

Minnesota State Board of Civil Legal Aid

FY26 Annual Report

Board Review September 11, 2026



Letter from the Chair

“We must not be content only to see things as they are. We must have the vision, faith and hope to see what things can and must become.” I first quoted these words of Sister Generose in my final *Letter from the Chair* as I finished my term with the Legal Services Advisory Committee (LSAC) in 2019. As I write this, the quote takes on new meaning reflecting on the transition from LSAC to the State Board of Civil Legal Aid (BOCLA).

BOCLA began on July 1, 2025 with a statutory mission “to ensure access to high-quality civil legal services in every Minnesota county.” Unlike Athena, however, the new agency did not spring into existence fully formed. On day one, urgent decisions needed to be made to maintain the stream of revenue and ongoing activities of grantees. Using existing models we were able to adopt a core structure and be “open for business” from our very first meeting. We have now drafted and adopted ten important governance policies with more in the works.

In the course of the year, we reviewed LSAC’s generous legacy of recommendations, and decided to continue the ongoing data project as well as to facilitate regular grantee meetings, including our first major in-person gathering to get grantee input on legislative funding priorities. We also approved the first BOCLA Standard for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid, focused on maintaining and updating a grantee’s case acceptance criteria in the LOON database, to improve both the coordination and collaboration among grantees and the prospective client referral experience.

We also worked to identify our values as an agency, which in turn enabled us to create an Identity Statement and Bylaws. These documents are on our website, but it is worth underlining our core values here. Meaningful Access to Justice; Equity and Community-Centered Impact; Integrity, Transparency, and Trust; System Strength and Coordination; Sustainability and Stewardship; and Innovation with Purpose are the principles which will guide our decision-making.

With this guidance, there is much work to do in the coming year. We will create the first BOCLA grant application process, implement additional grantee standards, and enact additional policies to fit the needs of BOCLA. In addition, we look forward to advocating for the agency and civil legal aid in the coming legislative session.

Full lists of the board members and staff of BOCLA are contained below. They deserve more thanks than I can fit in this letter. Their vision, faith, and hope on behalf of Minnesotans facing critical civil legal issues enable BOCLA to see what it can and must become.

