



# MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP

## Report to the Legislature

FY 2024

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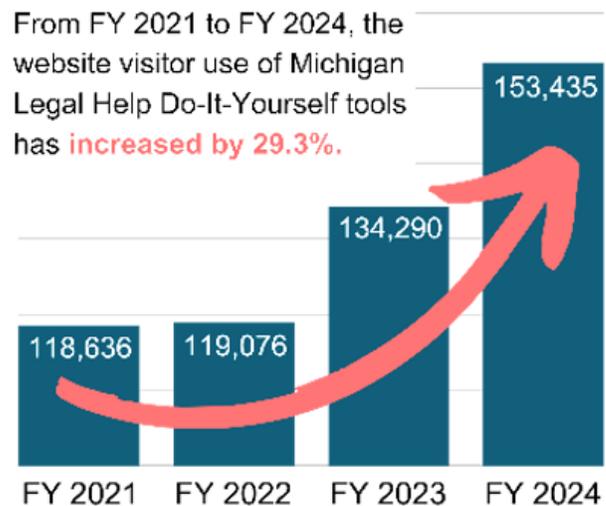
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## Introduction

Launched in 2012, the Michigan Legal Help Program (MLH) focuses on assisting people facing civil legal issues without the assistance of an attorney. A program of Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services, MLH runs the [www.michiganlegalhelp.org](http://www.michiganlegalhelp.org) website, which provides free resources and tools on topics including family law (e.g., parenting time and custody), personal safety (e.g., domestic violence, PPOs), landlord/tenant matters, public assistance, and wills and life planning, among many others. MLH sets the standard nationwide with online assistance to help individuals better understand their rights and options and access tools to meaningfully participate in their cases. The website provides a robust library of easy-to-understand articles, self-led Do-It-Yourself tools that help people fill out court forms and other legal documents, as well as step-by-step instructions that break down legal procedures.

## Meeting a Growing Need for Services

Michigan Legal Help is facing an increased demand for its services. In 2024, more than 2.1 million people used the MLH website, with more than three million total sessions. MLH's Do-It-Yourself tools were used 153,435 times—a more than 14 percent increase from 2023, and a nearly 30 percent increase since 2021.



MLH's LiveHelp chat service saw 4,167 chats in FY 2024, and MLH staff answered 8,120 emails through its after-hours email service—an increase of more than 28 percent from FY 2023. MLH serves a central role in triage and referral to help people find appropriate resources. The MLH Guide to Legal Help (Guide) walks users through a series of questions about their county, income, legal issue, and other factors, then creates a personalized list of resources for that individual. This curated list of resources from the Guide serves to effectively connect people to appropriate resources to cut down on visitor frustration and unnecessary traffic to service providers. In 2024, the Guide was completed 68,970 times.

Recognizing that because of income or other access constraints, people may not have access to home broadband, devices, or comfort with technology to fully utilize its tools, MLH also helps courts and libraries open and operate legal self-help centers. These centers are places where people can go to get one-on-one help using the MLH website. MLH provides statewide training and technical assistance to these centers. There are now more than 60 centers in 32 counties across the state.

