

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES:
A CORE FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT



How Civil Legal Services Makes Government Work...

Civil Legal Services are a critical part of the judicial branch of government. Our democratic system is made up of three branches of government: judicial, legislative, and executive. Everybody deserves equal access to government. Without civil legal services to low-income citizens, the judicial branch of government fails to meet its promise of equal access to all.



Civil Legal Services help to keep low-income people from falling further into poverty. CLS providers help low-income citizens stay in their homes, stay employed, and keep themselves and their children healthy and safe, thereby minimizing their dependence on government services and benefits.



Civil Legal Services help courts function more efficiently. CLS providers educate low-income citizens about how they can handle problems before they become enmeshed in the legal system. CLS providers help to crystallize a client's legal issue so judges can make fair, effective decisions that resolve the client's problem quickly.

How Civil Legal Services Helps Our Community....

1. Susan*, a disabled woman living on \$674 per month, had a disagreement with her landlord. The landlord locked her out of her apartment, removed the toilet, and boarded up the windows and doors. Susan called the sheriff, who made the landlord let her back into her apartment. But the landlord did not replace the toilet and continued to harass her. New Mexico Legal Aid represented Susan in court and the judge awarded her a judgment of over \$4,000 in rent abatement and civil penalties for the landlord's egregious actions.

2. Jessica*, a sixteen year-old mother, wanted her infant daughter Jody to grow up in a safe, stable home. A lawyer from Pegasus Legal Services for Children filed a petition on Jessica's behalf, which resulted in a court order establishing Jody's father's paternity, joint custody with primary physical custody for Jessica, and child support for the baby. Because Jessica was receiving cash assistance through TANF, Jody's father was also ordered to pay arrearages to the state.

3. Sandoval County District Court sets aside a special day to hear foreclosure cases. United South Broadway, a legal services agency, provides assistance, resources and representation to homeowners facing foreclosure. This benefits the homeowners, but it also helps the Court: the more informed the homeowner is, the better decisions he or she can make, which helps the Court reach the right outcomes in the cases before it. Foreclosure cases pose a major challenge, and with the assistance of USB the courts and homeowners are better served.

*Names have been changed to protect client privacy.



IN 2008 CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES AGENCIES HELPED:

- 28,113 low income New Mexicans in all 33 counties
- 10,121 people defend against domestic violence and obtain custody and child support orders
- 5,175 people avoid eviction from their homes
- 3,538 consumers defend themselves from unfair business practices
- 1,474 people with disabilities get fair treatment and access
- 1,020 people access health care for themselves and their children
- 857 people fight unfair employment practices
- 305 people defend against foreclosure proceedings
- 232 families access a free and appropriate education for their child with disabilities
- 159 Native Americans address issues related to their status as Indians
- 21 landowners protect their land and water rights

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