

August 15, 2025

# The Social Economic Impact and Return on Funding Investment of Civil Legal Aid Services in the State of Michigan

2023-2024



**NOTICE OF DISCLAIMER:**

The Michigan Supreme Court established the Justice for All Commission by Administrative Order 2021-1 to develop recommendations and projects to expand access to and enhance the quality of the civil justice system in Michigan. The opinions and recommendations contained in this document are those of the Justice for All Commission and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Michigan Supreme Court or State Court Administrative Office.

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# Executive Summary

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Legal Aid organizations across Michigan manage thousands of cases each year, addressing issues such as housing, public benefits, domestic violence, consumer protection, and more. In 2022, the Justice for All Commission released a Social and Economic Impact and Social Return on Investment Report based on cases from 2019 and 2020.

This updated study examines the social value of legal services provided in 2023 and 2024—both in terms of the immediate benefits to individuals and the long-term, consequential impact on communities as a whole.

The consequential benefits include savings in community support costs, reductions in community medical care expenses, additional income and taxation revenues from benefit programs, savings in housing and support costs for homeless families, and savings in community law enforcement, court systems, and other government agency costs.

The researchers found that the social return on investment for legal aid organizations is higher than comparative values for many other types of social service organizations based on two primary factors:

1. Many types of legal services delivered result in significant future cost savings or additional income, including obtaining federal disability benefits and saving on costs for emergency housing.
2. There are significant pro bono services delivered by attorneys in Michigan, which saves on costs spent. Legal Aid organizations provide the necessary infrastructure for clients and pro bono volunteers, so that more individuals can be helped.

# Executive Summary – Results

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Researchers found, looking at 2023 and 2024, for every \$1 invested in Michigan legal aid, the people of Michigan received \$5.49 in immediate and long-term consequential financial benefits, a 549% return on investment.

The SROI reflects the fact that over two years, total investment in legal aid was approximately \$93 million and resulted in more than \$511 million in net, realizable economic benefits. The total net value includes more than \$61 million in immediate net value and more than \$450 million in long-term net consequential value.

The researchers looked at specific services provided by civil legal aid, and found that over two years:

- In 4,568 cases involving criminal record expungement, Michigan residents received approximately \$3.7 million in immediate direct benefits and more than \$47.9 million in gross long-term consequential financial benefits.
- In nearly 25,000 cases involving landlord tenant disputes in non-subsidized housing, Michigan residents received nearly \$23.3 million in immediate direct benefits and approximately \$13.4 million in gross long-term consequential financial benefits.
- In 806 cases involving Supplemental Security Income, Michigan residents received approximately \$300,000 in immediate direct benefits and nearly \$6.1 million in gross long-term consequential financial benefits.

The SROI analysis was conducted by CSACO Community Services Analysis LLC for the Justice for All Commission (JFAC) which was created to expand access to and enhance the quality of the civil justice system in Michigan.



# What is Social Economic Impact and Social Return on Investment?

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In normal financial analysis, Return on Investment is the ratio of money gained or lost relative to the money invested. In social service organizations, Social Return on Investment measures the financial value created by the organization through delivery of services to the community.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is an approach to measuring and understanding the financial impact of a social services organization. While SROI is built on the logic of cost/benefit analysis, it is different in that it measures the comparable value of organizations whose results cannot be easily measured in money. In the same way that a business plan contains more information than simply financial projections, SROI provides information about actual and long-term results of services, and the qualitative, quantitative, and financial information on which to base decisions about the delivery of social services by organizations. An SROI analysis can take many different forms. It can encompass the social value generated by an entire organization or focus on just one specific aspect of the organization's work.

SROI analysis has been developing since the 1960's. The SROI process has become more fully developed during the last decade, primarily based on a detailed multi-year study conducted by Social Value International, The New Economics Foundation, New Philanthropy Capital, the National Council on Voluntary Organization, and the Government of Scotland.

