



MARYLAND
LEGAL AID

Advancing
Human Rights and
Justice for All

2018 International Forum on Legal Aid:

Legal Services for Women and Children

(Topic 5A)

Wilhelm H. Joseph Jr., Esq.

Executive Director - Maryland Legal Aid

Legal Services for Women and Children

Who is Maryland Legal Aid?

- Established in 1911
- Private, non-profit law firm providing free civil legal services to people who are low-income statewide
- 12 full-service offices and 6 self-help centers
- Most clients have incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines
- In 2018, this amounts to \$25,795 for a family of three



Legal Services for Women and Children

What we do?

Expungement of criminal records

Family

Child advocacy

Consumer

Education

Employment

Housing

Health care

Government (public) benefits

As a full-service law firm, Maryland Legal Aid is able to address clients' issues from a holistic perspective. The problems clients experience often stem from their poverty and are interrelated. Without access to government benefits for which clients are eligible, for example, clients may not be able to afford appropriate housing or be able to pay their debts.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Legal Assistance Provided:

- Preventing unlawful evictions
- Advocating for improvement of substandard housing
- Acquiring needed health care
- Obtaining disability and other income assistance
- Maintaining custody of children and obtaining, preserving, and increasing child support
- Preventing foreclosures or mitigating their effects
- Recovering unpaid wages
- Remedying fraudulent sales practices, predatory contracts and financial fraud
- Restoring utilities
- Dealing with debts and debt collectors
- Resolving subsidized housing problems
- Obtaining unemployment benefits
- Gaining protection against domestic violence
- Securing educational services
- Expunging criminal records to remove barriers to obtaining housing, employment, and child custody



Legal Services for Women and Children

The United States government has signed several human rights related international conventions, most of which have not been ratified by Congress.

Despite this, Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) has made a concerted effort to provide legal aid services in line with international human rights conventions and declarations.



Legal Services for Women and Children

International Covenants, Conventions and Declarations applicable to MLA's work

- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights



Legal Services for Women and Children

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

Discrimination against women is defined as:

“any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field.”



Legal Services for Women and Children

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

This convention endorses:

1. Equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life;
2. The affirmation of reproductive rights of women and recognizes culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations;
3. The elimination of domestic violence;
4. Taking appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

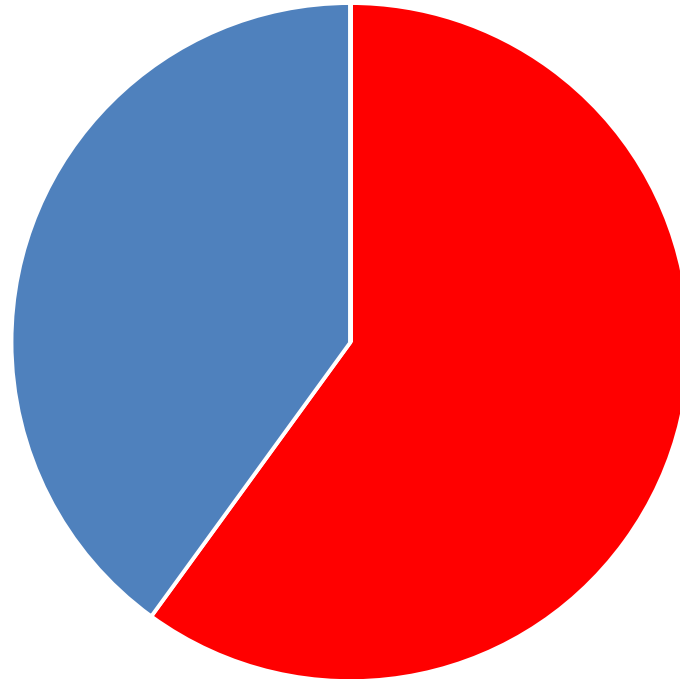
Within the Declaration of Human Rights, this encompasses:

1. The right to housing
2. The right to living wage jobs
3. The right to income security in the event of unemployment
4. The right to health care



