation for children who remain in dependent six months following termination of their parents' legal rights (RCW 13.34.212(1)), OCLA began a five-year phase in of representation for all dependent children and youth ages 8 and above and all such children and youth in termination of parental rights cases as directed by ch. 210, laws of 2021.

3. Appointed Counsel Program for Indigent Tenants in Unlawful Detainer (Eviction) Cases (Eviction Right to Counsel or RTC): In accordance with the directive in RCW 59.18.640 and RCW 2.53.050, OCLA administers and oversees a program ensuring that courts appoint attorneys to effectively defend indigent tenants in unlawful detainer (eviction) cases. OCLA contracts with 13 organizations across the state for direct representation of eligible tenants employing a "civil public defender" model of representation. Established by the Legislature in 2021, the appointed counsel program became fully operational statewide in January 2022.
4. Pre-RTC Eviction Defense Legal Aid Program: This program targets legal assistance to tenants who are threatened with eviction but against whom formal court eviction proceedings have not yet been commenced. The object is to identify, divert from the court system, and resolve disputes before legal eviction proceedings are commenced.
5. COVID-19 Civil Legal Aid Program<sup>1</sup>: In 2020, OCLA established an emergency program to provide civil legal assistance to individuals and families hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic – those who lost their jobs, were denied unemployment or pandemic unemployment insurance benefits, are survivors of pandemic-related domestic violence and who need protection and safety for themselves and their children, essential workers exposed to hazardous employment conditions in violation of applicable health and safety guidelines, tenants threatened with eviction, children (especially BIPOC children and children with learning disabilities) whose educational progress was harmed during the extended mandatory remote learning requirements, and many others. The program was initially funded with state and federal COVID emergency funds. It is now underwritten with state general funds.
6. Reentry Legal Assistance Program (LRAP): The LRAP program provides information, assistance, advice, and representation to individuals reentering civil society following incarceration. Formerly incarcerated people experience many obstacles to successful reentry into civil society that, if timely addressed, will reduce their risk of recidivism and increase their potential for success. Many of these obstacles (e.g., housing, employment, discrimination, family reconciliation/safety, economic and medical assistance) can be favorably resolved with effective legal information, advice, and assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> These programs are funded through FY 2024. Starting in FY 2025 these funds will be part of the General Civil Legal Aid Program.

7. State v. Blake Civil Consequences: Conservative estimates are that well over 200,000 individuals who were convicted under the state's simple possession law have rights to a range of relief (e.g., resentencing, commutation, vacation, and refund of legal financial obligations (LFOs)) through the civil and criminal justice systems. In 2021, the Legislature directed OCLA to establish a statewide program to provide legal assistance to those entitled to such relief.
8. Civil Legal Aid for Domestic Violence Survivors: The 2022 Legislature directed OCLA to establish a new program dedicated to providing civil legal assistance to survivors of domestic violence who experience a range of civil legal problems arising from their victimization. OCLA is funding 7 programs (including two Native directed or tribal) dedicated to addressing these problems in several regions of the state and two on-near reservation areas.
9. Crime Victims Legal Aid Program: Through an interagency agreement with the Department of Commerce, Office of Crime Victims Advocacy, OCLA supports two statewide and three regional providers of civil legal assistance to crime victims. Much of this work centers around legal assistance on behalf of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors, victims of trafficking, and individuals subject to on-the-job sexual harassment (mostly in the agricultural industry).
10. Foreclosure Fairness/Foreclosure Assistance Program: Through a dedicated percentage of funding generated by filing fees associated with residential mortgage and deed or trust foreclosures, OCLA receives funding from the Department of Commerce to underwrite a statewide Foreclosure Prevention Unit at the non-profit Northwest Justice Project.
11. Community Reinvestment Project: Through an interagency agreement with the Department of Commerce, Community Reinvestment Project funds 2 statewide partners and three regional partners to provide legal assistance. The focus of this funding is to provide legal assistance communities disproportionately harmed by the historical design / enforcement of criminal laws and penalties for drug possession (otherwise known as the war on drugs).

