



Office of the Administrative Director of the Courts – THE JUDICIARY • STATE OF HAWAII
417 SOUTH KING STREET • ALI'ĪOLANI HALE • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813 • TELEPHONE (808) 539-4900 • FAX (808) 539-4855

Brandon M. Kimura
ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

Daylin-Rose H. Heather
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

December 2, 2025

Via electronic submission

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura
Speaker of the House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear President Kouchi and Speaker Nakamura:

Pursuant to Section 607-5.7, Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), the Judiciary is transmitting a copy of the *Biennial Report on the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund*.

In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, we are also transmitting a copy of this report to the Legislative Reference Bureau Library.

The public may view an electronic copy of this report on the Judiciary's website at the following link: https://www.courts.state.hi.us/news_and_reports/reports/reports.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to contact Karen Takahashi of the Judiciary's Legislative Affairs and Special Projects Division at 808-539-4896, or via e-mail at Karen.T.Takahashi@courts.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,

Brandon Kimura

Brandon M. Kimura
Administrative Director of the Courts

Attachment

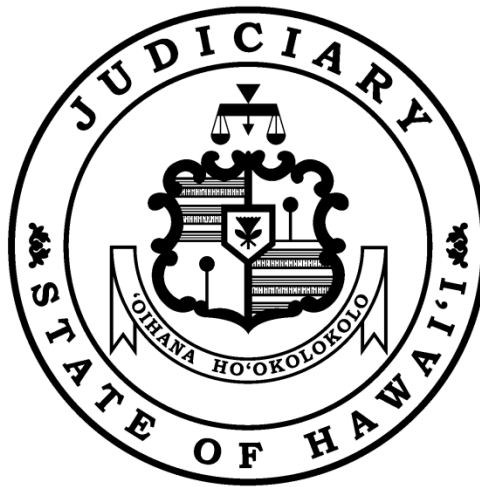
c: Legislative Reference Bureau Library

**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

ON

HRS § 607-5.7

Biennial Report on the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF)



Prepared by:

The Hawai'i Justice Foundation

and

The Judiciary, State of Hawai'i

December 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I:	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RECOMMENDING CONTINUATION OF ILAF
SECTION II:	ILAF FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS
SECTION III:	PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE TO ENSURE ACCURACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SECTION IV:	REMAINING CHALLENGES FOR THE ILAF PROGRAM AND THE PARTICIPATING LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS
SECTION V:	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
APPENDIX:	LETTERS FROM EACH ILAF LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDER OUTLINING ILAF'S POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE DELIVERY OF CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TO INDIGENT POPULATIONS

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RECOMMENDING CONTINUATION OF ILAF

The following report has been prepared for the Judiciary by the Hawai'i Justice Foundation (HJF), which serves as the Fund Administrator for the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund, pursuant to contract with the Judiciary, State of Hawai'i.

The Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF) was created pursuant to Act 305, Session Laws of Hawai'i 1996 (hereinafter Act 305) and codified as Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS) § 607-5.7. Act 305 created a special fund that receives surcharges collected on selected types of civil cases filed in Hawai'i's various state courts. These surcharges are then distributed to qualifying organizations that provide direct civil legal services to those in Hawai'i whose income does not exceed 125 percent of federal poverty guidelines or who are eligible for free services under the Older Americans Act or Developmentally Disabled Act. The Program has operated successfully for 28 years. No general funds are involved in the process, and all the funding is generated from surcharges on selected court case filings (no government case filings are surcharged.)

ILAF was further amended by Act 180, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2011 (hereinafter Act 180) by extending the types of cases for which surcharges are collected and providing step increases in the amount of the indigent legal fees. Act 180 also required the Administrative Director of the Courts, or the contractor administering the fund pursuant to a contract with the Administrative Director of the Courts, to review ILAF on a biennial basis to determine whether it is meeting the civil legal needs of indigent persons, and to report its findings and recommendations to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of the legislature in each even-numbered year beginning with the regular session of 2014.

Findings and Conclusion: The Hawai'i Justice Foundation, serving as fund administrator for ILAF pursuant to a contract with the Judiciary, has reviewed the effectiveness of ILAF and recommends that ILAF be continued in its current format. ILAF has positively affected the organizations receiving funds under this special fund, and each of these organizations has been effective in delivering requisite legal services to qualifying clients. Legal needs of the limited-income involve critical legal issues such as landlord and tenant, housing, financial situations, family law, and elder law. The figures for FY 2024-2025 establish that the total number of cases handled under the ILAF program exceeds 9,400. These cases range from full representation in complex cases to providing legal information or making appropriate referrals for assistance. All cases meet the statutory requirements of ILAF, including poverty income guidelines and/or type of case (i.e., elderly or disabled.). The current process ensures that all funds collected under the program will be used only for the intended purposes.

The ILAF program is an excellent example of the partnership between the Judiciary, HJF, and the ILAF legal service providers. The Hawai'i State Legislature is to be commended for its creation and continued support of ILAF and for its positive actions increasing the surcharges through Act 180, SLH 2011.

ILAF, as amended by Act 180, is an acknowledgment of the serious need for legal services for those of low-income. Current national and local economic conditions remain very unstable and uncertain. Legal needs of people are higher than ever, due to these economic conditions. Low-income legal service providers are experiencing cuts in federal governmental funding sources and reduced contributions from private donations, which makes it critical that ILAF be continued. With the increased surcharges resulting from Act 180, funding to qualifying organizations has increased from about \$330,000 per year to \$1,000,000 in FY 2026.

