

INVEST IN JUSTICE FOR ALL

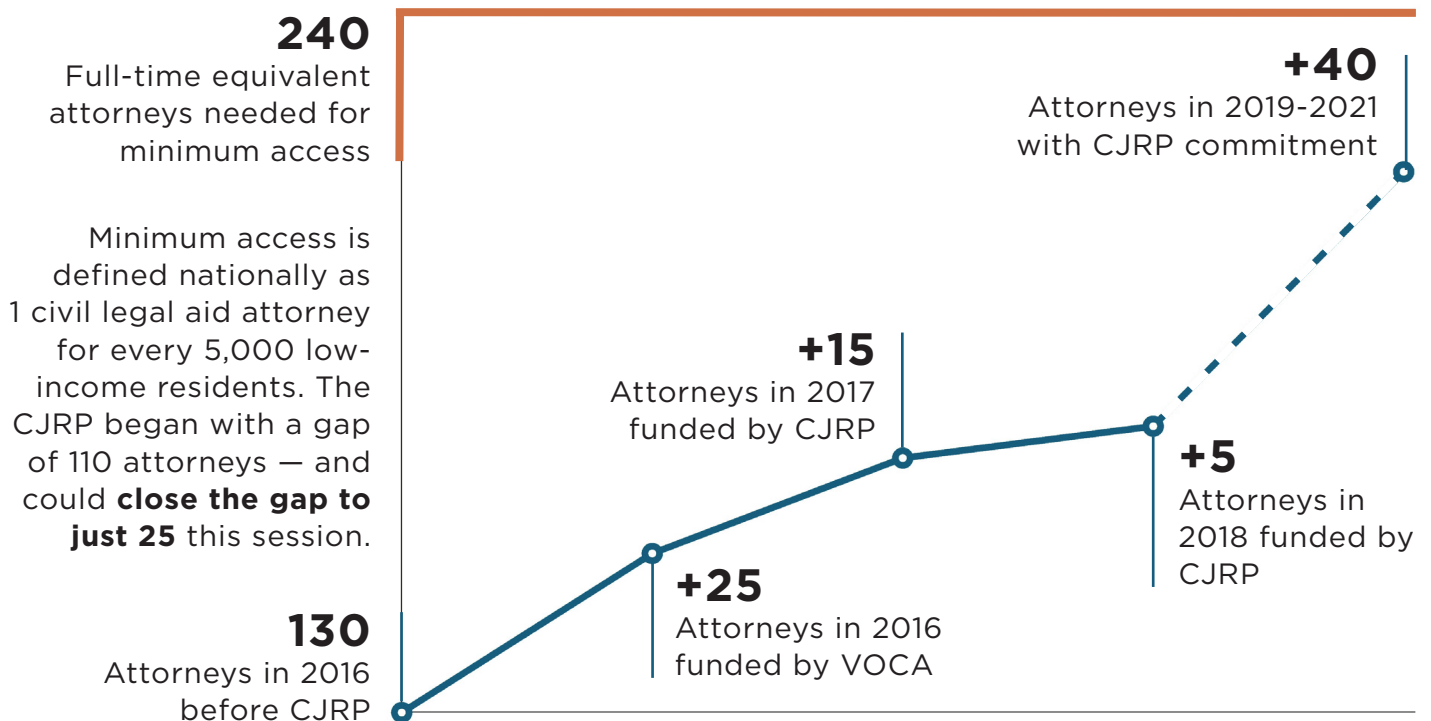
Civil legal aid keeps people housed, secure in their jobs, and protected from illness and violence. But far too many Washingtonians lack access to justice when they need it most. The most recent study from WSU found that **71% of low-income residents have at least one critical civil legal problem each year**, and the average number of civil legal issues rose from 3.3 per year in 2003 to 9.3 in 2015. But **only 24% of those in need get help from a civil legal aid attorney**.

During the past two sessions, you recognized the urgent need for more investment in civil legal aid, increasing funding to “partially implement” the **Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan (CJRP)**. The funding has already had an impact, but more investment is still needed just to reach the **“minimum access” necessary for ending our state’s civil justice crisis**.

Now is the time to continue your commitment to civil legal aid with an increase of \$11.4M in the 2019-2021 budget to:

- ✓ Significantly increase the number of low-income families who are able to protect themselves under the law by adding 40 new legal aid attorneys across the state
- ✓ Maintain current service capacity at civil legal aid programs, and prevent service gaps by retaining and recognizing staff and volunteer attorneys

Progress toward minimum access to justice



CIVIL LEGAL AID: A SMART INVESTMENT

Debt-Free and Working in Grays Harbor County

Chris* became addicted to drugs at age 16 and was homeless for 12 years, accumulating criminal charges and \$18,000 in hospital debt before he entered recovery in 2015. His debt and penalties against driving prevented him from pursuing his goals of recovering and becoming a plumber.

But Chris was referred to the **Northwest Justice Project**, and legal representation helped eliminate some of his debt and negotiate more affordable payment plans for the rest. He also received eligibility for a driver's license. Chris was able to secure a job as a plumber and drive a company vehicle. After a recent promotion, he moved out of recovery and into his own apartment with his girlfriend and her children.

✓ Investing in legal aid keeps families safe, housed, and healthy.

Legal aid programs funded by the state, including the Northwest Justice Project, help low-income people protect their livelihoods, property, health, and families.

✓ Investing in legal aid ensures fairness and justice in our society.

If our justice system does not work for all of us, then it isn't really a justice system. Legal aid ensures that the laws we pass are fairly enforced.

✓ Investing in legal aid today saves money tomorrow.

According to studies conducted in Delaware, Florida, Indiana, and many other states, every \$1 invested in civil legal aid can return \$7 or more in state government savings on emergency shelter, foreclosure, public benefits, criminal proceedings, and other expenditures.

Every day, civil legal aid creates immediate and long-lasting social and economic impacts for low-income individuals, families, and entire communities.

Safely Housed in Chelan County

Margaret's* landlord was not fulfilling the lease obligations. He had not provided proper water connections and sewer disposal to Margaret's trailer, so she withheld rent. Her landlord then bullied her and threatened eviction. As a survivor of domestic violence, this experience was traumatizing for Margaret.

Fortunately, she connected with a lawyer from **Chelan-Douglas County Volunteer Attorney Services**, who worked to make sure that Margaret was not evicted. Instead, she was relieved of paying rent and was able to move out of the trailer park. Because of civil legal aid, Margaret and her son avoided homelessness and now live in a safe, habitable home.

**Names changed for anonymity*