



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh, COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force Request Dedicated Funding for Civil Legal Aid and Support Services

BALTIMORE, MD (November 18, 2020) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh, on behalf of the [Attorney General’s COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force](#), today sent a [letter](#) to Governor Larry Hogan requesting consideration of \$22 million in civil legal aid and support services funding in his FY’22 budget. The urgent need for sustained funding for this critical assistance was exposed and exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long before the pandemic, funding and resources for civil legal aid fell far short of the demand – serving only 20% of Marylanders who needed help. Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) distributes funds from the Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program to provide civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. As Attorney General Frosh noted in his letter, “this funding stream is variable and undependable. At the moment, interest on trust accounts is yielding a small fraction of what would have been MLSC’s budget needs pre-pandemic.” Last month, Attorney General Frosh and Governor Hogan provided nearly \$12 million to MLSC, averting a funding crisis that would have severely impacted its ability to provide civil legal aid services across the state. But that funding was a one-time allocation to assist families facing eviction as a result of COVID-19, and does not resolve the civil legal aid community’s chronic, structural funding deficit.

“Thousands of Marylanders are left to navigate the civil legal aid system on their own, often fighting to save their homes and families,” said Attorney General Frosh. “The COVID-19 pandemic put an immeasurable burden on an overly-burdened system, at the same time funding was significantly reduced. As a state, we must ensure there is an ongoing, dedicated, line-item appropriation for civil legal aid to put it on a long-term, sustainable path and provide the resources to assist our neighbors.”

Other states, recognizing the vital role of legal aid in the civil justice system, have ensured a dedicated, line-item, budget appropriation to support their civil legal aid organizations. Specifically, of the \$22 million requested, \$20 million would be dedicated for civil legal assistance administered by MLSC, and \$2 million for support service organizations like financial and credit counseling agencies, which are not funded by MLSC.