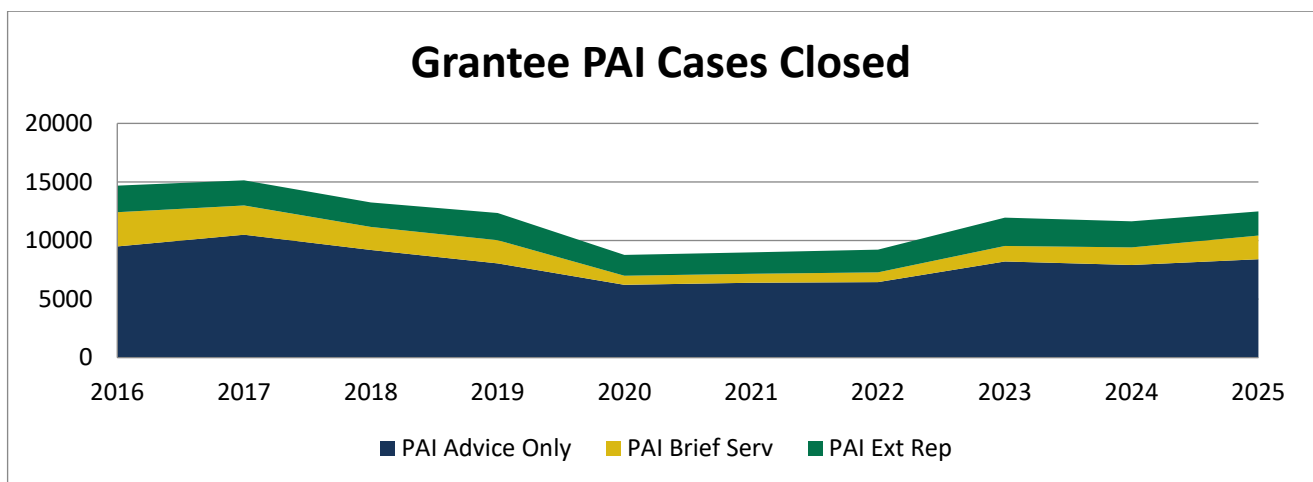
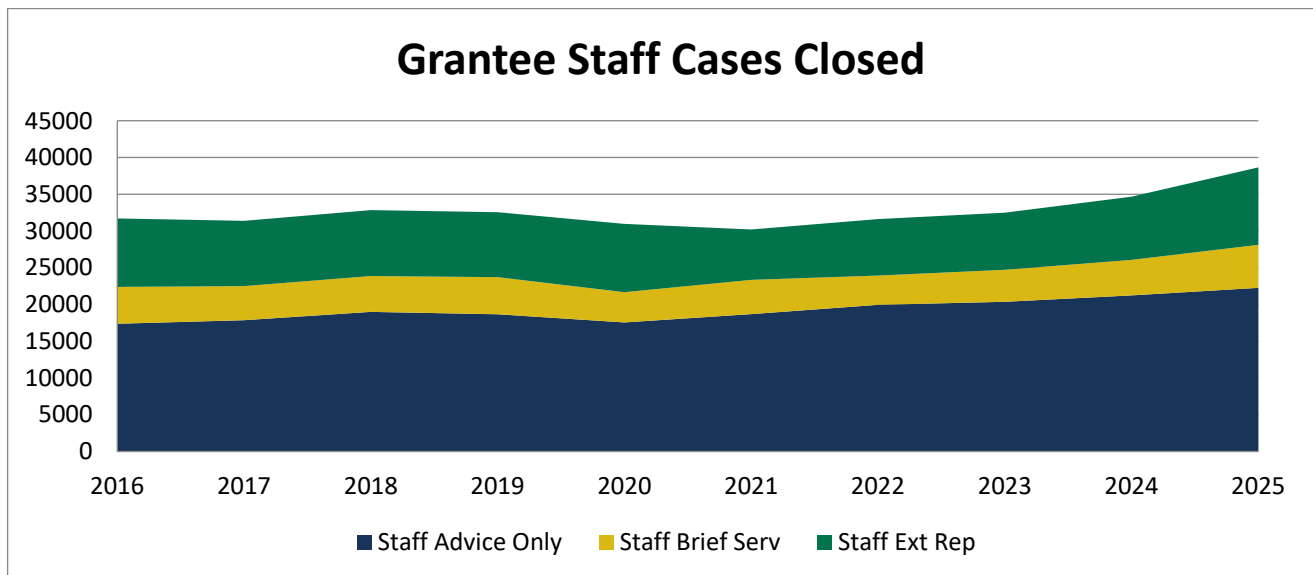


Sincerely,
Christopher L. Wendt
BOCLA Chair

Clients Served

BOCLA focuses its grant making on programs that benefit low-income Minnesotans facing critical civil legal needs. Grants can be used to serve clients at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines, currently defined as less than \$66,000 per year for a family of four.¹ According to recent Census data, there are more than 1.2 million Minnesotans eligible for services based on those income guidelines.²

The following charts detail the number of cases closed by civil legal aid grantees over the past decade. Staff case totals have steadily increased over the past three years as available grant funding has increased. Private attorney involvement (PAI) cases, including both volunteer and judicare attorneys, have returned to pre-pandemic levels but are still lower than the peak for PAI cases reached a decade ago.



¹ 2026 Poverty Guidelines, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.

² 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate for Minnesotans at or below 200% of Poverty.

Grantee 2025 Case Data Summary

Total Cases Closed: **51,139**

- 38,676 cases (76%) closed by staff attorneys
- 12,483 cases (24%) closed by private attorney involvement (PAI) through pro bono or judicare

Total People in Households Benefitting from Legal Representation: **128,854**

Client Demographics Reported:

- Gender – **66% Female, 34% Male**
- Age – **3% Under 18, 78% 18-59, 19% Over 60**
- Race – **44% White, 25% Black, 15% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 5% Native American, 7% Other/Multi-Racial**

Case Types: **29% Housing, 25% Family, 10% Immigration, 8% Consumer, 5% Income/Health Benefits, 23% Other** (includes employment, education, expungement, wills, etc.)

