

*Landmark Report Finds that Access to Justice Boosts the State's Economy*

A landmark report published by the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Access to Justice Commission finds that civil legal services significantly boost the state's economy by bringing in millions of federal dollars, improving the lives of low-income citizens, and saving Maryland millions in expenditures.

The report, "Economic Impact of Civil Legal Services in Maryland," calculates that non-profit civil legal services programs generate \$190 million per year in economic activity, cost savings, and increased productivity. According to Pamela Ortiz, Executive Director of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, which produced the report, the state's civil legal services providers have a significant impact on the state's economy. "In advocating for their clients, legal services lawyers help their clients receive millions of dollars in benefits they would otherwise never receive. Their efforts bring millions of dollars in additional federal aid into the State. They also help their clients win millions of dollars in additional resources which they spend on goods and services in Maryland. By helping their clients thrive, they also save the State money in expenditures associated with homelessness, domestic violence and other social costs of poverty."

There are 35 legal services programs that receive state funding through the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. These programs employ attorneys that represent 0.7 percent of all Maryland lawyers. Yet the impact of the services provided by these attorneys and the additional lawyers who serve pro bono far outweighs any measure of the costs to employ them. For example, the report illustrates that in FY2012 advocacy by Maryland civil legal aid providers achieved the following:

- Brought \$9.9 million in federal dollars to benefit Maryland residents, which, in turn, translated into a minimum \$12.6 million in economic stimulus for the local economy
- Obtained \$10.7 million in other direct financial benefits for residents
- Secured \$161 million as a result of systemic advocacy on behalf of tenants at risk of eviction, vulnerable homeowners, and low-income persons in need of emergency shelter
- Resulted in at least \$882,096 in tax revenue by keeping citizens in the work force
- Saved at least \$3.7 million in state expenditures on shelter costs by preventing homelessness
- Saved at least \$1.3 million in health care costs and productivity by preventing domestic violence

The report concludes that the positive financial implications of civil legal aid are just the tip of the iceberg: "For many low-income Marylanders, the real benefits of civil legal aid come from the many non-monetary outcomes they achieve with the help of a civil legal services organization. For those individual clients, the real benefits may be incalculable."