Many additional organizations are continually contributing to the SROI body of knowledge, including the Global Impact Investing Network, Social Value International, the International Foundation for Valuing Impacts, the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation, the Global Reporting Initiative, and the United Nations Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.



There are two separate phases of SROI:

**Phase 1** is the measurement of the value delivered to the community by the services currently being delivered by the organization (the “**Outputs**”). The most accurate and understandable measurement basis for these outputs is the Fair Market Value of the services being delivered - what it would cost the community to acquire the same services that a social service provider delivers if that provider did not exist - plus the value of benefits received during the immediate period under study. This result is a measurement of the comparative efficiency of the organization in delivering or providing the services.

**Phase 2** is the measurement of the long-term value of the results of these output services delivered - known as the “**Outcomes**”. These measurements may take years to realize. For example, people with disabilities who receive training on independent living skills and how to more fully integrate within the community and require significantly less financial support from the community over the course of their lives.

By way of another example, people who receive assistance in finding and retaining employment require less future financial support from their communities, plus their future demands on the law enforcement and legal systems are less, their future needs for community-based medical assistance are less, and their future tax payments are greater.

A SROI analysis can fulfill a range of purposes. It can be used as a tool for strategic planning, as a basis for funding and investment decisions, as a basis for communicating impact and financial results to stakeholders, and as a methodology for comparative evaluation of an organization’s long-term effectiveness.

While not the only basis for funding and investment decisions, the SROI results provide the most accurate and comprehensible answer to three of the important questions asked by funding decision makers:

1. What are the long-term economic impacts from these services?
2. What are the financial benefits we receive for our funding?
3. What is the measurable “bang for the buck”?

# Overview

For the Years 2023 & 2024

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In historical financial analysis, Return on Investment is the ratio of money gained or lost relative to the money invested. In social service organizations, Social Return on Investment measures both the immediate value and long-term consequential financial values created by the organization through the social impacts of delivery of services to the community.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is an internationally standardized and accepted process for measuring and understanding the financial impacts of a social services organization. While SROI is built on the logic of cost/benefit analysis, it is different in that it measures the comparable value of organizations whose social economic impact long-term results cannot be easily quantified in financial results.

The organizations providing Civil Legal Aid services in the State of Michigan that participated in this analysis are:

## **Full Service Legal Aid Organizations:**

Lakeshore Legal Aid

Legal Services of Eastern Michigan

Legal Aid of Northern Michigan

Legal Aid of Western Michigan

Michigan Advocacy Program

*(Note: This report does not include data from Farmworker Legal Services)*

**THE COUNSEL AND ADVOCACY LAW LINE** is an attorney-staffed hotline for low-income people that completes intakes, provides advice and brief services, and makes referrals to the regional Legal Aid programs that participated in this report.

# Highlights of Michigan’s Legal Aid Providers Social Return on Investment Analysis Results – 2023

<b>Total Number of Services Provided in Michigan</b>	36,975
<b>Immediate Gross Direct Value of Services</b>	\$31,458,000
<b>Long-Term Gross Consequential Value</b>	\$225,446,000
<b>Immediate Net Direct Value of Services</b>	\$29,033,000
<b>Long-Term Net Consequential Value</b> The long-term impacts of Legal Aid services are the consequential financial impacts to the community resulting from the outcomes of the legal aid services. These consequential benefits include savings in community support costs, reductions in the community medical care expenses, additional community income and taxation revenues from benefit programs, savings in housing and support costs for homeless families, and savings in community law enforcement, court systems, and other government agency costs.	\$213,888,000
<b>Total Net Economic Impacts of Services</b>	\$242,921,000
<b>Total Funding for Michigan Civil Legal Aid Operations</b>	\$48,396,000
<b>Social Impact Return on Investment</b>	502%

**\$5.02** |

For every \$1 invested in Michigan Legal Aid during the year 2023, the citizens of Michigan received \$5.02 of immediate and long-term financial benefits.

