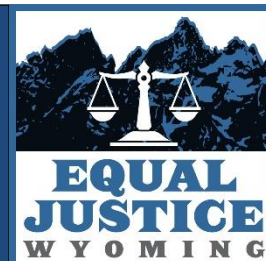


# Equal Justice Wyoming

## Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2017



*"There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has."*

- **Hugo L. Black, U.S. Supreme Court Justice**

### Board of Commissioners

Patrick Day, Outgoing President

Stuart Day, Incoming President

Cathy Duncil, Incoming Vice-President

Jacquelyn Bridgeman, Incoming  
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Aronowitz

(Term expired June 2017)

Timothy O. Beppler

(Term expired June 2017)

Brad Bonner

Ray Fleming Dinneen

(Term expired June 2017)

Jennifer Hanft

Katie Hogarty (Appointed July 2017)

Mary Johnson (Term expired June 2017)

Tyson Logan (Appointed July 2017)

Tom Lubnau, II

Monica Vozakis (Appointed July 2017)

### Ex Officio Members

Walter F. Eggers, III

Robert Jarosh

Ronda Munger

### Staff

Angie Dorsch, Executive Director

Liz Hutchinson, Staff Attorney/Pro Bono  
Coordinator

Sheryl Knight, Administrative Assistant

Aaron Varner, Staff Attorney/IT Project  
Manager

Jessica Wales, Administrative Assistant



### Message from the Executive Director

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and Staff of Equal Justice Wyoming ("Equal Justice"), I am pleased to report on our progress during the 2017 fiscal year ending June 30, 2017.

Pro bono attorneys play an essential role in the delivery of legal services to low-income individuals. This year, two programs utilizing volunteer attorneys greatly expanded access to legal help.

The Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) Program is an excellent example of the impact our volunteers have in their communities. Over the past year, with the support of local bar associations and the Access to Justice Commission, we have been able to expand the VRA from a single-site pilot project to a five-county program. In total, the program assisted 336 people in 2017. We look forward

to the continued expansion of the VRA program to new areas of the state so that even more people will have access to legal help.

In partnership with the American Bar Association, we also launched Wyoming Free Legal Answers (WFLA), [wyoming.freelegalanswers.org](http://wyoming.freelegalanswers.org), an online platform that screens applicants for income eligibility and allows eligible individuals to submit questions via a secure portal. Licensed Wyoming attorneys then log in and answer the questions. This expands the availability of legal advice to every corner of the state. In FY 2017, 153 legal questions were answered through the portal.

Because of the continued expansion of the programs and sources of assistance that Equal Justice and our grantees offer, more people than ever received some form of legal help in the past fiscal year. In FY 2017, 4,045 persons received assistance from Equal Justice and the programs we fund.

Although we have greatly expanded legal information and advice through our new programs, we still have a long way to go. The limited resources that are available meet only a fraction of the need. And as uncertainty looms over the fate of federal funding for civil legal aid, it is more important than ever that our state continues our commitment to the promise of equal to justice for all.

**4,045 people served with legal services and self-help assistance in FY 2017**

We would like to thank all of the dedicated volunteers and staff of legal aid programs for their work over the past year. Equal justice for all is impossible without their tireless efforts. In FY 2017, 46 lawyers accepted at least one pro bono case, 54 volunteered at a free legal clinic, 46 served as a VRA, and 17 answered questions on WFLA. In total, 694 people received help from a volunteer lawyer through these programs.

- Angie Dorsch

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## Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

### Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

In March 2016, Equal Justice launched the Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) pilot program in Cheyenne, placing pro bono attorneys in the Laramie County Courthouse to assist self-represented litigants. The attorneys provide legal information, explain court procedures, and assist litigants completing pro se forms. The program quickly became a success, and

**336 individuals assisted by  
46 Volunteer Reference Attorneys**

over the past year, Equal Justice has worked, in cooperation with the Access to Justice Commission and local bar associations, to expand the program to new areas of the state. In November 2016, Equal Justice launched the VRA program in Casper, and then expanded it again in May 2017 to include Laramie, Sheridan, and Rawlins. A reference attorney is available in the courthouses of each of the five counties on the first and third Thursday of each month from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. The program assisted 336 people in FY 2017.

## Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The new Wyoming Free Legal Answers portal, at [wyoming.freelegalanswers.org](http://wyoming.freelegalanswers.org), was launched in August 2016, in partnership with the American Bar Association, to offer free legal advice online. The online platform screens applicants for income eligibility and allows eligible individuals to submit civil legal questions via a secure portal. Attorneys licensed to practice law in Wyoming are able to register as volunteers on the site. The volunteer attorneys then log in and can answer legal questions that have been submitted by low-income individuals. Equal Justice provides the day-to-day administrative functions for the site, including ensuring that only Wyoming licensed attorneys in good standing are given access to answer questions on the site and ensure that only civil questions are asked. Equal Justice also sends weekly updates to the volunteer lawyers, including supplemental resources for both lawyers and clients.