Dollar Benefits Achieved for Clients: **\$35,594,524**

- \$22,485,525 in existing income or benefits protected
- \$13,108,999 in new income or benefits established

Benefits Achieved through Extended Representation:

- Clients better able to pay for daily necessities – **4,470**
- Clients less likely to be harassed by creditors – **3,592**
- Clients in a better position to keep or find a job – **3,161**
- Clients in a better position to keep or find housing – **7,090**
- Client has improved housing conditions – **4,249**
- Client is physically safer – **4,355**
- Client has improved quality of life – **10,295**

Benefits Achieved through Access to Advice, Brief Service, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), or Legal Information:

- Clients with access to legal advice – **30,675**
- Clients with access to brief services – **7,859**
- Individuals connected to low-cost ADR services - **595**
- Individuals with automated court form assistance through LawHelpMN.org – **1,882**
- Individuals who were assisted via live chat to navigate LawHelpMN.org – **1,772**
- Unique visitors accessing legal information through LawHelpMN.org – **434,566**

Important Background for Understanding and Using BOCLA Data

Case data is collected every March for the preceding calendar year. This report details cases closed by grantees from January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025. More information is included in the Case Data Handbook on the BOCLA website.

Financial data, grant awards, and grant reporting follow the state fiscal year, which runs from July 1 through June 30. FY26 includes July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

In addition to collecting quantitative case closed data from all BOCLA grantees, the Board also tracks qualitative data through client stories. The following are excerpts from FY26 grant reports showing the depth and range of impact on Minnesotans statewide.

- After a violent assault and stalking, civil legal aid represented a client in a contested Order for Protection (OFP) hearing. The court granted relief in the form of a two-year Order for Protection. Recognizing the threat of ongoing stalking and harassment, the court also imposed enhanced protections. After the OFP was issued, civil legal aid also assisted the client in enrolling in Minnesota's Safe at Home address confidentiality program, enabling the client to relocate safely. The client reported feeling significantly safer and more hopeful about the future. The client is in a secure location unknown to the abuser, and the combination of the final Order for Protection and the Safe at Home program has given them the confidence to leave the home, rebuild a life, and live without the constant fear of being watched or confronted by the abuser. Through comprehensive legal advocacy and ongoing support, civil legal aid helped a survivor regain both safety and peace of mind.
- A client sought legal assistance after being denied unemployment benefits following the loss of her job as a transportation driver. She reported experiencing months of workplace harassment from coworkers, including intimidation, inappropriate comments, and other conduct that created a hostile work environment. Although she raised these concerns with her supervisor, no meaningful investigation or corrective action occurred. Shortly after reporting the harassment, the client was terminated based on allegations that she had improperly disclosed confidential client information. Civil legal aid represented the client during her unemployment benefits appeal and demonstrated that the alleged misconduct did not meet the legal standard required to disqualify her from receiving benefits. As a result, the client received a substantial retroactive unemployment benefits award, providing critical financial stability while she searched for new employment.
- Civil legal aid represented an elderly veteran and his wife who received an eviction notice from their landlord for failure to vacate. The clients were extremely worried as they did not have the capacity to vacate on short notice. Civil legal aid provided them with information about their rights as tenants in Minnesota and represented them at their initial eviction hearing. They were able to negotiate 3.5 months to vacate and an expungement of the eviction case.
- When residents of a 321-unit apartment building first began working with civil legal aid, they had already spent months trying to solve serious habitability problems on their own. The landlord's deferred maintenance and neglect, along with an old and deteriorating plumbing infrastructure, caused frequent pipe bursts, flooding, water intrusion, and recurring damage throughout the property. Several tenants had previously pursued individual legal actions to compel emergency repairs within their own apartments. While

those cases occasionally resulted in isolated fixes, they failed to address the building's underlying systemic failures.

Rather than asking the court to resolve hundreds of individual and unit-specific repair disputes, civil legal aid developed a strategy seeking building-wide relief for every resident that included not only dwelling units but also issues in common areas such as the parking garage, laundry area and mail room. The pending lawsuit seeks court appointment of an independent administrator to take over management of the property until it is restored to safe and habitable conditions. If granted, this remedy would address not only the visible symptoms of disrepair but also the years of deferred maintenance and systemic management failures that allowed the conditions to persist.

