

Legal Aid in Texas 2003

Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation

The Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation is the primary Texas-based funding source for the provision of legal aid to the poor. In 2003, TEAJF granted \$11.7 million to legal aid providers statewide.

Access to the civil justice system for the poor is of the utmost importance to ensure the continuation of our democracy. Legal aid organizations make it possible for people who are not able to afford an attorney to exercise their rights in the legal system. Legal aid gives hope to people who have nowhere else to turn.



The Need for Legal Aid

Currently, more than three million people live in poverty in Texas. Oftentimes, these Texans find themselves in need of legal services, but unable to afford them. Low-income Texans face a multitude of civil legal problems related to their most basic needs: safety from violence, livable housing and access to necessary medical care.

To qualify for legal aid, an individual cannot earn more than \$11,638 per year. A family of four cannot earn more than \$23,563 per year. One catastrophic event, such as a terminal illness, can cause the loss of income while creating a plethora of legal issues.

Legal aid organizations make a significant difference in the lives of indigent Texans. But with limited funding and an ever increasing population in need of assistance, legal aid providers must turn away thousands of people each year.

This document illustrates the tireless efforts of legal aid organizations that advocate on behalf of Texas' most vulnerable residents.

Closed Cases

In 2003, 39 TEAJF-funded legal aid organizations closed 101,780 cases. These cases included obtaining protective orders for women in abusive situations, advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities and ensuring the protection of the elderly.

In determining the number of cases that were closed in 2003, legal aid programs also calculated the number of people who benefited from each case. The number includes people who were represented in addition to family members and others who are positively affected by the case outcomes. In 2003, 312,233 people benefited from legal aid's efforts.

Dollar Benefits

In 2003, legal aid organizations secured \$14,953,541 in back awards for clients in cases such as child support, workers compensation and public benefits. Additionally, monthly benefits totaling \$1,835,927 were secured for legal aid clients.

Types of Cases

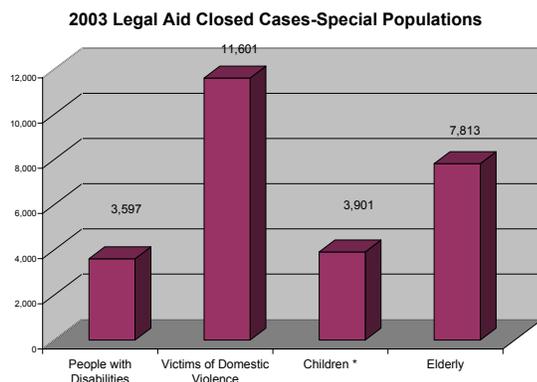
Low-income Texans face a wide variety of legal problems related to their basic needs. The following chart shows the breakdown of legal aid cases for 2003.



As shown in the chart, family law continues to be the primary service provided for legal aid clients, followed by individual rights. Family law encompasses a wide variety of issues, including safety from domestic violence and child custody.

Special Populations

While legal aid prides itself on affording indigent Texans access to justice, the providers are especially proud of their accomplishments on behalf of special populations. Below is an illustration of cases in which legal aid has advocated for those particularly in need of a voice in the legal system.

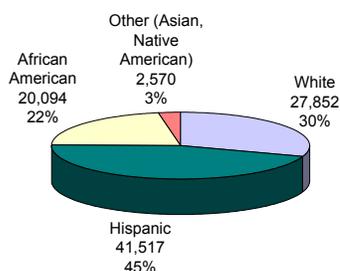


* Represents cases in which children were the primary client. Children often indirectly benefit from family law cases, such as those related to domestic violence and child custody.

Ethnic Diversity

Most TEAJF-funded organizations track client demographics. The chart below illustrates the ethnic breakdown of Texans assisted by legal aid.

2003 Legal Aid Closed Cases-Ethnic Breakdown



Attorney Contributions

TEAJF-funded legal aid organizations endeavor to involve private attorneys in access to justice efforts for the poor. Because these organizations cannot meet all of the needs, volunteer attorneys can make a world of difference to an individual facing a seemingly insurmountable legal problem.

In 2003, 7,916 attorneys collectively donated 117,423 hours via a legal aid program. More than 1,500 paralegals donated their expertise as well to ensure justice for the poor.

Also in 2003, attorneys donated more than \$1.1 million for access to justice during the State Bar of Texas annual dues collection, in addition to their donations to local legal aid providers.



Expanding Legal Aid

TEAJF-funded legal aid organizations continue to make a significant difference in the lives of poor Texans. Sadly, legal aid cannot represent everyone who needs assistance. In the instances where legal aid cannot provide full representation, providers strive to provide advice or counsel to as many people as possible.

As we look to the future of legal aid, it is apparent that we will only be able to serve more Texans in need by increasing resources. Policy makers must demonstrate their support of legal aid by appropriating increased state funding and developing favorable policy. Attorneys and law firms are strongly needed to increase contributions and pro bono work. TEAJF, in conjunction with the Texas Access to Justice Commission, will continue to educate the public about legal aid and the importance of its role in our Texas communities.

For more information about the Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation, or to make a donation, please visit www.teajf.org. For more information about legal aid, please visit www.texasatj.org.

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