



Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS)

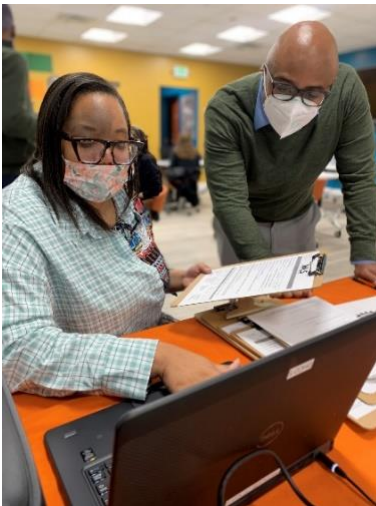
www.mvlslaw.org

The Need

In the United States, only people charged with a criminal offense have a constitutional right to a lawyer. **There are no free public defenders for Marylanders who are facing a civil legal case and cannot afford a private attorney.** Simply put, people can lose their kids, home, or freedom – not because they did anything wrong, but because they did not get the information or help they needed. The civil justice system touches everyone but has an outsized role in the lives of people who have a low income, older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, and historically disinvested communities of color. According to a recent study, **71% of low-income Americans faced a civil legal issue in a recent year, and the vast majority said that their issues “significantly affected their lives.”** Frequently, clients’ issues are intertwined, or they are facing more than one legal problem. Unresolved civil legal issues can cause a family teetering on the edge to spiral into poverty.

The Program

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS) **removes barriers to justice through free civil legal help, community engagement, and advocacy for equitable laws.** Our vision is for a fair legal system that is free of injustice and equitably serves underrepresented Marylanders. We believe in justice for all.



MVLS was founded in 1981 to organize volunteer attorneys to respond to the need for free legal help across our state. Since then, we’ve grown to become the **largest provider of pro bono legal services here in Maryland.** We provide legal help across six categories of civil law: family, housing, consumer, criminal record relief, estate planning, and income tax controversy. Having legal representation is often the deciding factor between someone being able to keep their home, put food on their table, or protect themselves. Approximately 54% of MVLS clients are Black and 37% are seniors. All of our clients have a household income of 50% below the Maryland median. MVLS works with a network of 1,300+ volunteer attorneys and tax professionals to match these clients with someone who can **provide full legal representation and help resolve their case.**

Over the years, our pro bono program has expanded, and in-house attorneys have joined MVLS to lead specialty programs to serve our clients. These programs, which include a **human trafficking prevention, workforce development, advance planning** (which often aims to support older adults), and other projects, complement our volunteers’ work and contributes to systemic and community-stabilizing change.

MVLS works with a large network of community partners including religious institutions, schools, hospitals, neighborhood associations, and other nonprofits who provide trusted introductions to prospective clients. We conduct proactive outreach with these partners including through **door-knocking, resource drops, know-your-rights presentations, and free legal clinics**. Community partners also help inform and guide MVLS' work, ensuring that our services represent the needs of our clients.

Additionally, and crucially, MVLS advocates for racial equality, equity, and fairness in Maryland's legal system because we see first-hand that our current system too often reinforces inequities and has an outsized negative impact on communities of color. **MVLS works with local and state lawmakers to inform the public discourse around issues of justice to elevate our clients' voices and advocate for more equitable laws.** MVLS has recently conducted advocacy around issues including ending tax sale, ensuring affordable access to water, allowing people to seek criminal record expungement, and ensuring the Black legacy homeowners can transfer their homes to the next generation.

The Impact

Civil legal aid has a proven impact on people's housing, financial and family stability. Not only are individuals more likely to prevail in their case with an attorney by their side, but they are also better off in the long term for having resolved their issues. In a study done by a legal aid organization out of Ohio, more than half of their clients attributed increased stability more than a decade later to the civil legal assistance they received. MVLS stands with over 4,000 Marylanders each year to provide this life-changing, free legal help.



No matter what issue matters most to you, it's likely that MVLS is making an impact:

- Family law efforts keep families together and help protect those among us who are most vulnerable. Family stability is particularly important to children.
- Criminal record relief is removing barriers to employment so that Marylanders can pursue stable and sustainable jobs.
- Consumer and income tax work helps people resolve ballooning debt, fight back against bad actors, and protect their limited assets to afford necessities.
- Housing and estate planning efforts are helping people stay in their homes, age in place, encouraging wealth-building in historically disinvested Black Baltimore neighborhoods, and addressing social determinants of health.

An MVLS housing client who agreed to share her story, Jaunice Stanford, was recently profiled in a US News & World Report article. She shared, "**People work all their life to be able to pass something on to their children. And then other people try to take away everything. I am fortunate because people were able to help me.**" The impact that our programs have on individuals is powerful and lifechanging.

How You Can Help

Organizations, funders, and people like you help MVLS impact the lives of our clients and stabilize the communities where we do our work by donating, volunteering, and helping us build community connections.

Make A Gift – Your donation to MVLS helps us respond to clients’ needs in real time. Whether it’s staffing the intake team, so that we can literally answer calls for help, or helping us build out specialty programs like our Workforce Development or Human Trafficking Prevention Project, we couldn’t provide legal help to the thousands of Marylanders in need without you. Gifts can be made securely online at www.mvlslaw.org/donate or by mail to Attn: Development | 201 N. Charles Street, Suite 1400, Baltimore, MD 21201. Gifts of \$500 or more are recognized in our Partner’s Club.

Champions for Justice – Join our sustaining monthly donor program and become a Champion for Justice. Our champions help MVLS plan for the future and ensure our sustainability with recurring gifts to support our core programs. www.mvlslaw.org/championsforjustice

Sponsor An Event – Organizations and individuals can help MVLS by sponsoring our events. *A Taste for Pro Bono* is our signature spring fundraiser and 100% of the event proceeds support free legal help. *Celebrate Pro Bono* is our fall volunteer recognition event and celebrates the contributions of our volunteer attorneys and tax professionals. Email Katie Sutton ksutton@mvlslaw.org to learn more.

Other Ways to Give – Thank you for supporting MVLS through your workplace giving donations, Donor Advised Fund, stock gift, the CITC Program, IOLTA reporting, Legacy Gift or another philanthropic avenue that works best for you. MVLS participates in the United Way of Central Maryland and Baltimore City Campaigns (#2420) and the Maryland Charity Campaign (#521225975).

Volunteer – If you are an attorney or tax professional, consider joining our volunteer panel and taking a case to make a direct and personal impact on Marylanders in need. MVLS offers thorough support to our volunteers, including trainings, mentorship, and advice from staff attorneys. Our [Pro Bono Portal](#) provides a real-time look at clients that you can help. Learn more and sign up to volunteer or take a case by emailing Margaret Henn, Director of Program Management, at mhenn@mvlslaw.org.

Partner – You can help connect MVLS to potential clients. If you are interested in co-hosting a training, community presentation, or resource drop, or if you have other ideas about how free legal help might benefit people in your neighborhood, please reach out to Chandler Walters, Communications & Outreach Coordinator, at cwalters@mvlslaw.org.

At MVLS, we believe in **justice for all**. Thank you for helping us make that a reality.

Contact Us

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**Know Someone Who Needs
Legal Help?** Our Client Intake
Line is open M-Th 9am-12pm
1-800-510-0050