The hard reality is that funds distributed under ILAF are not sufficient to fully fund any of the organizations. There still remains a need for other funding sources, including but not limited to federal funding, private and charitable foundation contributions, and state legislative funding. ILAF does constitute a vital and essential source of stable funding for qualifying organizations. As further outlined in this report, ILAF has an extensive application and reporting process that ensures that organizations receiving ILAF funds are providing requisite services to qualified clients. This application and review process is quite onerous on both the applying organizations and HJF, but the process is invaluable in ensuring that the available funds are fairly awarded based upon only those clients who qualify under the ILAF statute. On behalf of all of those people in Hawai'i who have received legal services under ILAF, it is respectfully requested that the Hawai'i State Legislature continue ILAF in its current form.

SECTION II: ILAF FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS

HRS § 607-5.7 sets forth the operating details for ILAF, and these requirements are rigorously followed by the Judiciary, HJF, and all the participating organizations. The statute sets out the dollar amount of surcharges and the types of cases for which surcharges apply. The Judiciary collects the surcharges when cases are filed, and funds collected during a particular fiscal year are distributed quarterly in the following fiscal year. Act 180 expanded the types of cases to which the surcharges were applied and also provided for step increases in the amounts of surcharges, with the final step increase taking effect on January 1, 2014. While the amount of funds available through ILAF varies each year depending upon the number and type of case filings, it is clear that Act 180 has operated to provide significant additional distribution to qualified civil legal service providers.

From the inception of ILAF, the Judiciary has annually contracted with HJF to serve as the ILAF Fund Administrator. Pursuant to HRS § 607-5.7, HJF manages the annual application process. Any organization that meets the eligibility criteria mandated by statute is allowed to participate in ILAF. The amount received by each organization is determined by that organization's pro rata share of the eligible expenses for its provision of direct legal services. Each organization has the opportunity to appeal any decisions regarding its pro rata share or other issues relating to its application, but no appeals have been made within more than 23 years.

It should be noted that the formula by which funds are distributed has remained unchanged from the inception of ILAF in 1996, other than the minor language corrections contained in Act 180. The statutory provision regarding the formula for distribution reads as follows:

(k) Funds shall be distributed on a pro rata basis to organizations that meet the criteria in subsection (i), based upon the portion of their total budget expended in the prior year for civil legal services to indigent persons as compared to the combined total expended in the prior year for legal services by all qualifying organizations applying for funding. An applicant that provides services other than civil legal services to indigent persons may establish its proportionate entitlement to funds based upon financial statements that strictly segregate the portion of the organization's expenditures in the prior year that were devoted exclusively to the provision of civil legal services for indigents. (Act 180, SLH 2011; H.R.S. § 607-5.7)

Prior to the impact of Act 180, the amount distributed each year to eligible ILAF organizations was approximately \$330,000. Act 180 has had a very positive impact upon the amount of funds distributed. The amount distributed from ILAF was \$330,000 in FY 2011; \$513,000 in FY 2012; \$472,039 in FY 2013; \$1,410,289 in FY 2014; \$1,425,000 in FY 2015; \$1,300,000 in FY 2016; \$1,000,000 in FY 2017; \$1,100,001 in FY 2018; \$1,000,001 in FY 2019; \$1,000,000 in FY 2020; \$1,000,000 in FY 2021; \$1,000 in FY 2022; \$1,000,000 in FY 2023; \$1,000,000 in FY 2024; and \$1,000,000 in FY 2025. The amount scheduled for distribution in FY 2026 is detailed below:

Domestic Violence Action Center	97,417
Hawai'i Disability Rights Center	110,278
Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i	579,474
Mediation Center of the Pacific	24,627
Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation	11,284
The Legal Clinic (immigration)	54,465
University of Hawai'i Elder Law Program	18,135
Univ. of Haw. Medical Legal Partnership	52,648
Volunteer Legal Services Hawai'i	51,672
Total	\$1,000,000

The amounts available for future years vary with the number of eligible cases filed, but it is estimated that each year approximately \$1,000,000 will be available for distribution among the eligible civil legal service providers. It is clear that Act 180 has had a very positive impact upon the amount of ILAF distributions, making ILAF an essential element for stable funding for Hawai'i's legal service provider organizations.

SECTION III: PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE TO ENSURE ACCURACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The ILAF Program has procedural safeguards to ensure accuracy and accountability. All organizations receiving funds under ILAF are strictly monitored by HJF. Monitoring the ILAF process is extremely burdensome and time-consuming for HJF, but attention to detail is essential to the operation of a program that accurately determines eligibility and allocation of funds between those organizations that qualify for ILAF funds. The Program also requires significant efforts from participating organizations in both the application process and the reporting process.

Quarterly reports and a yearly summary report are required of each organization and are reviewed by HJF prior to submittal to the Judiciary for its review. Each February, formal notice is provided in the *Honolulu Star Advertiser* announcing that applications for ILAF funds are being solicited, with a deadline set for late March. The application process is quite extensive, with thorough documentation required. The application includes an attestation clause which requires the Executive Director of each organization to attest to the truthfulness of the application. State unemployment reporting forms are used for verification of each employee, and individual signed statements are received from each employee attesting to the veracity of the percentage of time spent by that person providing qualified direct legal services to ILAF-eligible clients. Using this information, the pro rata percentage for each qualifying organization is calculated by HJF to 1/1000th of a percent. After the Judiciary reviews HJF's percentage recommendations, the Judiciary sends letters of award percentages to each applicant that meets ILAF requirements and qualifies for fund distribution.

Each organization may appeal any decision regarding its pro rata share or other application issues, but no appeals have been filed for more than 23 years. Once the current fiscal year has closed and the Judiciary has determined the total amount of funds that are available for distribution, the percentage allocation for each qualifying applicant is applied against the total available funds to determine each organization's yearly dollar award. These awards are then distributed quarterly, with HJF reviewing all invoices and the required quarterly and year-end reports. Quarterly checks are processed by the Judiciary to an organization only after that organization has submitted all required paperwork to HJF for certification and HJF has formally requested the Judiciary to pay the sum to the organization.