## **OVERSIGHT**

The Office of Civil Legal Aid is overseen by a bipartisan Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee. RCW 2.53.010. The Oversight Committee includes members appointed by both caucuses of the House and Senate, three representatives appointed by the Supreme Court (including a client-eligible member), two representatives appointed by the Board for Judicial Administration, a representative appointed by the Governor, and a representative appointed by the Washington State Bar Association.

## **STAFFING**

OCLA is currently staffed by an agency Director (appointed by the Washington State Supreme Court), Director of Operations, a Children's Representation Program Manager,

Children's Representation Program Counsel (2), a Children's Representation Training Coordinator, an Eviction Defense Programs Manager, Eviction Defense Program Counsel (2), a Civil Legal Aid to Crime Victims Program Manager, a Civil Legal Aid Program Counsel, and five support team members.

## 1. General Civil Legal Aid Program

OCLA published the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study (2015 CLNS), which defined the scale of our state's challenge in real terms - more than seven in 10 low-income people experienced an important civil legal problem each year.<sup>2</sup> Yet, 76% of these people had no professional legal help to solve their problems.<sup>3</sup> Problems affect access to basic health and human services, family safety, access to and the ability to retain affordable housing, economic security, employment and freedom from economic exploitation, and a range of other issues that affect basic liberties and implicate core property rights. The study outlined a "snowball effect" of how low-income people who experience one civil legal problem on average experience nine such problems, most of which arise from a single problem or set of problems. Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault experience more problems across the entire spectrum problem areas and average about 18 problems per capita per year, most of which flow from their victimization.

The 2015 CLNS documented significant racial and other differentials in the experience of low-income people by race, immigration status, status as victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, youth, and disability. People who identify as African American or Native American experience substantial levels of discrimination and differential treatment due to their prior involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice systems and their credit history.

More than 50% of those who experience problems with a legal dimension do not understand that they could benefit from legal advice or assistance, and do not seek legal help to solve these problems. Even for those who do understand the need for legal help, most cannot obtain it because they do not have the funds, do not know where to go, and/or cannot get through to overwhelmed civil legal aid hotlines and community based legal aid providers. In the end, only 24% of those who experience one or more civil legal problems get any help at all.

Low-income people have little confidence in their ability to solve problems fairly through the courts or the civil justice system. More than two-thirds of respondents in the 2015 CLNS Update said that they did not believe that people like them can effectively use the courts to protect themselves, their families, or to enforce their legal rights.

Responding to the 2015 CLNS findings, the bipartisan Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee adopted the 2016 Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan (2016 CJRP). The 2016 CJRP outlined a multi-biennial budget and policy agenda to increase the ability of low-income people to understand their legal problems, secure access to legal help, and develop tools to help them solve problems before they spiral out of control. The 2016

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<sup>2</sup> Washington State Supreme Court Civil Legal Needs Study Update Committee, [Civil Legal Needs Study Update, Final Report](#) (October 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Discussion of the substance and prevalence of civil legal problems experienced by low-income people in this section is based on the findings of the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study Update and related technical papers produced by Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC). Information relating to the 2015 CLNS Update is available at: <http://ocla.wa.gov/reports/>

CJRP also established a baseline level of client service capacity that the state should attain to achieve equity of access for low-income people with significant legal problems. This “minimum access”<sup>4</sup> baseline standard is 1 FTE attorney (or the equivalent of pro bono service) for every 5,000 people living at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

OCLA funding supports a robust and effective system of volunteer attorney recruitment and engagement. Through 17 local bar sponsored (and often bar operated) community-based programs, thousands of volunteer legal aid attorneys deliver more than 50,000 hours of free legal help to low-income residents eligible for state-funded civil legal aid services.<sup>5</sup> At 2,000 hours per FTE attorney per year, this contribution delivers the rough equivalent of 25 FTE civil legal aid attorneys.