- A mother of four minor children with a valid work permit and a pending U visa (visa for crime victims who assist law enforcement) was unexpectedly detained. Working with a contract attorney, civil legal aid filed a habeas petition challenging her unlawful detention the very next day. Just three days later, the petition was granted. That victory led to a bond hearing where a staff attorney provided legal representation. They completed intensive preparation, including gathering evidence and researching bond law, to build a strong case. At the hearing, she secured bond. The client was released and reunited with her children.
- Civil legal aid represented an older married couple being financially exploited by their adult son. He had moved into their home, refused to leave, stole cash and other items of modest value, and generally behaved in a threatening way. He alienated neighbors and service providers, effectively isolating his parents. With guidance from their attorney advocate, they explored a range of possible interventions from legal action to identifying resources and referrals for their son. In this case, advocacy led to identifying supportive services for the son. This provided relief to the clients, and ultimately allowed the son to move out and eliminated the need for an eviction or protective order at this time.
- A civil legal aid client living with stage IV breast cancer was no longer able to work but maintained a \$23,000 term life insurance policy she had through her former employer. This life insurance policy was all the client could leave for her daughter's education. The insurance company informed her the policy was being terminated for non-payment. The client attempted to provide the receipt for the money order and the USPS tracking verification notation to show that USPS had lost the payment. The former employer would not reinstate the policy unless she could prove the money order was accepted or cashed by the insurance company. Civil legal aid wrote a letter to the insurer's General Counsel, providing the excellent documentation the client had maintained. Two weeks later, the policy was reinstated.

BOCLA Funding Sources

BOCLA's primary grant cycle includes revenue from three primary sources: an appropriation from the Minnesota legislature, a portion of the annual lawyer registration fee dedicated to civil legal services, and Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) revenue. The Board also manages pro hac vice fee revenue as part of the Justice for All rolling grant application process that is open as funds are available. All four of these funding sources and the related grants are detailed in this report.

FY26-27 Legislative Funding – \$35,353,000 per year

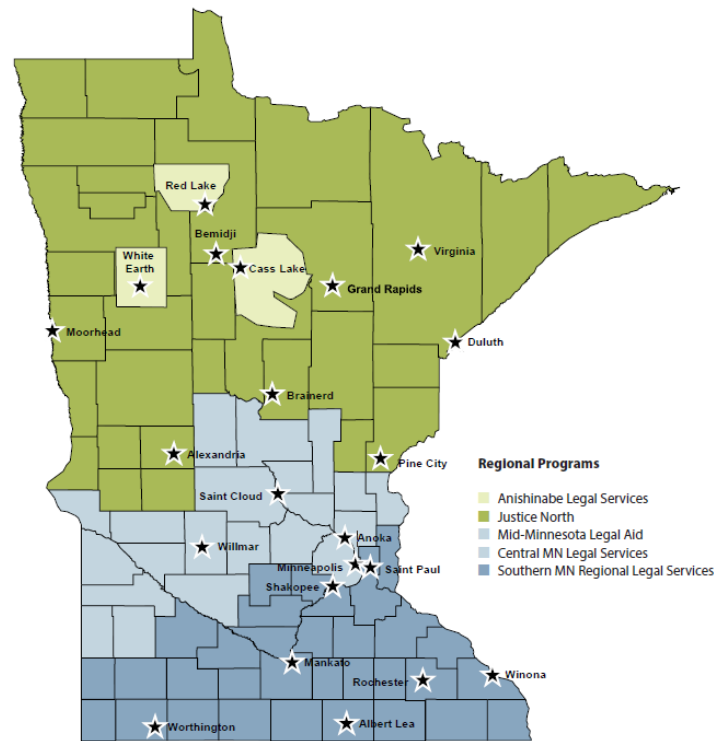
Minnesota Statutes 480.24 through 480.244 directs the process for grantmaking from the legislative appropriation. In compliance with the statute, BOCLA distributes 85% of the available funding³ based on a per poverty population formula to organizations that were eligible to receive federal legal services corporation funding on July 1, 1982. The remaining 15% of the appropriation is added to other BOCLA funding sources and awarded through a competitive grant process.

The table below shows the organizations that received per poverty population funding with their FY26 formulaic awards and the map shows the corresponding service areas and office locations.

85% Organization Name	FY26 Formulaic Award
Anishinabe Legal Services	\$351,083
Central Minnesota Legal Services	\$1,381,645
Justice North (merger of Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota and Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota as of 1/1/26)	\$5,800,179
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	\$10,892,877
Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services	\$11,314,016
	Total: \$29,739,800

³ Staff and administrative costs of \$355,000 were deducted from the total legislative appropriation of \$35,353,000 before the 85% / 15% calculations were made. BOCLA distributes administrative costs across all funding sources. More details on administrative costs are included in the Total BOCLA Expenses section below.

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After these 85% awards are calculated, the remaining \$5,258,200 in annual legislative funds was added to the available IOLTA and lawyer registration fee revenue to determine the total available for discretionary grants. The recipients of the FY26 discretionary grant awards are detailed in the next section (BOCLA Grant Making – Biennial Grants).