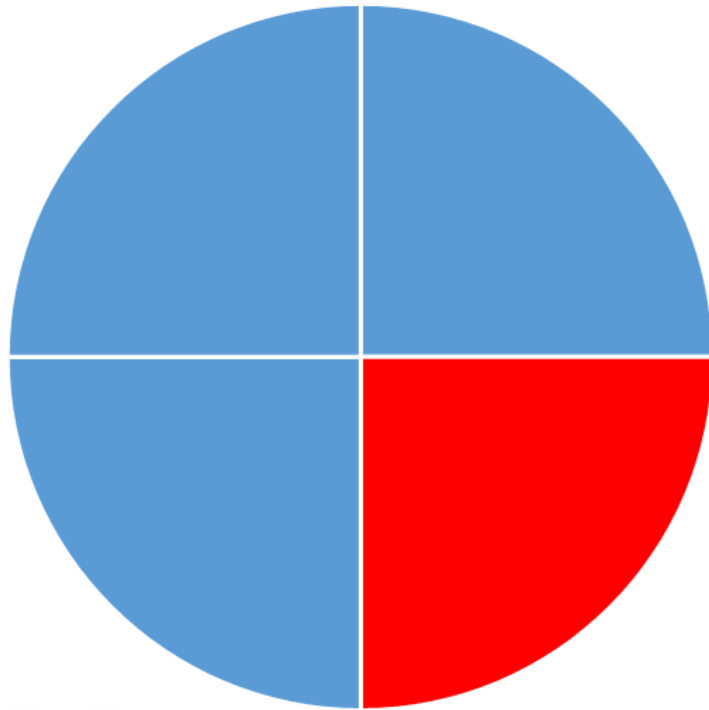
Women in Poverty and Domestic Violence in the U.S.

50-60% of women receiving welfare have been victims of domestic violence as adults.

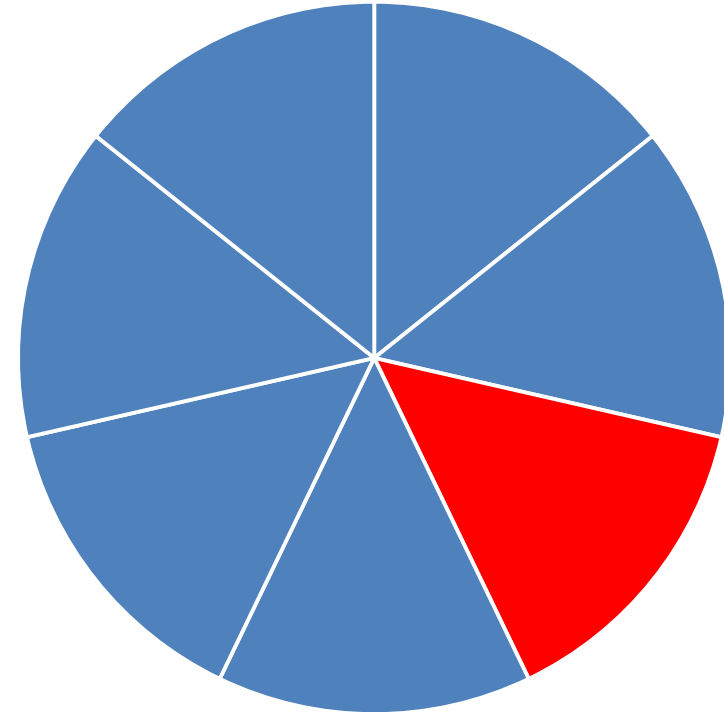


Dating Violence in the U.S.

1 in 4 women report having been victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner.

