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**ILLINOIS EQUAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANTS TO 16 ORGANIZATIONS  
PROVIDING CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TO LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS STATEWIDE**

***3 new projects funded in effort to diversify and broaden impact despite level funding***

(CHICAGO).....The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) announced today that it has awarded over \$1.66 million in grants to 16 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 31,000 low-income people to receive legal assistance and provided web-based legal resources that were accessed more than 333,000 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 had remained level at \$3.5 million for three years, but was slashed 50% to \$1.75 million last 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 last year forced the IEJF to cut eight long-standing grantee organizations from the grant list entirely and significantly reduce funding to the remaining fourteen grantees. At a time of increased demand for legal services, this has resulted in 43,000 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 have meant that there are now less services available for many of the most vulnerable, including homeless children, seniors, immigrants, and domestic violence victims.

In an effort to broaden and diversify its grants roster this year despite such limited resources, the IEJF was able to provide modest funding for three new projects. The Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing was awarded \$10,000 to support the Tenants in Foreclosure Intervention Project, the only program in Illinois assisting low-income tenants facing eviction and other housing problems due to foreclosure.

Working Hands Legal Clinic was awarded \$9,000 to support a legal information center providing advice on wage theft and workplace rights in partnership with the Mexican Consulate in Chicago and the Midwest Center for Law and the Deaf was awarded \$6,000 to provide access to legal information on their website in American Sign Language.

To learn more about the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, visit [www.iejf.org](http://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](http://www.equaljusticeillinois.org).

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