HJF has worked with each organization to ensure that the organization has in place effective methods for: a) screening potential clients for ILAF eligibility; b) generating accurate and complete information regarding cases handled under ILAF; c) using the organization's "client grievance policy"; and d) developing tight mechanisms for demonstrating that ILAF funds are being effectively utilized. Each participating organization enters into a contract with the Judiciary about the duties and responsibilities of the organization receiving ILAF funds. These contracts contain strong provisions that require participating organizations to work closely with HJF and/or the

Judiciary should it appear that a specific organization might need to improve its ILAF screening or reporting process.

At the end of the fiscal year, each organization must submit a final report, which includes detailed information on the number of cases handled under ILAF. The case numbers for each organization are not included in this report, since the missions of the various ILAF organizations vary greatly. Comparison of number of cases handled is not an accurate means of determining the “efficiency” or “effectiveness” of any specific ILAF legal service provider. For example, some of the organizations do a great deal of information and referral, while other organizations handle a higher percentage of court cases. All of the ILAF organizations provide different but essential parts of meeting the needs for legal services, but their missions and approaches do and should vary greatly.

For many years, ILAF has operated smoothly and without complaints regarding accuracy or accountability from the Judiciary, HJF, or the ILAF legal service providers. The ILAF Program is an example of how mutual cooperation and competency can produce an effective process that works for the betterment of Hawai‘i’s people.

SECTION IV: REMAINING CHALLENGES FOR THE ILAF PROGRAM AND THE PARTICIPATING LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

ILAF is a very solid program, with strong relationships and cooperation between the Judiciary, HJF, and the legal service providers. However, there still are substantial unmet needs for legal services. It would be highly desirable to be able to determine more precisely what percentage of existing legal needs are not being met. The last formal study undertaken in Hawai‘i was the 2007 Assessment of Civil Legal Needs, which found that four out of five low-income Hawai‘i residents do not have their legal needs met and that legal service providers are able to assist only one in three persons who contact them for assistance. National studies contain similar figures regarding percentage of legal needs being met. However, it is very difficult for any ILAF organization to provide accurate data on unmet legal needs, since the organizations do not have any contact with people who have legal needs but have not asked the organizations for help.

Low-income legal service providers are currently facing extreme financial hardships and increased need for services. Operational details under COVID-19 conditions created additional challenges for the legal service providers to deliver essential services, and providers now utilize both in-person and technological means to deliver services. The need for legal services continues to increase, due to poor economic conditions and the expanding percentage of the population who are below 125 percent of federal poverty guidelines. At the same time, total funding for legal service providers has remained stable and for some has decreased. ILAF funds are one of the few stable financial sources available to providers. Federal Legal Services Corporation funding remains a controversial and unresolved political issue under the current federal administration. Many ILAF organizations have had to reduce staff hours and reduce intake of cases. Additionally, throughout Hawai‘i and the rest of the country,

legal service providers have been forced to move from “full-representation” cases to primarily giving information and advice or to providing basic legal information in group situations in various community locations. The Judiciary, in conjunction with the Hawai‘i State Bar Association and legal service providers, has now established Self-Help Centers in each Judicial Circuit. Hawai‘i’s legal community is working together to help meet the serious legal needs, but the situation remains a daunting one. Community support for pro bono and low-income legal services is extremely strong, but the fact remains that a large proportion of legal needs go unmet for those in Hawai‘i’s low-income population.

SECTION V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

HJF has reviewed the effectiveness of ILAF and recommends that it be continued in its current format. Monies received from ILAF have had a positive effect upon all of the legal service providers that received funds, and each of these organizations has effectively delivered requisite services to qualifying clients. The ILAF process has operated smoothly and successfully for 29 years, and qualifying organizations know they will receive their fair pro rata share under the Program. More than 9,400 cases were handled under ILAF in FY24-25, helping more than 9,400 of Hawai‘i’s people. The hard reality is that funds distributed under ILAF are not sufficient to fully fund any of the organizations. There still remains a need for other funding sources, including but not limited to federal funding, private donations, charitable foundation funding, and State of Hawai‘i legislative funding. The ILAF program is an excellent example of the partnership between the Judiciary, HJF, and the ILAF legal service providers. The Hawai‘i State Legislature is to be commended for its creation and continued support of ILAF and for its positive actions increasing the surcharges through Act 180, SLH 2011.

APPENDIX:

This Appendix contains letters from each of the participating legal service providers. Review of these letters clearly illustrates the positive impact of ILAF upon each of the nine participating legal service providers.

Domestic Violence Action Center
Hawai‘i Disability Rights Center
Legal Aid Society of Hawai‘i
Mediation Center of the Pacific
Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation
The Legal Clinic
University of Hawai‘i Elder Law Program
University of Hawai‘i Medical Legal Partnership
Volunteer Legal Services Hawai‘i



September 8, 2025

Re: Indigent Legal Assistance Fund

Dear Honorable Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature,

The Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC) extends our profound gratitude to the Hawai'i State Legislature for your steadfast commitment to the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF). **Your continued support of ILAF is not just an investment in our organization—it is a lifeline for the most vulnerable members of our island community.**

The Critical Importance of ILAF

ILAF serves as an essential foundation that enables DVAC and other non-profit organizations to deliver life-saving legal assistance to survivors of family abuse and trauma. Without this vital funding stream, we could not provide the comprehensive, specialized services that our clients desperately need during their most vulnerable moments—often in situations that are deeply emotional, complex, and genuinely life-threatening.

The need for ILAF has never been more urgent. In FY2025 alone, DVAC made **4,037 client contacts** through cases, court appearances, and outreach efforts. As client caseloads continue to rise and the costs of delivering legal and social services increase, we face mounting challenges. Contract funding remains stagnant, non-program expenses climb steadily, and traditional funding sources fall short of meeting our growing needs. Public contracts offer limited support for general operations, foundations focus primarily on program-specific funding, and private donations have declined due to inflation pressures.