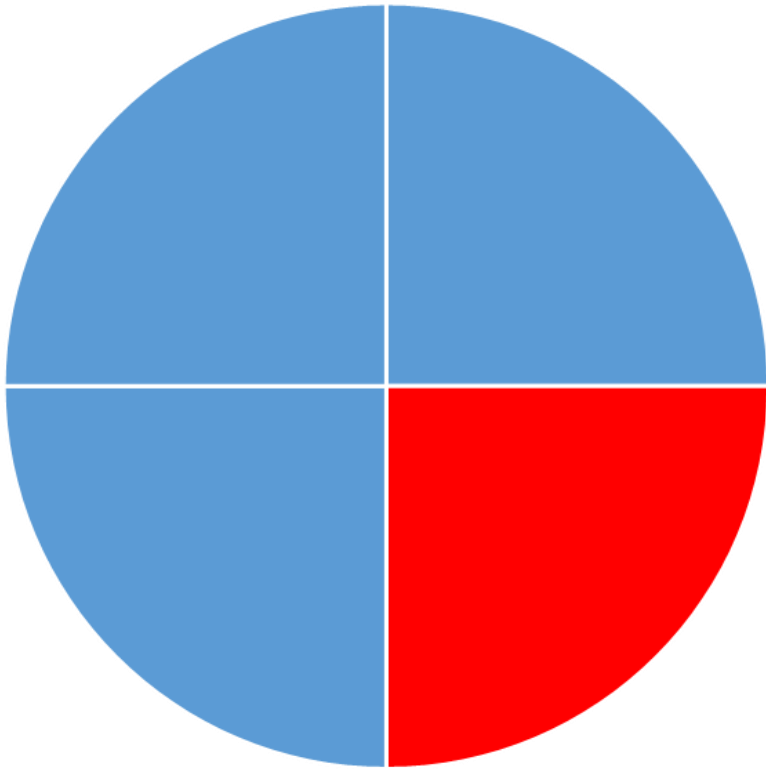


Compared to 1 in 7 men who report having been victims of severe physical violence by intimate partners. Women still report being abused at almost twice the rate of men.

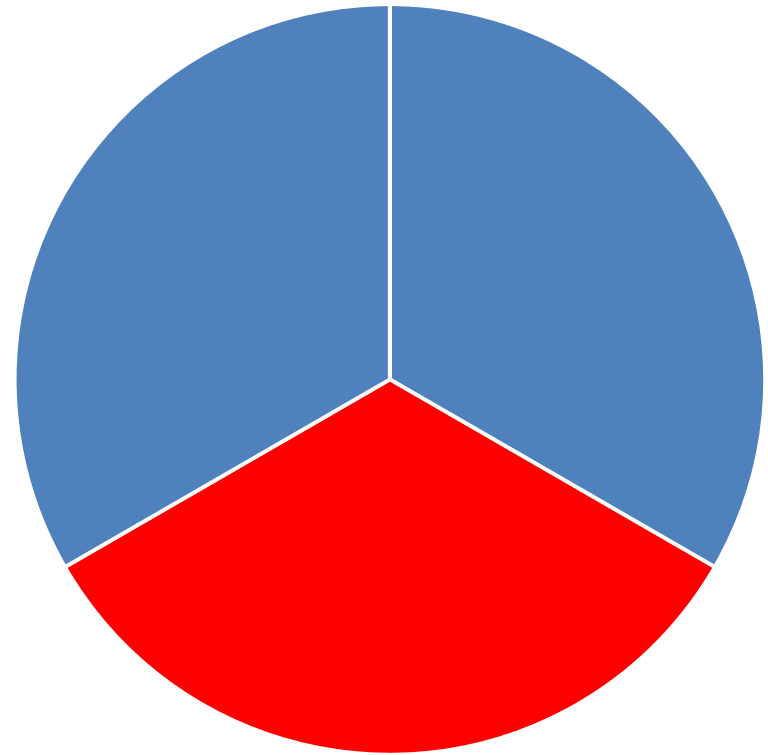


Dating Violence in Maryland

1 in 4 men in Maryland have experienced some form of physical violence.



1 in 3 women in Maryland have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.



Legal Services for Women and Children

MLA Programs Benefitting Women and Children

- Children in Need of Assistance (“CINA”)
- Victims of Crime Act Grant (“VOCA”)
- Legal Assistance to Victims Grant (“LAV”)
- STOP Violence Against Women Act Grant (“VAWA”)
- Legal Assistance to Victims sub-grant from Tahirih Justice Center
- Victims of Crime Act sub-grant from Prince George’s County Family Justice Center (PGCFJC)
- Violence Against Women S*T*O*P Formula sub-grant from PGCFJC



Legal Services for Women and Children



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CHILDREN IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE

Pursuant to a negotiated contract with the State of Maryland, MLA represents foster children in counties all across Maryland.

Every foster child in Maryland is appointed an attorney. MLA represents over 5,500 Maryland children who have been abused and neglected.