The portal is an important resource that reaches Wyomingites in rural and underserved areas of the state. It is also an innovative tool that allows flexibility for busy attorneys to contribute pro bono services anytime, anywhere they have an internet connection. Since its launch, pro bono attorneys have answered 153 questions submitted on the portal. 68% of the advice received through the portal was in response to family law questions.

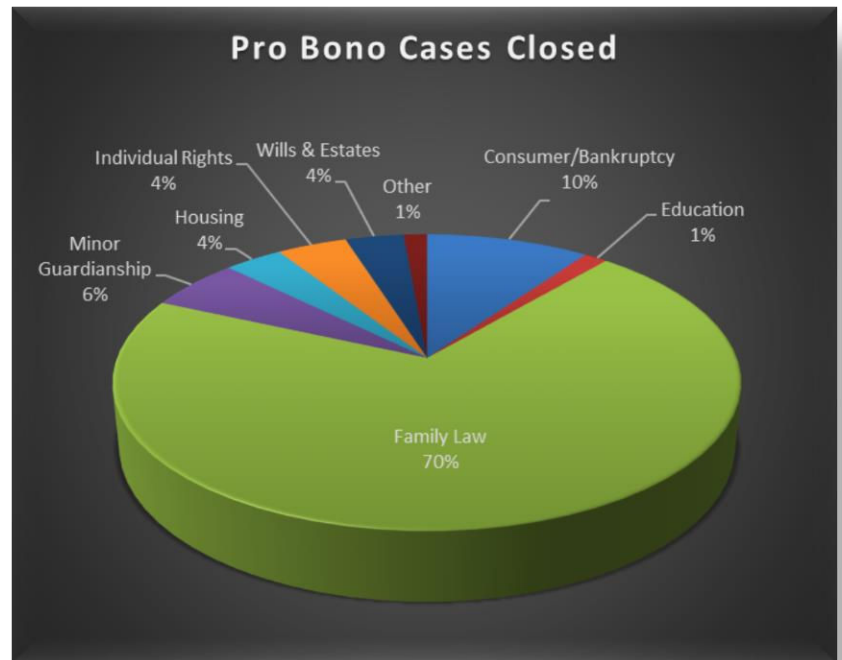
**153 legal questions answered by  
17 volunteer attorneys on  
[wyoming.freelegalanswers.org](http://wyoming.freelegalanswers.org)**

## Volunteer Lawyers Program

Equal Justice manages the statewide Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) in partnership with the Wyoming State Bar. Over the past year, we continued our work to increase pro bono legal services. We strive to provide resources and support to encourage and enable attorneys to undertake pro bono legal services for low-income clients. The types of assistance available through the VLP ranges from advice and brief services to full-representation of clients. Monthly clinics are held in Cheyenne with periodic clinics held in other locations throughout the state in collaboration with local bar associations. Equal Justice also held a clinic in collaboration with the UW law school's Equal Justice Club and the Downtown Clinic, a healthcare clinic in Laramie. Equal Justice is in the process of launching regular clinics at that location.

Not all applications that are accepted by Equal Justice can be placed with an attorney. The requests for assistance far outpace the number of available pro bono attorneys. However, 142 cases were closed during the FY 2017, and an additional 63 cases remain open, are placed with a volunteer attorney, and are receiving legal services. Therefore, a total

of 205 legal matters were handled during the FY 2017. An additional 15 applications that were submitted remain open awaiting possible placement with a pro bono attorney.



**205 cases handled by pro bono attorneys**  
**46 attorneys accepted at least one pro bono case**  
**54 attorneys volunteered at a free legal clinic**

## Training and Support for Pro Bono and Legal Aid Attorneys

Equal Justice holds free CLEs throughout the year to provide training on the areas of law that are the most common among our target population. We offered three live, in-person CLEs and nine live webinars in FY 2017. Four of the CLEs were made available specifically as training for legal aid attorneys and the others were available for all attorneys. We had a total of 1,147 attendees at our CLEs. The webinars

**1,147 attendees at Equal Justice sponsored CLEs**

we host are archived and available on our Pro Bono Portal for our volunteer attorneys to access at any time. There are a variety of resources on the Portal, such as sample pleadings and toolkits. Equal Justice also has a pool of volunteer mentor attorneys who are willing to mentor less experienced attorneys taking a pro bono case. In addition to these resources, Equal Justice provides professional liability insurance to cover our volunteers for any case or activity they undertake through our program. We hope these resources and support make it easier for attorneys to provide pro bono legal services.