The balance of the civil legal aid delivery system consists of staff attorneys employed by the statewide Northwest Justice Project and four state-funded specialized providers of civil legal aid services to specific hard-to-serve client populations or on matters for which unique client service expertise or delivery approaches offer the most effective approach to responsive legal aid delivery.<sup>6</sup>

The Legislature endorsed the 2016 CJRP commitment to minimum access in both the FY 2017-19 operating budget and FY 2019 supplemental operating budgets. It appropriated funding for 20 additional FTE attorneys, an automated document assembly system for unrepresented family law litigants, and expansion of investment in pro bono service capacity. As of January 1, 2019, the state-supported civil legal aid footprint will include 143 full-time, state-supported attorneys.

According to the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS), nearly 1.05 million Washingtonians live at or below 125% of the federal poverty level.<sup>7</sup> Combining the staff and volunteer legal aid capacity, the ratio of FTE basic field legal aid attorneys to persons living at or below 125% of FPL is 1:7,342. When considered against the number of people living at or below 200% of FPL (1.86 million), this ratio declines to 1:13,006. Thankfully, service capacity has increased as a result of the combined VOCA and state investment, though there remains more to do before low-income Washingtonians will have meaningful access to the help they need to solve critical legal problems.

## **2. Crime Victims Legal Representation**

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<sup>4</sup> Minimum access was first embraced by the Board of Directors of the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in 1975 to serve as the floor for federal investment in the newly created LSC. This figure was used to guide congressional appropriations from 1975-1980 (from \$75 million to \$300 million) by which time minimum access had been achieved. See, Erlich, *Giving Low-Income Americans Minimum Access to Legal Services*, 64 A.B.A.J. 696 (1978).

<sup>5</sup> Eligibility for state-funded civil legal aid services is governed by [RCW 2.53.030](#) as it was amended in 2018 by Ch. 21, Laws of 2018.

<sup>6</sup> These are TeamChild, the Seattle Community Law Center, the Unemployment Law Project and the Family Advocacy Program at Solid Ground.

<sup>7</sup> [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_17\\_1YR\\_S1701&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_1YR_S1701&prodType=table)

Beginning in FY 2017, OCLA assumed administration of a federally funded Integrated Civil Legal Aid to Crime Victims Program. Funding for this program originates from the federal Crime Victims Fund and is made available from the US Department of Justice in accordance with the federal [Victims of Crime Act \(VOCA\)](#). The Department of Commerce's Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OCVA) is the lead agency assigned to administer VOCA funding. Pursuant to its 2015-19 Victims of Crime Act State Plan,<sup>8</sup> OCVA has entered into an interagency agreement with OCLA to manage and oversee that portion of VOCA funding that is dedicated to providing civil legal aid to victims of crime.

OCLA has produced a Statewide Civil Legal Aid to Crime Victims Plan<sup>9</sup> which defines the core purpose and principal guidelines and expectations of the program. The Legal Aid to Crime Victims Plan identifies the participating legal aid programs and the VOCA-funded staff positions and activities throughout the state. Under applicable federal guidelines, VOCA funding is limited to providing limited legal assistance to address the emergent civil legal problems faced by crime victims. Unlike eligibility for basic civil legal aid, eligibility for VOCA-funded services is not determined by income.

### **3. Children's Legal Representation**

At any given time, about 850 children remain in the dependency system six months following the termination of their parents' legal rights. Prior to establishment of the Children's Representation Program, these children were legally voiceless and unable to effectively promote their own interests in legal proceedings that could dictate every aspect of their future lives. The Legislature, in the enacted Laws of 2014, chapter 108, created a right to counsel at public expense for these children. Representation was to be provided consistent with legislatively endorsed practice, training, and caseload standards. RCW 13.34.100(6)(c)(i). Administration of this program was assigned to OCLA. *Id.*; RCW 2.53.045.