# 2024 Results

<b>Total Number of Services Provided in Michigan</b>	35,008
<b>Immediate Gross Direct Value of Savings</b>	\$32,449,000
<b>Long-Term Gross Consequential Value</b>	\$249,309,000
<b>Immediate Net Direct Value of Services</b>	\$32,449,000
<p><b>Long-Term Net Consequential Value</b></p> <p>The long-term impacts of Legal Aid services are the consequential financial impacts to the community resulting from the outcomes of the legal aid services. These consequential benefits include savings in community support costs, reductions in community medical care expenses, additional community income and taxation revenues from benefit programs, savings in housing and support costs for homeless families, and savings in community law enforcement, court systems, and other government agency costs.</p>	\$237,943,000
<b>Total Net Economic Impacts of Services</b>	\$268,085,000
<b>Total Funding for Michigan Civil Legal Aid Operations</b>	\$44,638,000
<b>Social Impact Return on Investment</b>	601%

# \$6.01

For every \$1 invested in Michigan Legal Aid during the year 2024, the citizens of Michigan received \$6.01 of immediate and long-term financial benefits.

# Analysis of Impact

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The Social Return on Investment analysis completed for Michigan's Legal Aid organizations is a measurement of the values delivered from services completed during the years 2023 and 2024. These values are based on the number of clients and the types of legal matters handled during this period.

The Social Return on Investment value varies between the different Legal Aid organizations based on the number of matters, the types of legal issues, the long-term outcomes achieved in these matters, and the amount of time donated by volunteer lawyers to each organization.

**The Social Return on Investment for Michigan's Legal Aid organizations is higher than comparative values for many other types of social service organizations.** This is based on two primary factors:

## 1. Significant Cost Savings

Many types of legal services delivered result in significant future cost savings or additional income to the State of Michigan. These long-term values include (among many others):

- ▶ Multiple year income from Social Security and/or Disability benefits that were previously denied, terminated, or reduced.
- ▶ Long-term savings on children's medical and other support costs resulting from child support payments that were previously not obtained.
- ▶ Obtaining unemployment compensation benefits that had previously been unfairly denied.
- ▶ Significant savings on costs for emergency housing and family assistance resulting from enforcement of landlord/tenant law.
- ▶ Cost savings and benefits resulting from other legal aid services available to qualified low-income individuals and families.
- ▶ The significantly greater number of Self-Help Center services delivered statewide compared to other states with similar services.

## 2. Pro Bono Services

Another significant reason for the high value of Michigan's Legal Aid Social Return on Investment is the number of volunteer ("pro bono") hours of legal services delivered by attorneys in Michigan.

These pro bono services would be less available and less efficient if not for the operations of the Legal Aid organizations.

Michigan's Legal Aid operations provide the necessary infrastructure for clients and pro bono volunteers; this includes attorney recruitment, training, and recognition, client screening, administrative support, technical assistance, and follow-up services.

Michigan's Legal Aid organizations provide services in over one hundred types of civil legal problems. Their major areas of services are: (Impact Values rounded to 000's)



# Family Issues

**Matters involving domestic violence, divorce, separation and annulment, child custody and visitation, guardianship, and adoption.**

<b>Family Law Issues - 2023</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Adoption	14	\$3,000	N/A
Custody and Visitation	2,180	\$1,142,000	\$8,156,000
Divorce/Seperation/Annulment	2,493	\$2,031,000	\$32,660,000
Adult Guardianship	262	\$110,000	\$1,391,000
Gender/Name Change	43	\$22,000	N/A
Parental Rights Termination	12	\$3,000	N/A
Paternity	128	\$70,000	\$1,445,000
Domestic Abuse	534	\$666,000	\$4,178,000
Support	347	\$145,000	\$805,000
Other Family Issues	134	\$93,000	\$392,000
Neglected and Abused Dependents	11	\$5,000	\$18,000
Emancipation	3	\$1,000	N/A
Minor Guardianship	176	\$86,000	\$1,475,000
Other Juvenile	3	\$1,000	N/A

