



## MLSA

The Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) is a private, non-profit law firm that provides free non-criminal legal aid to low-income Montanans. MLSA provides legal services in all 56 Montana counties and on all Montana tribal reservations with 18 attorneys and 42 total staff based in main offices in Missoula, Billings, and Helena, plus circuit riding attorneys and three small posts located in partner organization office in Dillon, Bozeman, and on the Blackfeet Reservation.

## Legal Needs

MLSA generally represents people with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty rate, people who make up over 19% of Montanans. People living at the Federal poverty level try to make ends meet with \$25,250 per year for a family of four. One report shows that half of low-income Montanans have a civil legal problem each year that they are not able to address. There is one attorney in Montana for every 274 residents, but just one MLSA lawyer for every 10,055 low-income Montanans. MLSA had over 6,500 requests for help in 2016 and handled 3,198 cases. So for every case MLSA takes, it must turn away another.

## Justice for All

MLSA promotes fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of how much money a person has. A fair justice system supports things we all hold dear in our society: improving public health, fostering civil

engagement, ensuring security, providing education, and fighting poverty.

## What we can do because of generous support

Your generosity allows MLSA advocates to help domestic violence survivors and their children live lives free of violence, prevent veterans from unfairly losing benefits, and keep families from being homeless. Representation by an MLSA attorney can help prevent events devastating to families and costly to the community.



## Success

MLSA helped over 7,500 Montanans in 2016, including 3,400 children. Intake staff fielded an average of 547 requests per month. MLSA makes it easier for all Montanans to access legal information – through easy-to-understand legal forms, including online forms, and on-line legal self-help – so people can know their rights. Civil legal aid also helps streamline the court system and cuts down on court costs. 93% of Montanans served at MLSA in 2016 reported increased knowledge of how to solve their legal problems.

## Volunteers make a difference

MLSA also recruits private attorneys to volunteer free client services. These volunteer attorneys provide legal advice, limited scope legal services, and full representation to low-income clients who need legal help to address their civil legal problems. In 2016, MLSA’s statewide volunteer attorney coordination efforts resulted in private attorneys taking on free or reduced fee clients, donating over 7,900 hours of legal work.



## The economic impact of civil legal aid

In providing civil legal aid to low-income individuals, MLSA obtains millions of dollars for its clients and their communities in the form of direct economic benefits to clients, such as child support payments to domestic violence survivors and medical benefits to people with disabilities, as well as in the form of indirect economic benefits caused by new money being brought into Montana through MLSA’s work. These funds strengthen the state and local economies, reduce the burden on the state, and provide financial stability to families.

The total economic impact of MLSA’s statewide civil legal aid services in 2016 is \$9,645,345. This includes direct recovery to clients, cost savings, and other indirect benefits. For every dollar MLSA spent on providing civil legal services in 2016, \$3.15 flowed into the Montana economy. For in-state donations, this impact is even more: for every in-state dollar, \$10.61 is put into Montana’s economy.

The return on investment in legal aid made to MLSA is 215% for all money invested in MLSA and 961% for in-state money invested in MLSA.

► **If you believe in justice for all**, then you believe in programs like civil legal aid at MLSA to ensure that the very principle our founding fathers envisioned remains alive: justice for all, not just for the few who can afford it.

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