



Impact of COVID-19 on District Residents

We are facing an unprecedented demand for civil legal aid services during COVID-19. That demand will continue to soar. District residents are facing new and unanticipated legal problems that will only continue to grow as we emerge from this crisis. The DC Access to Justice Commission's FY21 budget request for the Access to Justice Initiative is now more important than ever.

- With businesses shut down and people out of work, many District residents are turning to the legal aid network for information, legal assistance, and help to access benefits.
- District workers who are deemed vulnerable by the World Health Organization due to pregnancy, age, and pre-existing conditions have turned to the legal aid network for assistance with getting work accommodations or help with access to benefits so they are able to keep their income while staying safe.
- Shelter-in-place orders meant to keep District residents safe from COVID-19, have had the unintended consequence of increasing the amount of time domestic violence victims spend with their abusers. There has been a spike in the number of reported cases as spouses who are desperate to leave their situations have turned to the legal aid network for assistance.
- COVID-19 has added an extra layer of difficulty in visitation and custody cases, as common areas where parents exchange children such as schools and day care centers remain closed. The legal aid network is helping to keep families together during uncertain times.

Investment in the civil legal aid network is critical to the District's recovery. The aftermath of COVID-19 will increase the need for civil legal aid. Any cuts in funding to the Access to Justice Initiative will have a devastating impact on District residents who will need help.

- If unemployment continues to rise, many District workers will need help navigating the unemployment compensation system and securing available benefits and protections – many for the first time in their lives.
- District residents that were once able to hire private attorneys to handle their cases will now turn to legal aid for services. We must provide adequate funding to meet the demand.
- District residents who had difficulty paying rent during COVID-19 due to lost wages will seek legal aid services to help with impending evictions, debt collection, and other civil legal challenges.

- Shelter-in-place orders are difficult on already strained relationships, legal aid lawyers predict there will be an increased demand for divorce, visitation and custody assistance.
- Legal aid lawyers ease the burden on the courts by either directly representing low-income residents or assisting and preparing pro-se litigants for court.
- Legal aid organizations who charge on a sliding scale to provide access to lawyers at highly reduced rates will have more clients that cannot pay because they are unemployed due to COVID-19.

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