Our Impact: 34 Years of Service

For more than 30 years, DVAC has served as a beacon of hope for survivors across our diverse island community. **Our data from FY2000-2025 demonstrates the extraordinary scope of our impact:**

Client Engagement & Legal Services

- **339,918** phone contacts with survivors seeking help
- **9,166** requests for legal representation
- **7,956** legal cases opened
- **10,219** advocacy cases opened
- **10,804** court appearances on behalf of clients
- **43,644** hours dedicated to document preparation and court proceedings
- **28,308** accompaniments to agencies, appointments, and court hearings



Safety & Risk Assessment

- **103,848** risk assessments conducted
- **114,040** safety plans completed

Serving Hawai'i's Diverse Community

DVAC proudly serves a clientele that reflects the rich diversity of Hawai'i's population. **Our FY2024 client demographics include:**

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Native Hawaiian	27%
Caucasian	19%
Filipino	13%
Japanese	8%
Hispanic	5%
Korean	6%
COFA Migrant and Pacific Islander	7%
Other Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Pakistani)	5%
African American	6%
Alaska Native/Native American	2%
Mixed Ethnicities	3%

Additionally, 31% of our FY2024 clients identified as immigrants, underscoring our role in serving some of our community's most marginalized populations. The majority of our clients are single mothers earning less than \$30,000 annually—individuals who face both the trauma of abuse and the additional burden of economic hardship.

Client Voices: The Human Impact

Your support of ILAF translates directly into transformed lives. Recent client testimonials powerfully illustrate this impact:

"[My DVAC team] made me feel secure in the decision to get help... At the courthouse, [my DVAC team] was very supportive and walked me step by step through the process. I can finally see a future that I'm so looking forward to! I know it's not over - but I see a rainbow on the other side."



"I thank God for [DVAC]... I can now leave... I feel better that someone is in my corner and understands me."

"DVAC has been the single most valuable resource for me in my journey to leave my abuser and find safety for myself and my children... Having a guide to navigate the overwhelming and complicated legal system while also being burdened with so many difficult emotions is so critical, and I am so appreciative of [DVAC]."

These words represent not just individual success stories, but testament to the transformative power of your investment in ILAF.

Our Commitment Moving Forward

Despite funding challenges, DVAC remains unwavering in our commitment to providing critical legal assistance and specialized services to all survivors—including immigrant, culturally specific, LGBTQIA+, and teen survivors. **ILAF funding is absolutely imperative to sustaining this vital work.**

Gratitude and Recognition

We cannot overstate our gratitude for your recognition of ILAF's crucial importance. Your generous and continued support acknowledges that access to legal assistance should never be determined by one's ability to pay, and that our most vulnerable community members deserve protection and advocacy.

Thank you for understanding that ILAF is more than a budget line item—it is a cornerstone of justice and safety for survivors throughout our island community.

Mahalo nui loa,

Laurie Arial Tochiki, JD, Ph.D
Interim CEO
Domestic Violence Action Center



HAWAII DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER

1001 Bishop Street, Suite 1110, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Phone/TTY: (808) 949-2922 Toll Free: 1-800-882-1057 Fax: (808) 949-2928

E-mail: info@hawaiidisabilityrights.org Website: www.hawaiidisabilityrights.org

September 23, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the 2026 Hawaii State Legislature
From: Louis Erteschik, Executive Director
Re: Indigent Legal Assistance Fund

The Hawaii Disability Rights Center wishes to express its utmost gratitude for the legislature's history of support for the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund.

The Hawaii Disability Rights Center is the state designated protection and advocacy system, having been designated by prior Governors in several Executive Orders to provide advocacy services to individuals with disabilities, in accordance with various federal laws. Hawaii law expressly recognizes the obligation of the state to provide advocacy services to individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness in order to receive federal funds. The federal statutes require, as a condition of funding services provided by a number of state agencies, that a protection and advocacy agency be established by the State. In requesting federal funding for various state projects, every Governor has provided assurances to the federal government that federal funds distributed to HDRC do not supplant funds that are available from state and local sources.

The distribution that we receive from the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund represents almost all the state monies that we receive. I am sure you can appreciate that federal funding has plateaued over the past several years, while expenses have continued to increase. Fundraising opportunities for a legal services corporation like ours are very limited, and they would force us to compete with other legal services providers for the same donors. For that reason the monies we have received from the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund have truly been a blessing.



**HAWAII'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SYSTEM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
HAWAII'S CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**



The Hawaii Disability Rights Center is a small, efficient agency that serves thousands of individuals each year with legal issues surrounding their various disabilities. It is estimated that approximately fifteen percent of the individuals within the state may have a disability. Most of those individuals are also among the poorest in our state. We effectively utilize our resources and keep our administrative costs to a minimum. Thus, without the additional funds we received from ILAF, we would have been forced to substantially reduce our activities, cut staffing, and provide fewer services to the most needy, vulnerable population in our state at a time when their needs are increasing. In particular, this need is heightened by current events. While we don't yet know the outcome of budget negotiations in Washington we do know at the moment that the President has proposed a substantial reduction of our federal funding. If our federal funding is in fact reduced, that will make the ILAF monies all that more valuable.

We are grateful to the Judiciary and the Hawaii Justice Foundation for their leadership and exemplary efforts to ensure the smooth, efficient functioning of this program. We have worked closely with them on its implementation and we hope that the legislature will continue to fund the ILAF program in the upcoming budget and in the years ahead. Your continued support will enable us to address the needs of the population we serve. Your assistance will be so much appreciated by our clientele.

