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In 2024, Iowa Legal Aid received a generous grant from Iowa's Civil Reparations Trust Fund to enhance our ability to provide critical civil legal services to vulnerable veterans and rural Iowans. We are pleased to submit this report detailing our efforts in serving these populations since October 26, 2024.

### **Legal Services for Veterans**

Since October 26, 2024, Iowa Legal Aid has assisted 333 veterans in securing income, housing, and protection from domestic violence. Our work positively impacted 597 veterans and family members, including 150 children. We successfully secured \$33,732 in benefits for our veteran clients, including the return of garnished wages that exceeded the garnishment limit of \$2,000.

### **Cases**

- **Housing Issues (45%):** We addressed a total of 152 housing cases, including eviction, housing discrimination, foreclosures, and federally subsidized housing issues. Of these cases, 117 were for evictions, and we helped prevent immediate homelessness for 195 veterans and family members, including 37 children. Seven percent of veteran clients reported living in shelters, with friends/relatives, or were homeless. Our attorneys worked to resolve the legal issues contributing to their housing instability.
- **Income Protection and Benefits (26%):** We helped 86 veterans avoid wage garnishment, obtain public benefits, and resolve issues related to food stamps, unemployment, Social Security Disability Insurance, and Medicaid.
- **Family Law (14%):** We helped 46 veterans leave unsafe environments, obtain protective orders, file for divorce, secure child custody, and retain possession of family homes.
- **Other Legal Issues (15%):** We provided 49 veterans with legal support for wills, estates, driver's licenses, and advance directives/powers of attorney.

Ninety-nine percent of veterans' cases resulted in favorable outcomes, helping clients avoid homelessness, gain independence from abusers, and secure financial stability. All veterans learned about their legal rights under Iowa law.

## **Demographics**

- **Gender:**
  - 23% female
  - 77% male
- **Disabilities:** 60% identified as having a disability
- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - White: 80%
  - Black: 13%
  - More than one race: 2%
  - Other: 2%
  - Native American: 1%
  - Asian: 1%
  - Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 1%
- **Age Distribution:**
  - 20-39 years: 18%
  - 40-59 years: 33%
  - 60+ years: 49%
- **Income Levels (Area Median Income - AMI):**
  - Less than 30% of AMI: 50% (9% reported having no income at all.)
  - 30-49% of AMI: 26%
  - 50-79% of AMI: 15%
  - 80+ of AMI: 9%

## **Success Story**

“Jonathan,” an older veteran, contacted Iowa Legal Aid after receiving an eviction notice for non-payment of rent. He explained to his Iowa Legal Aid attorney that he suffered from severe anxiety and had not left his house for months. He said that he would not be able to attend the eviction hearing.

The eviction notice stated that the landlord had received no rent for Jonathan’s apartment for two months. However, Jonathan was responsible for only a small portion of his rent, and he received a Section 8 voucher for the rest. Jonathan’s attorney worked with Jonathan to collect records of payments he had made as well as those made by the local Housing Authority for his voucher. The attorney attended the hearing and presented proof that the Housing Authority had paid in the months that the landlord was claiming he had received nothing for the apartment. The eviction was set aside, and Jonathan was able to stay in his apartment while he looked for a less expensive place to live.

### **Legal Services for Rural Iowans**

Since October 26, 2024, Iowa Legal Aid assisted low-income rural Iowans with 2,482 civil legal cases. Our work benefited 6,104 rural clients and household members, including 2,581 children. We have secured \$3,140,105 in benefits for our rural clients. The largest financial benefits were from child support benefits that our clients will receive until their children turn 18.

### **Cases**

- **Housing Issues (36%):** During this reporting period, Iowa Legal Aid resolved 892 housing cases, including 613 evictions. We also provided legal assistance with mortgage foreclosures, public housing disputes, and housing discrimination.
- **Family Law (36%):** During this reporting period, we closed a total of 890 family law-related cases involving domestic violence, divorce, custody/visitation, adoption, and guardianship. Thirty-two percent (789) of our rural clients identified as survivors of domestic violence. We provided essential legal services in these cases.
- **Income Protection and Benefits (21%):** We assisted 520 rural Iowans with bankruptcy cases, wage garnishment disputes, consumer matters, and securing benefits such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security Disability Insurance, and food stamps.
- **Other Legal Issues (7%):** We helped 180 rural Iowans with wills, estates, driver's licenses, and advance directives.

Ninety-nine percent of rural residents' cases resulted in favorable outcomes, helping clients avoid homelessness, achieve independence from abusers, and secure financial stability. All clients learned about their rights under Iowa law.

### **Demographics**

- **Gender:**
  - 74% female
  - 26% male
- **Disabilities:** 37% identified as having a disability
- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - White: 87%
  - Black: 6%
  - Other: 3%
  - More than one race: 2%
  - Native American: 1%
  - Asian: 1%

- **Age Distribution:**
  - 0-19 years: 1%
  - 20-39 years: 42%
  - 40-59 years: 32%
  - 60+ years: 25% (the oldest client was 97 years old)
- **Income Levels (Area Median Income - AMI):**
  - Less than 30% of AMI: 57% (18% rural Iowans reported having no income at all)
  - 30-49% of AMI: 27%
  - 50-79% of AMI: 13%
  - 80%+ of AMI: 3%

### **Success Story**

“Emma,” an older Iowan, moved to a small town to live with her son and his wife after they invited her to live with them. After they got divorced, Emma’s situation worsened. Her son became abusive and told Emma he would kill her if she used the bathroom. He refused to clean the house, which became infested with mice. He began stealing money from her. He filed to have Emma evicted from his house, yet he would not allow her to access her belongings to pack and move them. Emma contacted Iowa Legal Aid and asked for help.

Her attorney talked with Emma about getting out of her son’s house as soon as possible since it was not safe for her to remain there. Her attorney focused on finding her safe housing and securing public benefits that could help her get back on her feet. He represented her at the eviction hearing, and the eviction was dismissed. Emma accessed additional resources the attorney shared so that she could move out of her son’s house.

### **Cumulative**

From January 29, 2024 to date:

- Iowa Legal Aid closed 840 cases for Veterans, helping 1,434 Veterans and family members, including 309 children.
- Iowa Legal Aid closed 5,927 cases for rural Iowans, helping 13,963 residents and family members, including 5,908 children.