MLA Advocates:

- Complete mandatory yearly training
- Represent children at all court hearings
- Support the child's legal issue at the appellate level;
- Visit children at home, work, school and in the community
- Attend ancillary meetings, such as education, placement, mediation etc.
- Monitor and participate in legislative hearings that may affect client's lives.



Legal Services for Women and Children



Break The
SILENCE
Against Domestic Violence



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Legal Services for Women and Children

Federal and State Resources

Maryland Legal Aid receives over **\$6.6 Million** in grant funding and contracts for legal services specifically targeting populations that are overwhelmingly women and children.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Abuse is not monolithic and comes in many forms..



Legal Services for Women and Children

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

In partnership with two Baltimore City/Baltimore County service providers (TurnAround, Inc. and CHANA), MLA facilitates efforts to protect the rights of survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and/or elder abuse through legal advocacy, intervention, outreach, and education.

Through this project, MLA co-locates a full-time staff attorney and a full-time paralegal at TurnAround, Inc. to provide civil legal services to victims of sexual assault and/or domestic violence, and co-locates a full-time staff attorney and full-time paralegal at CHANA to provide civil legal services to victims of elder abuse.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Legal Assistance to Victims (LAV)

In partnership with TurnAround, Inc., MLA provides high quality civil legal representation to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence so that they will have greater access to the justice system, know legal rights, and, thereby, feel empowered to regain control of their lives, heal and recover.

The project's goal is to address the issues of sexual assault and domestic violence and the gaps in service by providing comprehensive, holistic, and trauma-informed civil legal representation to underserved victims of sexual assault and domestic violence in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Through this project, MLA co-locates a full-time staff attorney and a full-time paralegal at TurnAround, Inc. to provide civil legal services. The project also funds a full-time legal advocate at TurnAround, Inc.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Violence Against Women S*T*O*P Formula Grant (STOP VAWA)

In partnership with the Women's Law Center's Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project (MEDOVI), Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) provides free, culturally sensitive civil legal services and immigration assistance to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in the Metropolitan Baltimore area.

This project provides enhanced legal services to victims with legal issues related to their victimization, including immigration assistance, child support, custody, unemployment compensation, and/or housing related matters. Program funds are used to support a portion of a full-time staff attorney and a portion of a bi-lingual paralegal at MLA, and a portion of a bi-lingual legal advocate at MEDOVI.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Our partners:

- TurnAround Inc.
- CHANA
- Prince George's County Family Justice Center
- Tahirih Justice Center
- Women's Law Center

They provide numerous assistance to our clients, including, but not limited to, access to emergency housing, food, clothing, counseling, court accompaniment, and assistance with utilities etc.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Collaborations with other Human Services Agencies:

At the Tahirih Justice Center, MLA provides legal services to immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking.

At Prince George's County Family Justice Center, a MLA staff attorney works a portion of each week at the PGCFJC, providing civil legal representation, brief advice and information to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and elder abuse.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. A

§ 1681, et. seq. states:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Title IX provisions include addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence



Legal Services for Women and Children

Victims' Rights and Title IV Case

MLA's Victim Assistance Program represented a client in a Victim's Rights case. This was a case involving a minor victim and minor Defendants and the crime occurred at a school. The Defendants were asserting that the sexual content was consensual. The Defendants eventually entered an Alfred Plea and were sentenced. The Defense attorney was very aggressive and our advocacy was invaluable in this matter.

After the incident, the MLA advocate also assisted the client with a proper school placement to meet the client's individual educational needs. Due to strong advocacy the child was placed in an educational setting with more support.



Legal Services for Women and Children

Family Law Case

MLA's represented a client who was a victim of rape by her husband. She was seeking an absolute divorce, custody, support, alimony, and marital interest in his retirement funds. MLA advocates went to trial and the Judge awarded the client an absolute divorce on the grounds of cruelty and excessively vicious conduct, full physical and legal custody of the minor child; child support; rehabilitative alimony for three years; and 50% of the husband's retirement fund (which resulted in our client receiving in excess of \$45,000 in addition to child support)!!





Through the provision of legal assistance benefiting women and children, MLA promotes human rights and justice for all.



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