

Why Iowa's Business Community Supports the Work of Iowa Legal Aid



Access to the court system is an important part of America's promise of "equal justice for all." This commitment applies to vulnerable Iowans just as much as it does to Iowa's business community. In fact, one of the primary criteria for business expansion is the assurance of a fair court system and a commitment to the rule of law.

There are many examples of work done by Iowa Legal Aid that results in benefits to the business community:

- The largest portion of Iowa Legal Aid's casework is in the area of family law, most involving domestic violence. Beyond the obvious consequences that domestic abuse has on family members, there are significant social costs too. According to the World Health Organization, domestic abuse costs \$5.8 billion in direct health care costs in the United States annually. In terms of employment, it is estimated that there are annual national costs of \$1.8 billion in lost wages and productivity. These statistics don't begin to address the costs of shelter services and justice system interventions. When Iowa Legal Aid intervenes on behalf of a client and assists the victim with the process of leaving an abuser successfully and safely, those costs are diminished. In many cases, those costs are shifted back to the abuser.
 - The second largest portion of Iowa Legal Aid's work is in the area of housing. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act recognizes that a student's academic and social development can be harmed by changing schools. In fact, on average, a child can lose 4-6 months of academic progress with each move to a new school. Preventing homelessness helps children have a better chance at a successful future.
 - Without legal assistance, low-wage earners who face illegal garnishment of their income and bank accounts are unable to pay their rent or mortgage, car payments and other bills. Iowa Legal Aid helps these clients to retain their wages so they can focus on their work and have transportation to get to the job site.
 - Ensuring that individuals who are disabled and unable to work receive the benefits to which they are entitled helps to reduce the need for general assistance programs that are supported by county property taxes. When an individual has a steady source of income, those funds are spent in the local community, supporting local businesses.
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How Iowa's Businesses Support Iowa Legal Aid



The support of Iowa's business community for access to the court system for vulnerable Iowans is demonstrated by the following examples:

- Musco Lighting has been a long-time supporter of Iowa Legal Aid's work through financial commitments and volunteer service. In addition to their ongoing financial support and volunteer efforts, Musco Lighting established a business challenge to encourage other companies to support Iowa Legal Aid's work as well. In 2010 and 2011 the Musco Challenge matched dollar-for-dollar new business donations.
- Presentations were made to John Deere and Pioneer to educate corporate counsel about Iowa Legal Aid's work and to encourage financial support and volunteer efforts on the part of their legal departments. Both are now assisting Iowa Legal Aid with the intake of new clients on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Many volunteers from the business community support Iowa Legal Aid's work through service on the Iowa Legal Aid Foundation Board of Directors, the Iowa Legal Aid Board of Directors, Advisory Councils (each regional office of Iowa Legal Aid has one), and various committees including the planning committee for the Iowa Legal Aid Foundation's annual event, Equal Justice After Hours.
- The business community supports Iowa Legal Aid through contributions to Iowa Legal Aid's Campaign for Equal Justice and sponsorship of its annual event, Equal Justice After Hours.
- Principal Financial Group Legal Department has assisted Iowa Legal Aid by having their legal department participate in intake of new clients every Friday afternoon for over 20 years. This commitment of having lawyers from the legal department conduct initial intake interviews (gathering facts and providing advice), allows Iowa Legal Aid staff to handle cases with short deadlines and provide more extended representation.



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