FY26 Lawyer Registration Fee Revenue – \$2,104,822

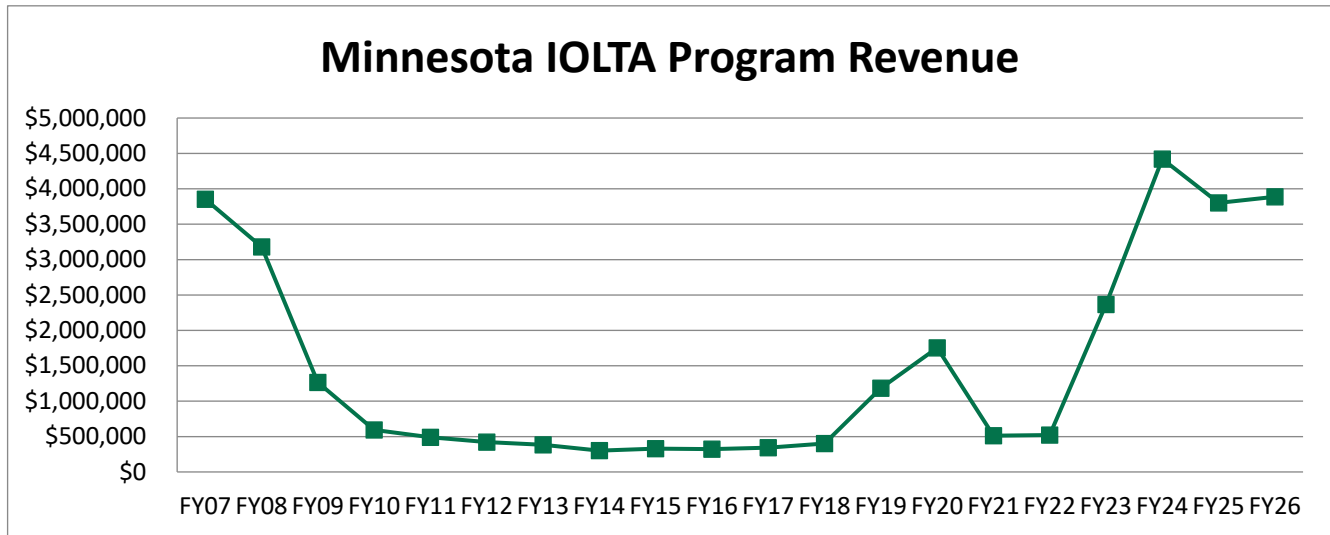
The Minnesota Supreme Court has dedicated a portion of the annual lawyer registration fee for grants to civil legal aid programs since 1997. In 2009 the Court increased the fee to offset some of the dramatic IOLTA decline, which generated an additional \$600,000 per year. That increase was made permanent by court order in 2011. Lawyer registration fee revenue has been a stable funding source because the number of lawyers licensed in Minnesota has been stable in recent years.

The following table describes the amount of each lawyer registration fee that is directed to BOCLA for grantmaking.

Active License More than 3 Years	Active License with Income Less than \$50,000	Inactive License	Inactive License with Income Less than \$50,000	Active License Less than 3 Years
\$75	\$47	\$71	\$43	\$37

FY26 IOLTA Revenue – \$3,886,570

In 1983, Minnesota was the first state to create a mandatory IOLTA program by court rule. The order accompanying the rule directed that grants from IOLTA revenue were for funding enhanced legal services for the poor, support for law-related public education, and programs that enhance the administration of justice. As an interest rate dependent funding source, annual IOLTA revenue has fluctuated dramatically. The chart below shows the ups and downs of the past two decades.



Because of the volatility in IOLTA revenue BOCLA has diversified spending with a mix of ongoing general operating grants, one-time project grants, and technical assistance to benefit the civil legal aid delivery system. BOCLA also maintains a reserve fund in case of unexpected interest rate declines.

FY26 Pro Hac Vice Fee Revenue – \$299,700

Following a recommendation of the Justice for All Steering Committee, the Legal Services Advisory Committee (LSAC) petitioned the Minnesota Supreme Court to create a fee paid by out-of-state attorneys requesting pro hac vice status to practice in district court. The revenue from such a fee would be used to support a wide range of projects, including those for people above civil legal aid income guidelines, as outlined in the [National Center for State Courts Justice for All](#) framework. At that time of the petition in 2020 Minnesota was one of only a few states in the country without a pro hac vice fee, and many of the states with such a fee directed the proceeds to access to justice work.