Thank you again for everything.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Erteschik', written in a cursive style.

Louis Erteschik, Esq.
Executive Director

September 8, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature,

The Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i ("Legal Aid") wishes to express its sincere gratitude for your ongoing support of civil legal services through the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund. As the largest and oldest legal service provider in the state, Legal Aid receives the largest percentage of ILAF funds each year. We are a Statewide organization --- the only law firm that has offices located on, and able to deliver legal services to, Oahu, Kauai, Moloka'i, Lana'i, Maui, and Hawai'i through locally based staff. With the assistance of ILAF, in FY25, Legal Aid provided assistance in over 7,030 cases aiding indigent persons and seniors 60 years of age or older throughout Hawai'i.

Legal Aid's principal mission is to substantially improve the lives of our clients by providing civil legal representation on crucial issues affecting their well-being. This includes protecting clients and their children from abusive situations; fighting illegal evictions which can lead to homelessness; counseling and representation of those facing foreclosure; helping clients receive critical health benefits; helping families access programs such as unemployment compensation, Federal Supplemental Security Income, general assistance and food stamps; assisting with family reunification; and ensuring safety after human trafficking. We are the only organization in the state capable of providing this level of wrap-around legal services. The critical support we receive from ILAF helps us to provide this assistance.

Both the pandemic and the 2023 Maui wildfires demonstrated just how critical civil legal services and legal information are, as well as having staff available where and when these services are needed. In both cases, many residents were encountering a need to access government programs and emergency assistance for the first time. Legal Aid responded quickly to provide essential legal services.

It is important to note that while ILAF support is substantial, it only covers a portion of the costs that it takes to serve the 7,030 cases which we closed last fiscal year. ILAF funds are critical in helping to leverage other sources of funding for legal services. Funding also supports our front-line staff in our branch offices throughout the state who work directly with and represent clients from Pahoehoe to Hanalei.

Legal Aid remains committed to providing quality legal assistance for low-income individuals and those eligible for free services under the Older Americans Act. We understand that ILAF dollars are public funds, and we take commensurate care to spend it properly and wisely to increase access to justice for our clients. We pride ourselves on providing high-quality work. We believe the assistance we provide positively impacts the lives of our clients.

Client Drea, who was in danger of being evicted and losing her Section 8 housing voucher, recently shared, "I want the people to know that Legal Aid is a much needed service that the people can use for legal representation. It [has helped] me tremendously, and I know it will help other people too."

Through ILAF funding, Legal Aid can continue to ensure that we meet the civil legal needs of Hawai'i's low-income population.

We thank you again for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Kopper', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Kaulila Kopper
Executive Director
Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i
924 Bethel Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813



Telephone: (808) 536-4302 • Fax: (808) 527-8088
924 Bethel Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Arsima Muller, Esq.
President, Board of Directors

David Kauila Kopper, Esq.
Executive Director

Contract No. J26160
1st invoice

**LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF HAWAI'I
CONTRACT FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES:
COMPETITIVE PURCHASE OF SERVICES
INVOICE
(P.O. #H03024)**

Angela K. Min
Special Assistant to Administrative Director
Office of the Administrative Director
417 S. King Street, Room 206A
Honolulu, HI 96713

Re: Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i 1st Invoice Payment Request

Dear Ms. Min:

We are requesting a payment of \$83,333.33 to Legal Aid Society of Hawaii for the provision of services for the first performance period, as specified in our Agreement for Services Contract No. J26160.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Jim Gagne at 527-8060.

Sincerely,


David K. Kopper
Executive Director



THE MEDIATION CENTER OF THE PACIFIC, INC.
Bringing People Together to Talk, Negotiate and Resolve Conflict Creatively

1301 Young Street, Honolulu, HI 96814 Tel: 521-6767 Fax: 538-1454 Email: mcp@mediatehawaii.org

**BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

PRESIDENT
Bruce McEwan

VICE PRESIDENT
Matt Hunter

SECRETARY
Signe Godfrey

TREASURER
Jason Graves

PAST PRESIDENT
John Morris

DIRECTORS
Justice Simeon Acoba (Ret.)
Gordon Arakaki
Sidney K. Ayabe
Sheri-Ann Lau Clark
Mike Cruise
William C. Darrah
Therese Dickerson
Kale Feldman
Brianna Hernandez
Unyong Nakata
Terri O'Connell
Tim Sylvester
Bryce Watanabe
Alison Zecha

**EMERITUS
DIRECTORS**
Cynthia T. Alm
Susan Lampe
David Simons

BOARD OF ADVISORS
Ann Botticelli
Kellie Chun
Jerry Clay
Michael Erne
Dolores Foley
Jerry Rauckhorst
Larry Rodriguez
Walt Schroeder

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Tracey S. Wiltgen

September 3, 2025

To: The Hawaii State Legislature
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

From: Tracey S. Wiltgen, Executive Director
The Mediation Center of the Pacific
1301 Young Street
Honolulu, HI 96814

The Board of Directors and staff of the Mediation Center of the Pacific (MCP) are extremely grateful to you for your continued support of increasing access to justice and the organizations who provide the direct services in this area. The Indigent Legal Assistance Funds (ILAF) have helped to provide critical support for MCP and other civil legal service providers who continue to assist members of Hawaii's indigent population in addressing their legal matters.

MCP is one of the organizations that currently receives funds through ILAF to support the civil legal needs of Hawaii's low income population. MCP is a 501(c)(3) not for profit corporation that was founded in 1979 to provide Hawaii's people with high quality mediation and dispute resolution services that are affordable and accessible. Through MCP's programs, clients are assisted in resolving legal disputes quickly and cooperatively, saving time, money, and stress.