<b>Family Law Issues - 2024</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Adoption	7	\$1,400	N/A
Custody and Visitation	2,419	\$1,530,000	\$9,847,000
Divorce/Seperation/Annulment	2,661	\$2,783,000	\$35,056,000
Adult Guardianship	279	\$124,000	\$1,722,000
Gender/Name Change	39	\$23,000	N/A
Parental Rights Termination	14	\$2,800	N/A
Paternity	133	\$80,000	\$1,878,000
Domestic Abuse	519	\$597,000	\$3,818,000
Support	389	\$161,000	\$637,000
Other Family Issues	141	\$95,000	\$379,000
Neglected and Abused Dependents	10	\$2,000	N/A
Delinquent Juvenile	3	\$1,000	N/A
Emancipation	2	\$1,000	N/A
Minor Guardianship	195	\$122,000	\$2,387,000
Other Juvenile	1	\$200	N/A

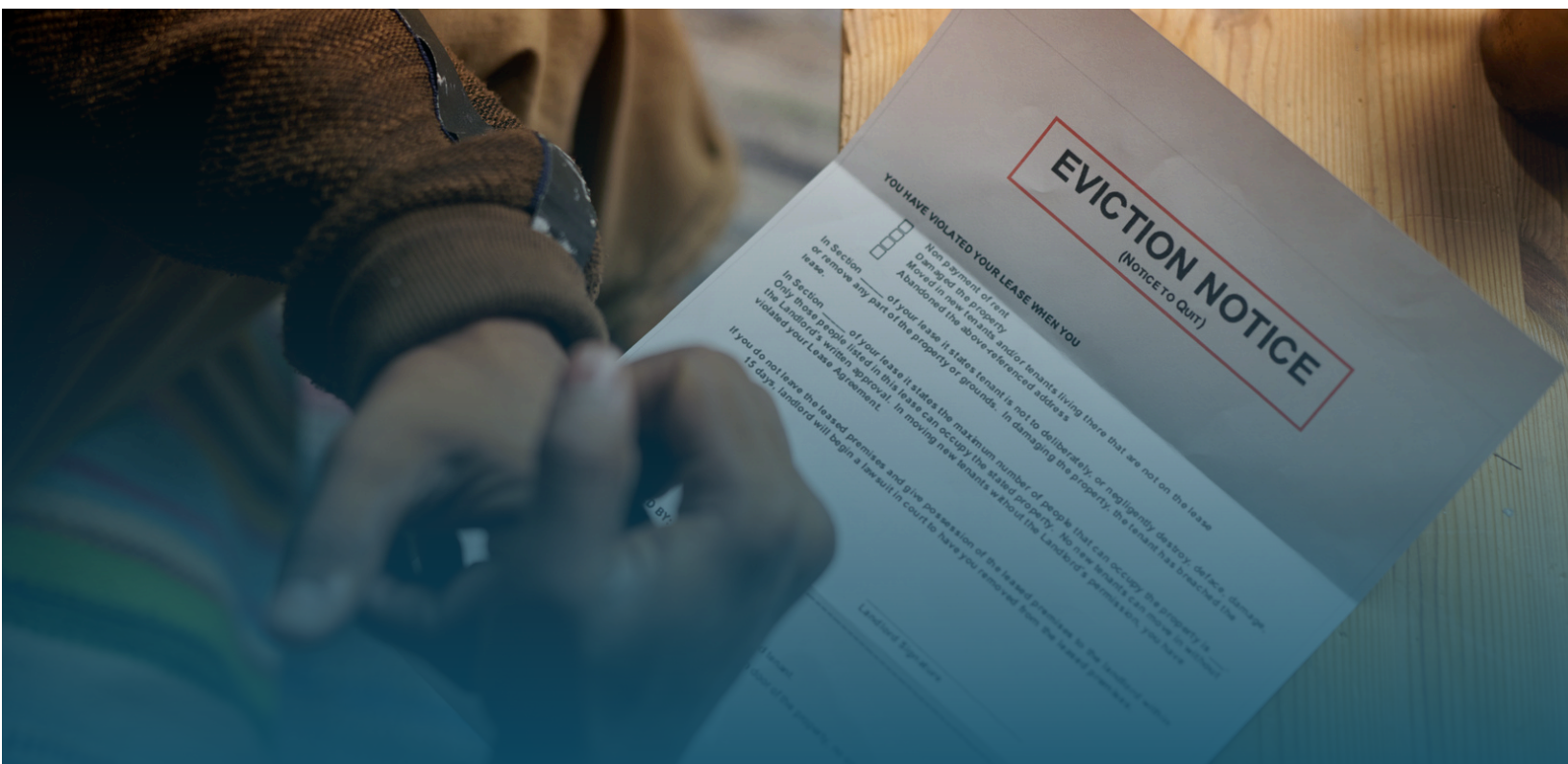


# Housing Issues

This includes matters involving loss of housing due to foreclosure, eviction from subsidized or private housing, public housing issues, private landlord/tenant problems, and sub-standard housing conditions.

<b>Housing Issues - 2023</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcomes Impacts</b>
Federally Subsidized Housing	3,513	\$3,437	\$115,321,000
Homeownership and Real Property	975	\$453,000	\$617,000
Private Landlord/Tenant Issues	\$14,326	\$12,451,000	\$7,884,000
Public Housing	344	\$354,000	\$2,404,000
Mobile Homes	1,218	\$971,000	\$3,047,000
Housing Discrimination	40	\$41,000	\$121,000
Mortgage Foreclosures	280	\$264,000	\$4,635,000
Mortgage Predatory Lending/Practices	29	\$53,000	\$205,000
Other Housing Issues	164	\$105,000	\$336,000

Housing Issues - 2024	Number of Cases	Gross Direct Service Impact Values	Gross Long-term Outcomes Impacts
Federally Subsidized Housing	3,605	\$3,889,000	\$137,375,000
Homeownership and Real Property	987	\$451,000	\$392,000
Private Landlord/Tenant Issues	11,171	\$10,837,000	\$5,508,000
