



# ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Providing FREE high-quality civil legal services to Alaskans since 1967

## FACT SHEET HB 48: Amending Civil Legal Services Fund Sponsored by Representative Hannan

### OVERVIEW

HB 48 seeks to amend AS 37.05.590 (the statute creating the Civil Legal Services Fund) so that up to 25% of Court System filing fees can be appropriated by the Legislature to the Fund each year to provide access to civil legal aid for low-income Alaskans with critical legal needs.

### CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND

The Civil Legal Services Fund was established as a special account in the general fund. It was amended in 2018 with nearly unanimous support after widespread bi-partisan acknowledgement that ALSC was severely underfunded.

At the discretion of the Legislature, funds are deposited from Alaska's 50% share of civil punitive damage awards and up to 10% of court filing fees received in the most recent Fiscal Year. These funds are then available to supplement ALSC's appropriation.

The availability of funds is dependent on court system filings and punitive damages awards to the state, causing the amount available from the fund to vary widely. Since the fund was established in 2007, available funds have fluctuated greatly from \$0 to \$360K.

In SFY25, \$296,500 was appropriated from the fund to ALSC, the amount available for appropriation in SFY26 is \$312,600.

### AMENDING AS 37.05.590

Amending the fund to allocate 25% of court filing fees is essential to meet the growing demand for civil legal assistance. Since the 2018 amendment, community needs have continued to rise. Combined with inflation, this demand has stretched ALSC's resources thin. It is time to amend the fund again.

Increasing the fund's allocation will help close Alaska's civil justice gap, delivering life-changing legal aid to vulnerable residents. As the state's primary civil legal resource, ALSC receives most legal service referrals but faces growing demand and declining support.

The charts below show the disparity between ALSC's rising client population and state funding, which has dropped from \$1.2M in 1984 to \$696,500 in 2024. At current funding levels, ALSC must turn away hundreds of families each year due to limited resources.



### MAKING THE FUND MORE EFFECTIVE

Current court filing fees go to the general fund. By appropriating 25% of these fees to the Civil Legal Services Fund, additional revenue will be generated to address unmet life-altering civil legal needs statewide.





# ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Providing FREE high-quality civil legal services to Alaskans since 1967

## LEGAL AID IMPORTANCE:

Civil legal aid ensures fairness in the justice system. It provides access to legal help for people who cannot afford it otherwise, to protect their livelihoods, health, and families. We need civil legal aid to make sure the principle our founding fathers envisioned remains alive: Justice for all, not the few who can afford it.

## WHO LEGAL AID HELPS:

- Seniors
- Veterans
- Disabled Alaskans
- Domestic Violence Survivors
- Low-Income Workers + Consumers
- Children

## HOW LEGAL AID HELPS:

- Ends Financial Abuse
- Prevents Homelessness
- Secures Child Support
- Secures Lawful Benefits
- Stops Domestic Violence

## WHY THIS FUND IS NECESSARY

- ◆ Nearly every state supports civil legal aid with court fees and fines, and/or state appropriations. Alabama, Florida, and Idaho are the only states that do not receive any state funding.
- ◆ The 2017 Alaska Court System's Access to Justice Committee report affirmed ALSC as Alaska's primary resource for civil legal issues, receiving most referrals for legal services, followed by the court system and its Family Law Self-Help Center.
- ◆ The American Community Survey estimates 1 in 7 Alaskans—approximately 98,225 Alaskans are currently living below 125% of the federal poverty line, a number rising each year. For most, access to civil justice depends solely on Alaska Legal Services Corporation.
- ◆ The May 2000 Alaska Supreme Court Access to Civil Justice Task Force recommended ALSC receive state funding equivalent to levels from the 1980s. Adjusted for inflation and poverty growth, this would exceed \$4.9M in 2024. ALSC's 2025 total operating budget is \$10.3M.



There is only one (1) ALSC attorney for every 10,000 eligible Alaskans.



ALSC is forced to turn away 50% of application due to lack of resources.

Each year, Alaskan households eligible for ALSC services face an estimated 38,308 legal issues, based on a study by the American Bar Association, which found an average of 1.01 legal problems per household annually. Approximately half of low-income households experience at least one legal issue each year, often with multiple interconnected problems.

## ADDRESSING ALASKA'S GROWING CIVIL JUSTICE GAP

The "justice gap" is the difference between the level of legal assistance available and the level that is necessary to meet the needs of low-income individuals. At current funding levels, ALSC turns away hundreds of families seeking assistance each year due to resource limitations.