The mission of the Children's Representation Program is to underwrite and oversee the delivery of [standards based](#), meaningful, effective and culturally competent attorney representation for legally free children who remain in the foster care system six months following termination of their parents' legal rights, with the goal of achieving early permanent placements consistent with the children's stated interests and relevant child well-being indicators.

Children's Representation Program attorneys will, among other things:

1. Ensure the child's voice is considered in judicial proceedings;
2. Engage the child in his or her legal proceedings;
3. Explain to the child his or her legal rights;
4. Assist the child, through the attorney's counseling role, to consider the consequences of different decisions; and

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<sup>8</sup> OCVA's State Plan can be found at <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/OCVA-VOCA-2015-2019-VOCA-State-Plan-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> OCLA's Statewide Civil Legal Aid to Crime Victims Plan is found at: <http://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Civil-Legal-Needs-for-Crime-Victims-Plan-July-2016.pdf>.

5. Encourage accountability, when appropriate, among the different systems that provide services to children.

The object of the program is to facilitate timely and appropriate placements that are consistent with the children's stated interests and their long-term well-being and that accelerate permanency for them and their families.



## STRATEGIC PLAN<sup>10</sup>

### AGENCY MISSION

The provision of civil legal aid services to indigent persons is an important component of the state's responsibility to provide for the proper and effective administration of justice. RCW 2.53.005. The Office of Civil Legal Aid will secure, invest, and oversee sufficient funding for the statewide civil legal aid delivery system, and will effectively administer the Children's Representation Program consistent with applicable standards of practice. The Office of Civil Legal Aid will ensure the highest level of accountability to taxpayers and beneficiaries for services delivered with public funds entrusted to the agency.

### STATUTORY AUTHORITY

RCW 2.53.030 outlines the substantive areas and related guidelines for operation of the basic state-funded civil legal aid program. Pursuant to RCW 2.53.020(3), the OCLA Director is to:

- (a) Contract with one or more qualified legal aid providers to provide civil legal aid services authorized by RCW [2.53.030](#);
- (b) Monitor and oversee the use of state funding to ensure compliance with this chapter;
- (c) Report quarterly to the civil legal aid oversight committee established in RCW [2.53.010](#) and the supreme court's access to justice board on the use of state funds for legal aid; and report biennially on the status of access to the civil justice system for low-income people eligible for state-funded legal aid; and
- (d) Submit a biennial budget request.

RCW 13.34.100(6) establishes the right to counsel at public expense for children who remain in a dependency proceeding six months following the termination of their parents' legal rights. RCW 13.34.100(6)(c)(i) and RCW 2.53.045 assign administration of the Children's Representation Program to OCLA.

### GOALS

OCLA works to achieve results in service of the following eight goals:

1. Funding: Secure funding necessary to address the most important civil legal needs of low-income people as documented by the 2015 CLNS; secure sufficient funding to ensure ongoing, effective legal representation of legally free children.

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<sup>10</sup> The Office of Civil Legal Aid adopted an agency Strategic Plan in 2008. The plan is under review and will be revised to reflect expanded agency responsibilities and increased public investment.

2. Accountability: Ensure that state funding invested in civil legal aid delivery and infrastructure underwrites effective and economical service delivery that is consistent with applicable statutory and contractual requirements and is responsive to the most significant civil legal problems experienced by eligible low-income people within Washington State.
3. Equity: Ensure that eligible low-income people have equitable access to the type and quality of civil legal aid services they need to solve important personal and family civil legal problems, regardless of where they reside or barriers they may experience due to cultural, linguistic, ability-based, or other characteristics.
4. State Support: Support efforts to establish and maintain statewide support infrastructure so that the state-funded civil legal aid system is best positioned to provide effective and economical client services over time.
5. Integration Within the Judicial Branch: Ensure that the effective and economical delivery of civil legal aid is institutionalized as an enduring responsibility and high priority of the Washington State judicial branch.
6. Oversight: Ensure effective, ongoing bipartisan oversight of the activities of the Office of Civil Legal Aid and the state-funded civil legal aid system, consistent with best practices and relevant professional standards for civil legal aid delivery.
7. Continuous Assessment and Reporting: Establish and/or support systems that allow continued assessment of the social, economic and legal environment affecting low income residents and the capacity of the state-funded civil legal aid delivery system to address the civil legal needs of eligible low-income individuals and families; report and make recommendations on policies relating to the provision of state-funded civil legal aid in Washington State.
8. Effective, Standards-Based Representation of Legally Free Children: Develop and manage systems to monitor, oversee and effectively support the provision of legal representation of legally free children consistent with the directives set forth in RCW 13.34.100(2)(6) and the standards referenced in that statute.
9. Effective Legal Assistance to Victims of Crime: Implement the Statewide Civil Legal Aid to Crime Victims Plan in a manner that ensures timely, responsive legal services delivered in consultation and coordination with community-based providers of related professional services to victims of crime.