Public Housing	306	\$299,000	\$1,994,000
Mobile Homes	1,003	\$749,000	\$2,209,000
Housing Discrimination	51	\$43,000	\$158,000
Mortgage Foreclosures	227	\$142,000	\$2,776,000
Mortgage Predatory Lending/Practices	13	\$24,000	\$84,000
Other Housing Issues	184	\$96,000	\$214,000



# Health Care Issues

This includes matters involving private health insurance, long-term health care facilities, home and community-based care, state and local health care, and other health issues.

<b>Health Care Issues - 2023</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcomes Impacts</b>
Home and Community Based Care	4	\$8,600	\$133,000
Private Health Insurance	2	\$1,000	N/A
Long Term Health Care Facilities	27	\$17,000	\$568,000
Other Health Issues	107	\$53,000	\$452,000

<b>Health Care Issues - 2024</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcomes Impacts</b>
Home and Community Based Care	12	\$9,000	\$199,000
Private Health Insurance	2	\$1,000	N/A
Long Term Health Care Facilities	20	\$15,000	\$398,000
State and Local Health Care	3	\$1,000	N/A
Other Health Issues	89	\$32,000	\$363,000

# Public Benefits Issues

This includes matters involving public programs such as Social Security benefits, Medicare and Medicaid, food stamps, temporary assistance for needy families, and unemployment compensation.

<b>Public Benefits Issues - 2023</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Medicaid Issues	91	\$28,000	\$474,000
Medicare Issues	13	\$6,000	\$66,000
Temp. Assistance for Needy Families	20	\$8,000	\$89,000
Social Security	75	\$25,000	\$2,001,000
Food Stamps (SNAP)	101	\$31,000	\$155,000
Social Security Disability Insurance	258	\$81,000	\$5,885,000
Supplemental Security Income	398	\$137,000	\$2,888,000
Unemployment Compensation	391	\$325,000	\$499,000