Mediation is a preferred process for helping parties resolve a broad array of disputes. The mediation process is less stressful for the participants because it is informal and focuses on creative problem solving to meet the needs of the participants, rather than an adversarial process that is used in the legal system. MCP is the only organization on Oahu that offers mediation and dispute resolution services for people in the low income population.

Over the years, MCP's services have been needed more than ever, particularly by individuals in the indigent population such as tenants facing eviction. As a result, the number of people served, and cases managed by MCP, continue to grow. In the recently ended fiscal year, Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025 (FY2425), MCP opened and managed 4,847 cases and conducted 1,357 mediations involving 5,871 hours. 85% of the people involved in the mediations were in the low-income population and 31% were indigent.



THE MEDIATION CENTER OF THE PACIFIC, INC.
Bringing People Together to Talk, Negotiate and Resolve Conflict Creatively

1301 Young Street, Honolulu, HI 96814 Tel: 521-6767 Fax: 538-1454 Email: mcp@mediatehawaii.org

Key areas that typically involve access to justice issues for the indigent population are landlord-tenant and domestic matters. MCP provides a high volume of services in these areas. More specifically, in FY24-25, MCP opened 937 new landlord-tenant cases. 181 of the landlord-tenant cases were opened prior to the filing of an eviction in court. Of those pre-eviction cases opened, 65 cases were mediated with 82% resulting in agreement enabling the tenant to remain housed.

To strengthen the mediation process and increase the rate of agreement, annual mediator orientations and mentor training were implemented. The workshops and training helped the mediators improve their skills, resulting in a higher rate of agreement and increased satisfaction with clients. For example, until this past year, the rate of agreement for landlord-tenant cases mediated from District Court remained at approximately 49% to 52% (FY22-23). Whereas this past fiscal year, the rate of agreement for District Court eviction mediations increased to 57%. This significant improvement is attributed to increased training and support of the mediators, as well as increased time for mediations that are conducted virtually or in person at MCP's office. While scheduling the District Court mediations requires more staff to manage the cases and greater mediator support, the increased rate of agreement shows the value of these efforts. Without the ILAF funds and other private funding, MCP would not have been able to serve the high volume of landlord-tenant cases, manage the pre-eviction mediations, or improve mediation outcomes.

Finally, in the domestic arena involving divorce, post-divorce, and paternity matters, MCP opened 823 new cases in FY24-25. Through mediation, the couples were able to stop fighting and agree on plans to support the needs of their children, thereby reducing the stress and related negative impacts that parental fighting has on children. Due to the steady increase of domestic cases, MCP has needed to recruit and train more mediators to provide the services, as well as institute regular workshops and training for the mediators to ensure quality services are provided. The ILAF funds provides critical support for ensuring the services are readily available for all couples.

The Board of Directors and staff of MCP are grateful to the Legislature for your support that has enabled MCP to serve Hawaii's indigent and create programs that increase access to justice for all. We are committed to the continued growth of these services by partnering with the other organizations who serve Hawaii's needy, as well as the Judiciary and Hawaii Justice Foundation.

Sincerely,

Tracey S. Wiltgen
Executive Director



Native Hawaiian LEGAL CORPORATION

1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1205 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Phone (808) 521-2302 • www.nativehawaiianlegalcorp.org



September 9, 2025

Re: Support for Indigent Legal Aid to Mālama Hawai'i's Most Vulnerable

Aloha e Honorable Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature:

Mahalo for your generous support of the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF) to ensure that people suffering poverty in Hawai'i have access to pro bono civil legal services that they need. Financial support for legal aid is critical for these charitable services to remain a part of the safety net for Hawai'i people and families when they are most vulnerable. Without civil legal aid, access to justice in Hawai'i would be a promise only for those that have financial means to pay, and many would go without legal services necessary to protect their rights to necessities, health, and wellbeing.

The Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC) is acutely aware of the need for legal aid funding to ensuring access to justice. NHLC is currently in its 51st year of service to the community and has long been the only non-profit law firm in the State dedicated to protecting and advancing Native Hawaiian rights. From rights to promised housing stability under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, to defense of rights to kuleana and other family lands in quiet title actions, to rights necessary to protect culture, the natural environment, the integrity of the 'ohana, and burials, NHLC stands with Hawaiian families and communities to advocate for all the legal protections that can be afforded to Native Hawaiians for their health and wellbeing. All of these rights are not only critical for individual well being, but also for the well being of the Native Hawaiian community, and our special and distinctive culture in Hawai'i that depends upon a healthy and thriving Native Hawaiian community.

Often, however, NHLC's clients are precariously positioned with no practical alternative to NHLC for help. Native Hawaiians are well documented as overrepresented among people suffering poverty in Hawai'i. Roughly one in five of NHLC's clients met the requirements for indigency in CY2024. In FY2024-2025, NHLC provided services to 50 'ohana qualifying as indigent whose matters closed, and provided services to another 68 indigent 'ohana whose matters remained open into the current fiscal year. NHLC was able to provide hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services to these 'ohana. ILAF monies help NHLC aid these vulnerable families and members of our communities.

Alternative resources to fund this important work are scarce. Indeed, the legal needs of the Native Hawaiian community regularly exceed the funding available to meet them. That growing justice gap is precisely why ILAF funding, including steady increases to annual allocations and their fair distribution among communities in need, is so critical. Poverty and ancestry should never be barriers to accessing justice. Further, legal aid investments are efficient uses of public funds because they often prevent long-

Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation
Letter in Support of Funding for Indigent Civil Legal Aid
September 9, 2025
Page 2

term problems that become much more harmful, difficult, and costly to fix, e.g., homelessness, health issues, and incarceration.

