

# Justice Running on Fumes: Analysis of the Reduction of Public Legal Services Funding in Wisconsin from 2010 to 2020 and Resulting Impacts on Indigent and Low-Income Access to Civil Legal Services and Representation in Northern Wisconsin

Amanda Foster, Legal Studies Major

Nathan LaCoursiere Senior Lecturer; Human Behavior, Justice, and Diversity

## Abstract

Northern Wisconsin is one of the most underserved areas of the country for legal services. This review highlights the substantial decline in State public funding for low-income legal services and the resulting impact on Judicare's ability to serve the upper 33 counties and 11 tribal nations of Wisconsin. This is a primary and secondary source literature, public and non-profit data analysis. The results of the analysis show: as funding has been cut, the amount of low-income cases handled every year has dropped precipitously, while the number of client requests, contacts and needs have stayed consistently high. Another finding: there is a limited number of individuals and families that qualify to use Judicare. This paper recommends further consideration of how the Wisconsin Bar works with Judicare in pro-bono and low-bono cases and possibly stipulating hour requirements for attorneys licensed in the state. Ideally, the state would go back to pre-2010 funding – if not increase that funding significantly given the State's needs. However, it's important to keep in mind: this would still leave most of the population without means or access to an attorney for civil legal services.

## Literature Review

- The Judicare Needs Assessment shows where Judicare stands today. Current issues such as one office servicing 33 counties and 11 tribal nations.
- "Not a Legal Issue" A Report on Community Legal Need includes a survey of 143 people that participated in this study as well as resource providers that the authors interviewed as local experts to find the how when trying to solve the resource issue. The issues reported as needed were on healthcare, employment, addiction treatment, transportation, technology, and eligibility for benefits like snap. The project speaks to the issues that could be solved readily through representation (legal) if it were available or more systematically through impact litigation and/or policy change.
- Legal Deserts: A Multi-State Perspective on Rural Access to Justice The main component of this publication is a survey that shows gaps in legal resources, policy response or lack of, and the availability of attorney's in those areas.

## Research/Methods

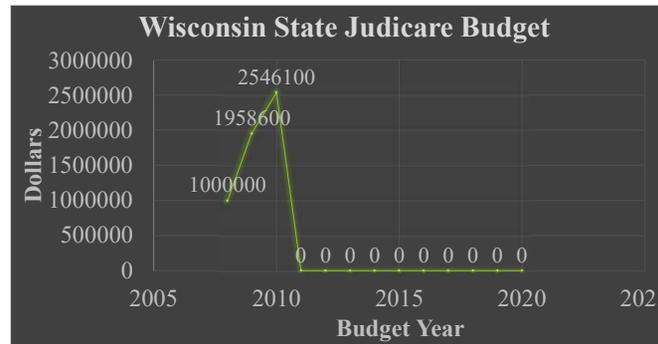
### Questions

- Is there a difference in civil legal aid services between 2010 and 2020 in Northern Wisconsin?
- Is there an impact due to state budget cuts?

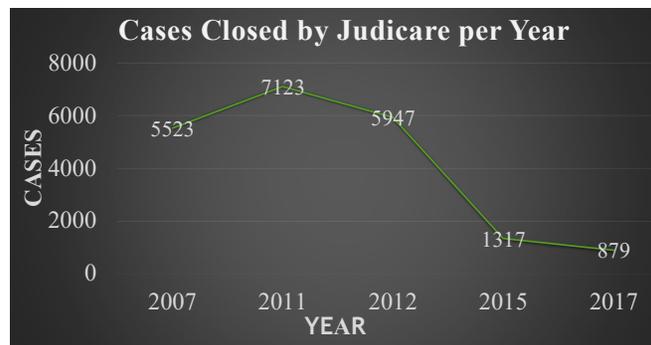
### Method

- Primary and secondary source literature, public and non-profit data analysis

## Results



- The State of Wisconsin cut the budget in 2010 from \$2,546,100 to \$0 and the general budget for civil legal services has remained zero through today
- **Budget cuts were rolled out in 2013 and Between 2012 and 2015 there was a 77% drop in the number of cases closed by Judicare**
- Judicare Card system abolished in 2013 and changed to primarily in house Judicare staff handling cases
- 36% of on staff attorney's with Judicare have worked for Judicare less than one year
- Only 16% of residents qualify for Judicare
- **Less than half (40% of applications received (4190) were accepted per year**



## Discussion

- The change in Judicare's distribution of resources that was implemented in 2013 may have more to do with the cases closed than the budget. What is unknown to the public is if the change in distribution was implemented because of the budget cuts.
- Further review to find how big the gap is between this and being able to comfortably afford a private attorney would show how underserved Northern Wisconsin is or isn't in a more tangible way.



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## Contact Information

afoster9@uwsuper.edu  
[www.linkedin.com/in/fosteramandag](http://www.linkedin.com/in/fosteramandag)