

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**ILLINOIS EQUAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANTS TO 14 ORGANIZATIONS
PROVIDING CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TO LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS STATEWIDE**

Forced to eliminate funding to 8 long-standing grantee organizations after 50% cut in state appropriation

(CHICAGO).....The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) announced today that it has awarded over \$1.67 million in grants to 14 not-for-profit organizations that provide legal representation, information and advice to low-income residents facing critical legal challenges throughout the state. The grants range in scope from funding for web-based legal information resources and telephone advice hotlines to mediation and full-scale litigation. The IEJF also supports legal aid programs that partner with county courthouses, public libraries and community-based social service organizations to offer help where and when people need it, and to develop solutions to life problems, not just legal problems.

“With these grants, legal aid organizations are able to directly help some of our most vulnerable residents, including children, people with disabilities, the elderly and working families, to protect their legal rights,” said Carolyn Clift, president of the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation. “Our mission is to support programs that empower people to resolve their legal issues and regain control of their lives. Last year, our grants enabled over 74,000 low-income people to receive legal assistance and provided web-based legal resources that were accessed more than 478,000 times.”

State funding for civil legal aid is appropriated through the Illinois Equal Justice Act and passed through the budget of the Attorney General. The Act, approved by the General Assembly and signed into law in 1999, recognizes the State’s responsibility to ensure equal access to the legal system. The Act also created the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation to distribute the State’s appropriation for civil legal aid to not-for-profit organizations throughout the state. The appropriation remained level at \$3.5 million for the past three years, but was slashed 50% to \$1.75 million this year. Of the ten most populous states, Illinois ranks last in what it spends on critical civil legal aid services. The average spent among the ten most populous states is \$12.5 million.

The 50% reduction in the appropriation this year forced the IEJF to cut eight long-standing grantee organizations from the grant list entirely. These organizations serve homeless children, seniors, domestic violence victims, immigrants, and tenants caught in the middle of the foreclosure crisis. The remaining 14 grantee organizations saw their grants reduced anywhere from 15% to 48%. The IEJF was unable to add any new organizations or projects, including one devoted to veterans benefits work, a top priority of the foundation. At a time when legal aid is needed most, these cuts will result in 37,000 fewer people receiving critical legal assistance compared to 2009. Legal aid attorneys are uniquely equipped to address the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the increasing number of people seeking public benefits for the first time, and these cuts will mean that there are less legal aid attorneys able to meet this increased demand for services.

To learn more about the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, visit www.iejf.org. To learn more about the Equal Justice Illinois Campaign, a bi-partisan effort to increase the state appropriation for civil legal services for the poor, visit www.equaljusticeillinois.org.

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