NHLC and our clients have long depended on public funds for civil legal aid to ensure justice is accessible for Native Hawaiians and in Hawai'i, rather than gatekept for those with financial means. Mahalo nunui for your continued kōkua and kāko'o, so that the promise of justice in Hawai'i can continue to be for all the people in Hawai'i, regardless of wealth. Your support helps fill the justice gap, allows NHLC to continue our nonprofit's 51-years of work serving the lāhui, and contributes to the advancement and protection of Native Hawaiian health and wellness in our state.

Me ka ha'aha'a,



Makalika Naholowa'a
Executive Director



BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

Corey Park, JD
President

Lowell Chun-Hoon,
Esq.
Vice President

Lisa K. Swartzfager,
Esq.
Secretary

Alexzis Fuke
Treasurer

Amy Agbayani, PhD

Kevin J. Block, Esq.

Robin Campaniano,
MBA, JD

Liza Ryan Gill, MA

Ashleigh Loa

Shingayi Masiya

Jon Kei Matsuoka,
MSW, PhD

Kelley D. Settles

Susan Chong Wong,
JD

EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

Bettina Mok, MA

September 4, 2025

To: The Hawai'i State Legislature
Re: Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF)

Honorable Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature:

The Legal Clinic (TLC) extends its sincere appreciation to the Legislature for its continued support of the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF). This funding is essential to ensuring access to justice for Hawai'i's most vulnerable residents, and we strongly urge its continuation. We are also grateful to the Judiciary and the Hawai'i Justice Foundation for their effective, responsive, and efficient administration of this program.

TLC's mission is to ensure justice for low-income immigrants and migrants in Hawai'i through high-quality immigration legal services, education, and advocacy. ILAF funds allow us to deliver these services free of charge to state residents from low-income backgrounds, with priority for those whose household income is at or below 125% of the federal poverty guideline.

- In 2024, ILAF was an important contributor toward TLC's ability to serve 176 low-income clients statewide, through direct immigration legal services. Cases included assistance with asylum petitions, removal/deportation defense in immigration court, citizenship and adjustment of status (green card) applications, and advice and counsel on a wide range of immigration matters.

Over the past year, federal enforcement actions have generated heightened fear in immigrant communities, resulting in more detained Hawai'i residents and greater need for legal representation in federal immigration court in Honolulu. With ILAF's support, our staff was able to provide urgent legal representation for many of these individuals who would otherwise face deportation proceedings without an attorney. ILAF funding has helped TLC build capacity to meet these needs and to expand outreach across the islands, including providing Know Your Rights sessions, webinars, and collaborations with local partners. ILAF also helps us sustain our pipeline for future immigration legal service providers, including training law student interns and supporting Department of Justice accreditation for non-attorney staff.

As one of the very few nonprofit organizations in Hawai'i specializing in complex immigration law, TLC plays a critical role in ensuring that immigrant families can remain together, obtain work authorization, and pursue stable futures in our state. ILAF funding has been indispensable in making this work possible.

We respectfully urge the Legislature to continue its support of the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund. This investment directly translates into life-changing services for low-income residents across Hawai'i, strengthens our legal system, and helps preserve justice and fairness for all. Mahalo for your continued leadership and commitment.

Sincerely,

Bettina Mok
Executive Director

UNIVERSITY of HAWAII at MĀNOA
WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON
SCHOOL OF LAW



September 8, 2025

TO: Hawai'i State Legislators
FROM: University of Hawai'i Elder Law Program
SUBJECT: Impact of Indigent Legal Assistance Fund

The University of Hawai'i Elder Law Program (UHELP) greatly appreciates the funding it receives through the Indigent Legal Assistance Program (ILAF). Without this supplemental funding, UHELP would not be able to accomplish key components of its mission. While UHELP is an integral part of the William S. Richardson School of Law, it does not receive any direct appropriations from the state or federal government to provide legal services, publications, and education to underserved older persons in our community on a year-round basis.

UHELP provides direct legal services to socially and economically needy older persons, caregivers, and veterans on a year-round basis, while it helps to serve the education and training needs of our law students. At the law school we provide law students with law related academic and experiential opportunities through UHELP by helping its older clients. In turn, our socially and economically needy older clients benefit from the legal services that the UHELP staff and law students provide under the supervision of UHELP's staff.

Through this ILAF grant, we work to enhance, protect, and preserve the autonomy and independence of our elders. Last fiscal year provided direct legal services, referral, and advice to approximately 320 qualified older persons as well as continuing educational outreach and informational support to care providers and their kūpuna care recipients. We also receive a significant number of calls from service providers, health care providers and institutions, non-profit organizations, and governmental agencies on elder law issues, including elder abuse, mental capacity, and health care decision-making, including end-of-life decisions.

With ILAF supplemental funding we hope to maintain our high level of legal services to socially and economically needy older persons as we all face increased budgetary challenges. We will continue to work cooperatively with the Judiciary, the Hawaii Justice Foundation, and the Legal Services Consortium to ensure a cooperative, smooth, and efficient operation at UHELP. Thank you again for your support of access to justice for low-income residents through ILAF funding.

Most Respectfully,

James H. Pietsch

Professor of Law and Director, UHELP

University of Hawai'i Elder Law Program
2515 DOLE STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96822-2328
TEL (808) 956-6544 • FAX (808) 956-9439 • INTERNET www.hawaii.edu/uhelp



Medical-Legal Partnership ♦ Hawai'i

A Project of the William S. Richardson School of Law
2515 Dole Street, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822

September 9, 2025

Hawaii State Legislature
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu HI 96813

RE: Support for ILAF Funding

Dear Honorable Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature,

On behalf of the Medical-Legal Partnership in Hawai'i (MLP), I am pleased to share this letter of support and gratitude for funding from the Indigent Legal Assistance Fund (ILAF). ILAF funds significantly enhance our capacity to provide direct legal services and systemic advocacy support to children and families who are experiencing poverty in Hawai'i.

