



The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation: Helping Ensure Fairness for All in the Justice System

IEJF is an integral part of fulfilling our state's fundamental promise of equal access to justice for all Illinoisans

- Fairness in the justice system should not depend on how much money a person has. IEJF is the statutory entity that helps level the playing field for low-income Illinoisans in the justice system by funding civil legal aid throughout the state.
- IEJF provides access to legal help for thousands of people to protect their families, their livelihoods, their health, and their homes. The appropriation for IEJF addresses the most common bread and butter legal problems Illinoisans face, which are not funded by other pools of state money that are targeted to particular legal needs.
- Legal aid is consistently one of the top referrals for General Assembly members serving constituent needs.

With a growing number of already disadvantaged Illinoisans in need, increasing IEJF funding is especially critical right now

- More than 2 million Illinoisans are eligible for and rely on legal aid when they face civil legal problems, and they are disproportionately people from our state's Black and Brown and rural communities who have been hit hardest by the pandemic.
- Due to a long-term underinvestment in these critical services, more than half of Illinoisans in need of legal aid are turned away due to lack of resources.
- While IEJF recently has been able to leverage other state funding from federal pandemic-related programs to expand its support for Illinoisans facing eviction or foreclosure, these funds are temporary and do not cover the many other legal needs faced by people in our state who are struggling to get by.
- The legal community continues to do its part, providing more than 1.8 million hours of pro bono service and donating more than \$17 million each year to support pro bono and legal aid in Illinois.

IEJF funding is a solid investment in Illinois' families and communities that saves taxpayer money and should be increased to at least \$2.5 million

- Access to necessary legal help plays an integral role in promoting safety and economic stability for the most vulnerable Illinoisans.
- Studies consistently show that in contested matters in court, the outcome often turns on whether a disadvantaged person has representation by an attorney.
- IEJF is a solid economic investment as well, saving money on other expensive government services and helping streamline the court system and cut down on court costs. A comprehensive study found that legal aid in Illinois produces an almost 2:1 return on investment in economic benefits.