<b>Public Benefits Issues - 2024</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Medicaid Issues	212	\$165,000	\$206,000
Medicare Issues	415	\$4,000	\$82,000
Temp. Assistance for Needy Families	9	\$2,000	\$30,000
Social Security	96	\$27,000	\$2,801,000
Food Stamps	94	\$35,000	\$221,000
Social Security Disability Insurance	245	\$143,000	\$6,253,000
Supplemental Security Income	408	\$163,000	\$3,203,000
Unemployment Compensation	280	\$216,000	\$350,000

# Consumer Protection Issues

This includes matters involving bankruptcy, debt and wage garnishments, tax issues, debt collections, and repossessions.

<b>Consumer Protection Issues - 2023</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Bankruptcy & Debtor Relief	562	\$276,000	\$1,357,000
Collections/Repossessions/ Garnishments	1,127	\$591,000	\$184,000
Contracts & Warranties	242	\$160,000	\$6,000
Collection Practices/Credit	19	\$7,000	\$1,000
Predatory Lending (Not Mortgage)	4	\$1,000	N/A
Loans & Installment Purchases	13	\$6,000	N/A
Public Utilities	69	\$24,000	\$4,000
Unfair Sales Practices	32	\$12,000	N/A
Other Consumer Finance Issues	204	\$62,000	\$13,000

<b>Consumer Protection Issues - 2024</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Bankruptcy & Debtor Relief	687	\$794,000	\$1,638,000
Collections/Repossessions/ Garnishments	1,389	\$702,000	\$164,000
Contracts & Warranties	286	\$123,000	\$4,000
Collection Practices/Credit	25	\$66,000	\$1,000
Predatory Lending (Not Mortgage)	8	\$3,000	\$29,000
Loans & Installment Purchases	3	\$2,000	N/A
Public Utilities	62	\$23,000	\$7,000
Unfair Sales Practices	11	\$3,000	N/A
Other Consumer Finance Issues	179	\$55,000	\$8,000



# Other Community Issues

This includes matters involving varied areas such as education, employment, mental health and disabilities, immigration, wills and estates, powers of attorney and advance directives, criminal record expungements, licenses (including Specialized Driver's Licenses), civil rights, torts, civil rights, licenses, and other individual miscellaneous legal issues.

Other Community Support Issues - 2023	Number of Cases	Gross Direct Service Impact Values	Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts
Education Issues	59	\$27,000	N/A
Employment Issues	179	\$149,000	\$98,000
Veterans Benefits	7	\$4,000	\$29,000
State & Local Income Maintenance	21	\$11,000	\$29,000
Other Income Maintenance Issues	40	\$13,000	\$39,000
Immigration and Naturalization	24	\$14,000	\$108,000
Criminal Record Expungements	2,545	\$1,924,000	\$24,883,000
Physically Disabled Rights	5	\$1,000	\$7,000
Civil Rights	3	\$2,000	\$2,000
Other Individual Rights	66	\$39,000	N/A
Licenses (Incl. Specialized Drivers)	116	\$30,000	\$137,000
Torts	13	\$5,000	N/A
Wills and Estates	1,386	\$797,000	\$1,382,000
Advance Directives/Power of Attorney	1,458	\$614,000	\$1,458,000
Other Miscellaneous Issues	60	\$19,000	N/A

<b>Other Community Support Issues - 2024</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Gross Direct Service Impact Values</b>	<b>Gross Long-term Outcome Impacts</b>
Education Issues	76	\$36,000	N/A
Employment Issues	150	\$102,000	\$49,000
Veterans Benefits	1	\$1,000	\$6,000
State & Local Income Maintenance	22	\$11,000	\$30,000
Other Income Maintenance Issues	39	\$12,000	\$30,000
Immigration and Naturalization	21	\$14,000	\$99,000
Criminal Record Expungement	2,113	\$1,733,000	\$23,042,000
Mental Health Issues	8	\$2,000	N/A
Physically Disabled Rights	6	\$1,000	\$4,000
Civil Rights	1	\$200	N/A
Other Individual Rights	87	\$36,000	N/A
Licenses (Incl. Specialized Drivers)	143	\$49,000	\$264,000
Torts	7	\$12,000	N/A
Wills and Estates	1,695	\$1,627,000	\$1,694,000
Advance Directives/Power of Attorney	1,702	\$674,000	\$1,701,000
Other Miscellaneous Issues	76	\$36,000	N/A