MLP Hawai'i is a project of the William S. Richardson School of Law (University of Hawai'i) to provide free, on-site legal services for patients at Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, Kapi'olani Medical Center, and other community-based settings. Since 2009, our small legal team has handled over 2,500 cases focused on the critical social/legal determinants of health. In 2024-25, for example, MLP opened 240 new legal case matters, one-third of which improved housing stability (eviction defense, disability access, and public housing navigation), and another third for income security (public benefits, employment, and consumer protection). Many of our cases also addressed civil rights, language access, and domestic violence issues. MLP staff conducts self-advocacy education for clients and community partners, and we also engage in extensive systemic advocacy work alongside the communities we serve. We have a particularly close relationship with Micronesian communities in Hawai'i and beyond, including working to address national policies like Medicaid restoration and I-94 access, as well as local matters to promote community safety, mental health, and health justice resources.

Today, local families are facing the punishing and cascading impacts of federal actions that render our work significantly more challenging. They include threats to basic food and housing safety net programs; the terror faced by our immigrant and migrant client communities; massive federal staffing and funding cuts reducing critical resources (including local civil legal services for indigent clients); and the attacks on the very tenets of democracy and the constitutional rule of law. In this time of federal chaos and disruption, state funding is critical. ILAF support for the work of local non-profit legal service providers is more important than ever. For MLP, even our small percentage of the overall ILAF funds translates into a substantial boost to our capacity to provide direct legal services to over 240 individual clients and families last year, and to reach hundreds more through community education and outreach.

Thank you for your continued support of this critical funding source. We are proud to be part of this dedicated cohort of legal service providers as we work together to expand access to justice for people across the state of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Dina Shek
Legal Director, Medical-Legal Partnership in Hawai'i
Faculty Specialist, William S. Richardson School of Law



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

September 3, 2025

Nickolas Kacprowski
President

Jennifer F. Chin
Vice President

Tred R. Everly
Secretary

Joanne C. Hoe
Treasurer

James E. Abraham

Trever Asam

Sidney K. Ayabe

David J. Hoftiezzer

Joanne Lee

Melissa A. Miyashiro

Alana Peacott-Ricardos

Summer G. Shelverton

Rachel Figueroa
Executive Director

To: The Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature

From: Rachel Figueroa, Executive Director
Volunteer Legal Services Hawai'i

Re: Indigent Legal Assistance Fund

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and those we serve at Volunteer Legal Services Hawaii ("Volunteer Legal"), thank you for the continued support for civil legal assistance to low-income and disadvantaged residents in our state.

The Indigent Legal Assistance Fund ("ILAF") remains a critical source of financial support for pro bono based civil legal assistance to those least able to afford and access professional legal help. Hawaii's institutional capacity to provide legal services to indigent persons in our state is strengthened by the pro bono work of attorneys. Volunteer Legal's pro bono program significantly extends the reach of legal aid programs to more persons in need with a broader range of legal services through coordination and collaboration with private attorneys.

Each year, over 1000 individuals are qualified to receive services through Volunteer Legal. Individuals are screened for income and asset eligibility as well as legal matter. The knowledgeable intake staff ensures that each qualified applicant is then paired with the appropriate volunteer attorney based on legal issue and level of service needed. These diverse needs are met through a continuum of services from intake and referral, to legal advice clinics, pro se guidance services, and referrals to volunteer attorneys for full representation.

Volunteer Legal is the administrative vehicle that allows for Hawaii residents in need to connect with legal professionals, without which many would go without access to meaningful legal assistance. People living in poverty or are at risk of poverty need legal assistance to resolve issues affecting their livelihood, housing, and family relations. Individuals in our State who are experiencing poverty or near poverty most often include children, elderly, disabled, veterans, rural residents, those recovering from homelessness or incarceration, and those with limited English capabilities. Access to civil legal services is intricately woven into the safety net of programs needed to effectively transition people out of poverty.

545 Queen Street, Suite 100
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Phone: (808) 528-7050
Fax: (808) 524-2147

www.vlsh.org

In 2024, Volunteer Legal qualified around 1000 individuals. Of that number, 55% had household incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guideline for the State of Hawaii. This amounted to a gross annual income of \$44,850 for a family of four and \$21,638 for an individual. In the same year, 20% of those served by Volunteer Legal were aged 60 years or older, and another 26% self-identified as having a disability. In all, Volunteer Legal assisted approximately 533 ILAF qualified individuals in 2024 in legal matters affecting child custody, bankruptcy, veterans benefits, landlord tenant issues, adoptions and guardianship, estate planning, and license reinstatement.

Volunteer Legal has over 200+ attorneys who volunteer in, including but not limited to, family law, bankruptcy, estate planning, collections, and small claims. We are very proud and thankful to have a wide spectrum of attorneys from solo practitioners to partners at large large firms volunteering. In 2024, Volunteer attorneys invested over \$815,000 worth of pro bono hours delivering direct services to qualified individuals and families through Volunteer Legals Clinics. Additionally, over 100 pro bono hours were donated online at ABA Free Legal Answers Hawaii, otherwise known as Hawaii Online Pro Bono.

ILAF funds are used to support staff salaries and benefits as well as program costs that directly ensure the quality and effectiveness of services being delivered to low-income persons. During the pandemic, ILAF was one of the few stable funding sources that Volunteer Legal received during the time of extreme need. In an average year, ILAF does not compose a large percentage of Volunteer Legal's overall program budget, but it does allow the organization to leverage other sources of funds from private foundations and donors.

The effectiveness of Volunteer Legal to act as the conduit between those in need of legal assistance and those with the tools to help is highly dependent on funds like ILAF. For these reasons, we thank the Hawaii State Legislature for its continued support of civil legal services to those who are in most need in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Figueroa". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Rachel" and last name "Figueroa" clearly distinguishable.

Rachel Figueroa
Executive Director