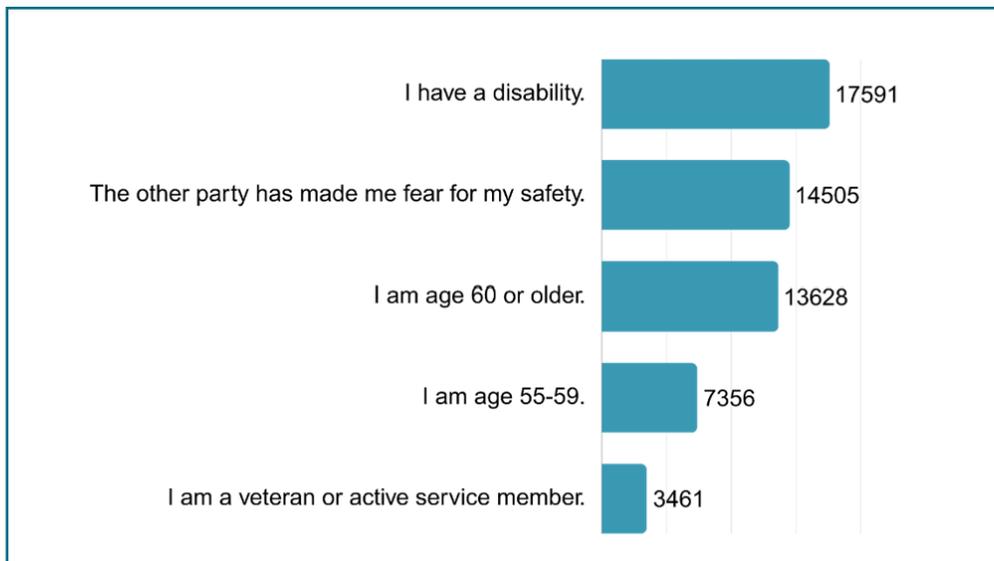


The assistance people receive at these centers is transformative. People have been able to get out of abusive relationships. Several people at one Jackson center were able to expunge records from over 50 years ago, allowing them to volunteer and be more involved in their grandchildren’s lives. Another visitor was able to regain custody of his child. People are impacted by the help they receive in self-help centers every day.

### **Triage Status – MLH Serves Vulnerable Populations**

As shown in the chart below, demographics regarding MLH visitors show that they are among Michigan’s most vulnerable and in need of legal help.

**Guide to Legal Help demographic categories**



## MLH Users Access Critical Information

Looking at the topics accessed in DIY tools, users found information on topics vital to their families' health and safety.

### Top 3 finished DIY Interviews:

Interview (Top 3 finished)	FY Total
Divorce With or Without Children (1360)	47,471
Petition for Personal Protection Order and Proposed Order (4676)	38,526
Food Stamp Calculator (5403)	8,673

## Anonymous MLH Website Visitor Survey Feedback

"This site help[ed] me get the groundwork set up to help me honor his wishes and my mom's [to draft a will]... This has taken a huge burden from my shoulders."

"Michigan Legal Help did an amazing job of walking me through my options, providing the necessary forms and instructions. You have lifted a huge weight off my shoulders.  
Thank you."

"Genuinely very helpful, thank you for creating such an easy-to-use resource. It felt like as soon as I started to feel over my head and confused by certain terms, there was a link to an article explaining what was going on. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"Thank you for making this a somewhat easy process. I'm grateful to be able to get these forms and begin the process of freedom from family trauma."

"This site help[ed] me get the groundwork set up to help me honor his wishes and my mom's [to draft a will]... This has taken a huge burden from my shoulders."

"I am an educated individual, but court documents still confuse me! These forms were very helpful and asked or explained need-to-know information in an easy to understand manner. Thank you!"

“I used the set aside guide to successfully set-aside a felony. It took a total of five months, with a three-month wait for a hearing. Thank you.”

“This site was recommended to me by my daughter, and she was right this site is really helpful for people like me who has no idea of where to start.”

### MLH FY 2024 Expenditures

Salaries	\$480,739
Fringes	\$94,692
Space	\$15,036
Supplies	\$8,968
Phone	\$4,079
Travel	\$2,302
Training	\$13,410
Library	\$4,100
Insurance	\$1,547
Dues & Fees	\$3,008
Software subscriptions	\$6,618
Contract Services	\$121,415
Administration & Misc	\$79,533

**TOTAL EXPENSES: \$835,447**

## Conclusion

While Michigan Legal Help does not give legal advice and is not a substitute for having a lawyer, the program provides invaluable information and tools that allow self-represented litigants to handle their own legal problems when they are not able to obtain a lawyer. Anyone with a Michigan legal issue can use Michigan Legal Help and nearly 80 percent of users would recommend the service to friends or family. Given the broad extent of use and the clear benefits to people most in need, the Michigan Legal Help program is clearly a critical resource for all people of Michigan.