

Justice Measured: An Assessment of the Economic Impact of Civil Legal Aid in Arkansas

A Report of the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission in partnership with
University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service

Executive Summary

This study assessed the economic impact of civil legal aid delivered by Arkansas's two Legal Services Corporation (LSC)-funded organizations in the state—the Center for Arkansas Legal Services (CALs) and Legal Aid of Arkansas (LAA)—for 2013. The research team analyzed detailed case closing information from each program, financial statements, self-help resource usage statistics from the Arkansas Legal Services Partnership website, and secondary data from other economic benefit studies, including methods for projecting costs saved through housing foreclosure and domestic violence interventions. This study also gathered qualitative information through surveys and interviews with former legal aid clients, current legal aid attorneys, and circuit courts judges.

The study demonstrates that CALs and LAA have a substantial positive economic impact on their clients and on the state of Arkansas. Together, they served nearly 12,000 clients in 2013 at a cost that was \$2.4 million less than the equivalent cost of such services in the private legal market. In addition, researchers concluded the following:

- Legal aid saved clients an estimated \$3.4 million in costs for nonlawyer legal document services.
- Legal aid put nearly \$2.3 million into the pockets of their clients and helped them avoid liabilities of over \$9.4 million.
- Representation in housing foreclosure cases prevented \$2.2 million in diminished housing values.
- Legal assistance for domestic violence victims likely prevented more than \$3.9 million in costs for emergency shelter, medical expenses, and social services.
- Revenues that legal aid brings into the state generate an additional \$8.8 million in economic activity in the state by virtue of their multiplier effect in local communities.

These positive outcomes are realized in only a small handful of the total cases that CALs and LAA close each year. Many of the cases they handle—such as guardianships of minor children, advocacy for children caught up in the juvenile justice system, and assistance to elderly Arkansans who are victimized by scams—are not often readily subject to quantification. Further study in this area is needed to establish reliable outcome measures that capture the broader benefits of civil legal aid that qualitative research indicates are present.

These findings can serve as a vital tool for aiding policymakers and funders to understand the dollar value of investments in civil legal aid. However, they tell only part of a larger story about the immeasurable contribution that legal aid makes to preserving the integrity of the rule of law by affording persons of limited means equal access to the civil justice system.

The full report is available at www.arkansasjustice.org/economicimpact.