# Counsel and Advocacy Law Line

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The Counsel and Advocacy Law Line is an attorney-staffed hotline that completes intakes and makes referrals to all the regional Legal Aid programs that participated in this report. The total economic impacts of these services are included in the Legal Aid economic impacts.

**16,520**  
Calls  
handled  
in 2023

**15,704**  
Calls  
handled  
in 2024

### Government and Legal System Cost Savings:

Cost savings to the community's government agencies and court systems provided through work reduction and increases in efficiencies from the legal aid and assistance services provided by Legal Aid.

<b>Government and Legal System Cost Savings in 2023</b>	\$3,444,000
<b>Government and Legal System Cost Savings in 2024</b>	\$3,491,000

*Note to these total values:*

### Participating Legal Aid Provider Organizations

These are the consolidated values for all the participating Legal Aid organizations in Michigan. Not all services are provided by every organization.

### Net Present Value Discounting on Long-Term Consequential Economic Impacts

Projected future outcome valuations were not discounted to Net Present Values based on the use of the Federal Funds Rate and the average 10-year horizon used in consequential impact valuations. This Federal Funds rate, however, is currently slowly declining (since September 2024) and is currently predicted to decline until 2027 but may be significantly variable in the future.

## Summary of Social Return on Investment Analysis Value

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The **gross total** immediate direct and longer-term consequential value of Civil Legal Aid services delivered in Michigan during the years 2023 and 2024 was \$539,662,000.

Of this total, approximately \$27,756,000 (5.2%) will not actually be received due to negative factors such as parents not making required child support payments; nonpayment of wage claims; nonpayment of housing claims and repairs; criminal record expungement recidivists; and the death or relocation out of the state by benefit recipients.



The total Net Social Return on Investment for Michigan's Legal Aid legal services programs during the years 2023 and 2024 was 549%.

The **net realizable economic impact** resulting from Michigan Legal Aid activities during the years 2023 and 2024 totaled \$511,006,000.

The total funding investment for civil legal aid services (*see the Social Impact Value Map for detailed amounts*) totaled \$93,034,000.

# \$5.49

For Every \$1 invested in Michigan's Civil Legal Aid services, they delivered \$5.49 in immediate and long-term consequential financial benefits for services delivered in 2023 and 2024.

## ABOUT CSACO

Community Services Analysis LLC (CSACO) is a leading provider of Social Economic Impact and Social Return on Investment Analysis in the United States. Since 2007, CSACO has completed over 300 SROI studies for local and state organizations and agencies around the country, including such clients as the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, the State of California Department of Rehabilitation, United Way, United Cerebral Palsy, Community College Districts in multiple states, Disability Service Providers (disability, substance abuse, and mental/physical handicaps) in multiple states, Habitat for Humanity, State Libraries and Public Archives, Community Investment Corporations, Cultural Events organizations, Community Foundations, and **over 250 Legal Aid organizations nationwide.**

Community Services Analysis LLC was the first organization in the United States to be a member of The SROI Network (now Social Value International), the international Social Return on Investment standards and accreditation organization, and has been recognized by many national social services organizations such as ANCOR (*the American Network of Community Options and Resources*), ACCSES (*the American Congress of Community Support and Employment Services*), and NLADA (*the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association*). CSACO is also a member of Social Value International, Social Value - United States, and the American Evaluation Association.

In 2013, following a detailed analysis of multiple Cost Benefit/Return on Investment methodologies and providers, the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association selected CSACO as their SROI analysis national partner.

In 2021, John Byrnes (Founder and Principal) was named the Evaluation Expert of the Year by Global Finance Magazine.