## MAJOR STRATEGIES

To achieve its mission and goals the Office of Civil Legal Aid employs the following strategies:

- Establish concrete client service expectations with appropriate accountability benchmarks in its contract with the Northwest Justice Project.

- Coordinate closely with the Supreme Court's Access to Justice Board and other key institutions to ensure the effective, efficient, and coordinated delivery of civil legal aid services in authorized areas of representation, consistent with the requirements of RCW 2.53, the ATJ Board's 2018-2020 *State Plan for the Delivery of Civil Legal Aid*, Washington State's Civil Equal Justice Performance Standards and other recognized national standards for delivery of civil legal aid.
- Conduct reviews of state-funded legal aid programs to ensure compliance with statutory, contractual, fiscal and service delivery expectations, requirements and limitations.
- Provide effective staff support for the bipartisan Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee.
- Ensure that sufficient resources are invested in critical statewide capacities needed to achieve effective, efficient and consistent client service delivery, including professional skills and substantive law training, interpreter services, leadership development initiatives, regional delivery planning and coordination, case management, GIS, and other technology-based systems, etc.
- Work to ensure that the unmet civil legal needs of low-income people are considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into judicial and executive branch initiatives.
- Monitor and report periodically on changes in the substance and frequency of civil legal problems experienced by low-income people in Washington State.
- Provide effective support and training for, and effective oversight of, attorneys appointed to represent legally free children, pursuant to RCW 13.34.100(2)(6).
- Develop and oversee an integrated system that delivers effective civil legal aid services in concert with other community-based professional service providers, to address problems that arise from criminal victimization and that will help victims of crime move beyond their victimization in ways that are consistent with their individual and family safety and well-being.

## MEASURES

For the general civil legal aid program, OCLA conducts a biennial fiscal and regulatory review of NJP's operations, and conducts annual site visits to selected NJP regional field service offices. OCLA staff also participates in site visits of staff and volunteer legal aid providers that receive state-funded via subcontracts. These oversight activities are undertaken to ensure:

- Compliance with all statutory requirements set forth in RCW 2.53.030
- Effective and efficient delivery of state-funded civil legal aid services in authorized areas of legal representation that are responsive to the needs of eligible clients
- Effective coordination of the delivery of civil legal aid services with other relevant legal, social and human services in communities throughout Washington State
- Provision of services consistent with national and state-based professional standards and best practices.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The State Auditor's Office conducted an audit of OCLA's contract management and oversight activities and found them to be appropriate to the task. [SAO Report No. 1016878](#), June 9, 2016. No exceptions were noted.