The Court then established a \$450 pro hac vice fee per case effective June 1, 2021. The majority of that revenue is available for access to justice grants on a rolling basis, with \$75,000 per year going to the Minnesota State Board of Law Examiners to offset the costs of administering the pro hac vice rule. LSAC managed grants from the funds generated through June 30, 2025, after which the responsibility was transferred to BOCLA by court order.

BOCLA Grant Making

Biennial Grants

The primary grants made by BOCLA follow the two-year legislative funding cycle. The grant process for FY26-27 was unusual because applications received in March 2025 were reviewed and scored by LSAC before the committee sunset on June 30, 2025. These scores and recommended funding amounts from LSAC were then sent to BOCLA so grant contracts could be executed as soon as possible at the start of the 2026 fiscal year. BOCLA relied on the work of LSAC in making these grants, including the practice of separating proposals by staff general operating, PAI general operating, and other general operating for ADR and support programs. LSAC also reviewed the proposed grant awards to ensure regional equity before making the recommendations to BOCLA.

Twenty-six organizations submitted FY26-27 grant applications totaling \$13,206,003 in requested annual funding. Annual general operating grant awards totaling \$9,115,165 are detailed by organization in the table below.

Anishinabe Legal Services	\$126,995
Cancer Legal Care	\$254,000
Central Minnesota Legal Services	\$289,605
Community Mediation Minnesota	\$250,000
Farmers Legal Action Group	\$100,000
HOME Line	\$27,500
Housing Justice Center	\$254,000
ICWA Law Center	\$165,000
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota	\$1,500,000
International Institute of Minnesota	\$65,000
Justice North	\$542,228
Legal Assistance of Dakota County	\$282,000
Legal Assistance of Olmsted County	\$307,994
Legal Services State Support	\$936,250
LegalCORPS	\$160,500

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Loan Repayment Assistance Program of Minnesota	\$55,000
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	\$323,984
Minnesota Disability Law Center	\$779,654
Minnesota Elder Justice Center	\$63,500
Minnesota Justice Foundation	\$231,000
Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services	\$380,055
Standpoint	\$55,000
The Advocates for Human Rights	\$325,000
Tubman	\$450,000
Volunteer Lawyers Network	\$1,190,900

As noted above, due to the volatility in IOLTA revenue BOCLA did not put all available IOLTA funds into the general operating grants. Instead, it budgeted \$2,500,000 over the biennium to support project grants that include one-time costs for infrastructure investments. Twenty organizations submitted project grant applications totaling \$2,391,804 and BOCLA fully funded those requests. Most projects involved technology upgrades, with a few making capital improvements to office space and one piloting a new service delivery model using paraprofessionals. The total two-year project grant awards for FY26-27 are detailed by organization below.

Anishinabe Legal Services	\$71,500
Cancer Legal Care	\$136,238
Central Minnesota Legal Services	\$88,938
Housing Justice Center	\$154,000
ICWA Law Center	\$89,000
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota	\$123,122
Justice North	\$331,295
Legal Assistance of Dakota County	\$63,540
Legal Assistance of Olmsted County	\$50,467

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Legal Services State Support	\$228,936
LegalCORPS	\$108,070
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	\$171,969
Minnesota Disability Law Center	\$49,698
Minnesota Justice Foundation	\$29,825
Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services	\$237,150
Standpoint	\$55,820
The Advocates for Human Rights	\$45,000
Tubman	\$212,000
Volunteer Lawyers Network	\$145,236

Justice for All Projects

Justice for All grant applications are accepted on a rolling basis, subject to available funds. The application scoring criteria include:

1. Clear connection to [Justice for All framework](#).
2. Budget provides necessary details to understand how grant will be expended.
3. Project will have a wide-ranging impact (large geographic or demographic reach).
4. Realistic project timeline.

The following describes all Justice for All awards paid using pro hac vice funds in FY26.

