

Legal Aid for Survivors of Domestic Violence

The Washington State Legislature appropriated \$2M in funding per year beginning in FY 2023 “to expand civil legal aid services for survivors of domestic violence, including legal services for protection order proceedings, family cases, immigration assistance, and other civil legal issues arising from or related to the domestic violence they experienced.” With this funding, the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) contracted with 7 legal aid providers across the state to deliver critical legal services for survivors of domestic violence. These programs serve diverse communities across Washington on a wide range of legal needs, with 20% of funding dedicated to Native and indigenous survivors in rural areas. **In the first two years of this funding, over 2,000 survivors of domestic violence received legal aid services, including legal information, advice, and representation.**

LEGAL SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

Domestic violence survivors frequently experience multiple, varied civil legal needs. Legal aid providers offered services in the following primary areas:

Protective Orders

- Representation in filing for protective orders ensured physical safety, and access to housing and other necessities in the immediate aftermath of abuse. This also included defending against abusive litigation or false allegations against survivors

Immigration

- Support for survivors filing VAWA self-petitions, U visas, and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) for minors. This included achieving lawful, permanent residence for clients as well as interim benefits such as work authorizations

Family Law

- Representation in dissolutions, child custody matters, and more. Developing protective parenting plans ensured ongoing child safety and promoted long term financial and housing security for families.

Privacy Protections

- Advocacy to prevent public disclosure of sensitive records and preserve survivors’ rights in criminal cases.

IMPROVING SYSTEMS

Training & Collaboration: Providers trained community advocacy organizations to identify legal issues and developed client-centered referral partnerships.

Holistic Support: Many contractors offered holistic legal services, often representing a single survivor on multiple interrelated legal issues.

Building Expertise: Attorneys shared their technical knowledge with cross-system partners, frequently consulting on complex or novel legal issues and working together to protect survivors’ interests in appeals and public policy.

EXPANDING LEGAL AID: WOMENSPIRIT COALITION



For over 22 years, WomenSpirit Coalition, a nationally recognized tribal coalition based in Sequim, has served Native victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. With this funding, WomenSpirit introduced civil legal services for survivors from seven tribes across the Olympic Peninsula. In June 2024, it opened Sayu’? X Wey Family Safety Center, the first Native-led family safety center certified by Hope Alliance International. In the picture above, Executive Director Dee Koester cuts the ribbon with Sequim City Council Member Vicki Lowe. The addition of civil legal services provides vital support to Native survivors, who face disproportionately high rates of domestic violence in underserved rural communities.

Contractors for FY 2023-2025:

- Northwest Immigrant Rights Program
- Sound Legal Aid
- Tacomaprobono Community Lawyers
- Spokane YWCA
- Sexual Violence Law Center
- Lummi Victims of Crime
- WomenSpirit Coalition