The Office of Civil Legal Aid uses the following tools in evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of state-funded civil legal aid service delivery:

- The requirements of RCW 2.53.030
- The ATJ Board's *State Plan for the Delivery of Civil Legal Aid Services*
- Regional client service delivery plans
- The ATJ Board's *Standards for Civil Legal Aid in Washington State* (2009)
- The federal Legal Services Corporation's *Performance Criteria* (May 2007)
- The ABA's *Standards for the Delivery of Civil Legal Services to the Poor* (rev. August 2006)
- Relevant standards for accounting and fiscal administration

In the area of children's legal representation in dependency cases, the OCLA has:

- Developed, and requires state-funded children's attorneys use, a web-based Case Activity, Reporting and Oversight System (CAROS) to monitor the performance of state-funded attorneys representing legally free children.
- Engaged the Court Improvement Training Academy at the University of Washington School of Law to develop and deliver training designed to enhance the ability of state-funded attorneys to represent children consistent with the standards referenced in RCW 13.34.100(2)(6).
- Regularly provides other training, ongoing technical assistance and support, peer mentoring and other resources designed to ensure effective, standards-based legal representation.
- Conducts periodic performance reviews of contract attorneys.

## **EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

Between 2008 and 2015, Washington State experienced a deep economic contraction and a slow, unequal recovery. Poverty rates have stabilized, but continue well above historic norms. According to the 2017 ACS, 14.4% of people in Washington State lived at or below 125% of FPL and 25.6% lived at or below 200% of FPL in 2017. There are deep and widening differentials in poverty rates between white and non-white populations. In 2017, 27% of African Americans, 19.0% of people who identify as Hispanic/Latino, and 25.2% of people who identify as Native American lived below 100% of FPL. The poverty rate for people who identify as White was 9.7%.

Cuts in local and state services coupled with significant changes in public policies directly affecting the poor, disabled, and vulnerable have led to increased homelessness, a systematic lack of critical services for children, the mentally ill, and other vulnerable populations, and other signs of social decay.

After significant capacity reductions between 2009 and 2015, new resources were invested in the statewide legal aid system following publication of the 2015 CLNS. An additional 23 VOCA-funded attorneys were added in 2017, 20 Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan FTE's were funded in the current bi-ennium by the Legislature,

along with increased investment in volunteer legal aid service capacity. Today the combined state-supported client service capacity is 143 full-service legal aid attorneys.

## **TRENDS**

Even though the worst of the economic crisis is behind us and much of the state's economy is as robust as ever, many were left behind; and many of these are forced to face complex problems that arise from, or are associated with, poverty, economic insecurity, housing insecurity, discrimination/disparate treatment, and the lack of an effective social safety net. For these people one problem often leads to a cascade of many. For example, a hospital bill becomes a debt collection problem that, once collateralized, becomes a mortgage foreclosure. Family social and economic stress is increased as life-long wage earners find themselves without jobs or the ability to secure new employment, as bills and legal obligations pile up. These dynamics were compounded by the loss of extended unemployment insurance benefits for the long-term unemployed. The loss of health, child care and other support services creates additional stresses on family incomes, causing them to make choices between paying rent, utilities, child care, credit card debt, or other essential services. The epidemic of domestic violence continues to fester in every part of the state.

## **STRATEGIES**

To address the crisis documented in the 2015 CLNS, the bipartisan Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee worked with OCLA to develop the 2016 Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan. The 2016 CRJP has been embraced by the Legislature, with initial down payments made toward achieving minimum access capacity, expanding volunteer involvement in civil legal aid, and developing new systems to help unrepresented family law litigants successfully navigate the court system.

In addition, OCLA sought and successfully secured federal funding to develop and deploy a statewide legal assistance program for victims of crime. Initiated in the winter of 2016-17, the program provides a range of civil legal aid services to victims of crime throughout the state. The initial report on the crime victims program is available on OCLA's [website](#).

## **FINANCIAL PLAN**

Over the course of the FY 2019-21 and FY 2021-23 biennia, OCLA will continue to seek graduated increases in funding for the basic civil legal aid program. These increases will be designed to ensure prudent and manageable expansion of the program consistent with the goals of the Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan, and maintain client service capacity in light of known and measurable cost increases incurred by OCLA's civil legal aid service providers. The goal is to achieve minimum access client service capacity by the end of FY 2023 and move the state's investment over to a maintenance level focus rather than the current expansion focus.

While caseloads continue to grow, OCLA expects to operate the Children's Representation Program within the FY 2017-19 appropriation level.