Organization	Award	Summary of Project
Minnesota Supreme Court	\$75,000	Support for the Consumer Debt Litigation Working Group and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Access to Justice Review
The Legal Revolution	\$75,000	Community Legal Education, Self-Help Materials, and Full Representation Related to Criminal Expungement and Clemency

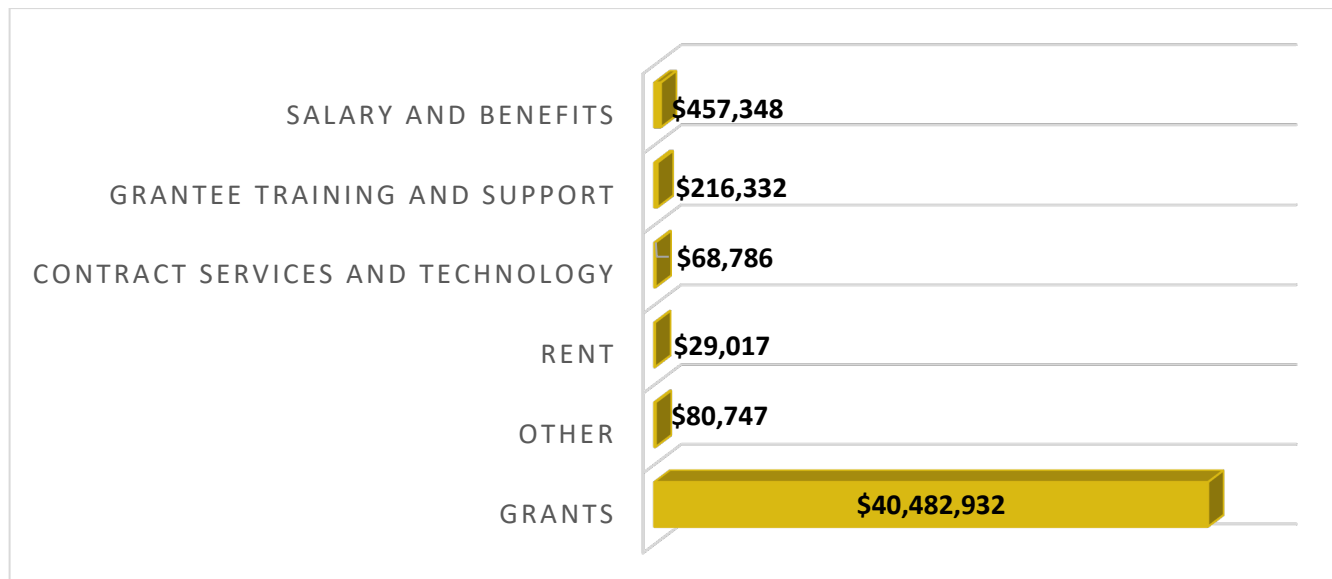
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Organization	Award	Summary of Project
Minnesotans for Consumer Financial Protection (fiscally sponsored by Exodus Lending)	\$75,000	Community Legal Education, Data Collection, Referrals, and Advocacy Related to Consumer Financial Protection
Justice North	\$75,000	Integration of Civil Legal Aid in Statewide Disaster Preparedness Work

Total BOCLA Expenses

In FY26, BOCLA spent \$41,335,163 across all categories. Staff grew from 2.0 FTE in July 2025 to 4.0 FTE in January 2026. Because of its small size, BOCLA also has an interagency agreement with the Minnesota Competency Attainment Board primarily for Human Resources, Legal Counsel, and IT Support.

The Board has set a goal of 2% administrative costs held back from funds available to support the work of the grantees and that goal was met this fiscal year. This chart provides a more detailed breakdown of spending.



Board Members

Name	Location	Appointment	Term Expiration Date
Tarryl Clark	St. Cloud, MN	Governor	January 3, 2028
Emily Cooper	Minneapolis, MN	Supreme Court	January 3, 2028
Katy Drahos	Minneapolis, MN	Supreme Court	January 1, 2029
John Gordon	Edina, MN	Governor	January 7, 2030
Holley Horrell	Minneapolis, MN	Governor	January 1, 2029
Jerry Lane	Minneapolis, MN	Supreme Court	January 7, 2030
John Murphy	Anoka, MN	Supreme Court	January 4, 2027
Ana Pottratz Acosta	Saint Paul, MN	Governor	January 4, 2027
Summra Shariff	Minneapolis, MN	Supreme Court	January 7, 2030
Korey Wahwassuck	Grand Rapids, MN	Governor	January 4, 2027
Christopher Wendt (chair)	Rochester, MN	Supreme Court	January 3, 2028

Staff

Bridget Gernander, Program Administrator

Susan Beaudet, Office Manager

Colleen Kelly, Grants Manager

Josh Pollock, Finance Manager