## Volunteer Attorney and Law Firm Receive Pro Bono Awards

The Cheyenne law firm of Woodhouse Roden Nethercott, LLC received the Wyoming State Bar's 2016 Pro Bono Award for Legal Services for Indigent Clients. The firm regularly accepts pro bono cases through the Volunteer Lawyers Program, as well as volunteering as a firm to provide legal advice at Equal Justice's free legal advice clinics.

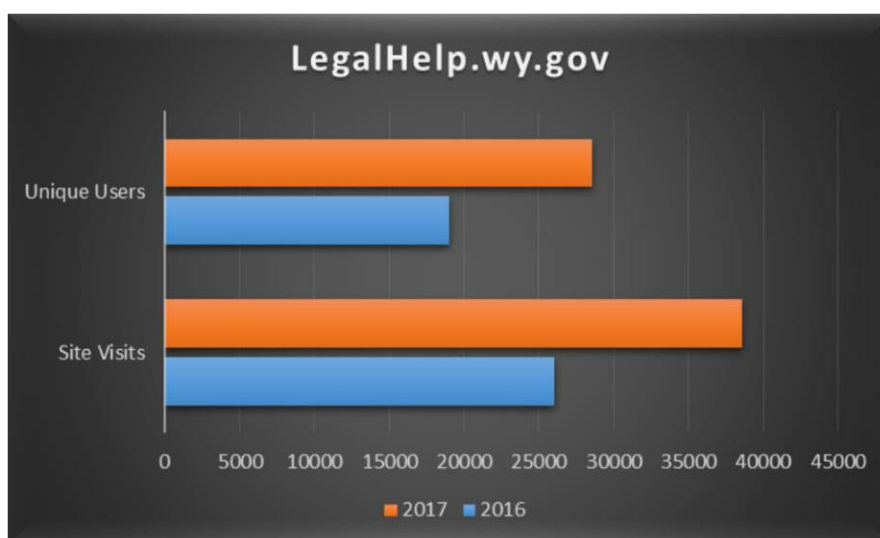
In addition, solo attorney, Billie Ruth Edwards, posthumously received the Wyoming State Bar's Pro Bono Award in 2016. Billie helped numerous pro bono clients and continued to work on cases for the Volunteer Lawyers Program until just weeks before her death. She was also a mentor attorney for other volunteers. Her dedication and passion for helping the less fortunate will always be remembered by the staff of Equal Justice and members of the Wyoming State Bar.

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## Self-Help Resources and Legal Information

### [www.LegalHelp.wy.gov](http://www.LegalHelp.wy.gov)

Equal Justice launched our legal information website in November 2012. Since that time, we have continually expanded the site and updated the content to provide information, resources, videos, online classrooms, and forms that address the most common civil legal issues faced by our target population. Traffic on the website continues to steadily increase with an especially large increase over last year. In FY 2017,



**38,549 site visits and 28,558 unique users**

there were 38,549 visits to the site, compared to about 26,000 in 2016, which is a 47% increase in traffic to the site. The site was visited by 28,558 unique users in 2017, compared to about 19,000 unique users in 2016, a 48% increase. The website is an important tool that allows the public to understand their legal rights and access legal information in plain language.

## LiveChat

Although there are a limited number of self-help centers and Volunteer Reference Attorney locations where people can get help finding appropriate legal resources in person, many in Wyoming are not near in-person assistance. In order to help people find the information they need remotely, Equal Justice's website has a LiveChat feature that can help people navigate our expansive website to find the legal resources they need. The LiveChat is somewhat like a remote self-help center in that it doesn't

**275 visitors to [www.legalhelp.wy.gov](http://www.legalhelp.wy.gov) received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator**

offer legal advice, but instead helps people navigate to appropriate information and resources. In FY 2017, 275 visitors to the website received assistance from a trained LiveChat operator.

The majority of the LiveChat volunteers are law students. We also utilize an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) member to help provide training on the LiveChat software and manage the volunteers' schedules.

## Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center

The Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center (WISE), at [wise.courts.state.wy.us](http://wise.courts.state.wy.us), is an extensive undertaking with the long-term goal that all court approved forms can be filled in using an automated interview. Divorce forms are currently available on the site. The program walks users through a series of questions and, using the answers the user provides, generates legal documents that can be filed in court to obtain a divorce. The program works similar to TurboTax and helps reduce the time it takes to complete the forms, and increases accuracy of the forms pro se litigants submit to the court. Based on changes in the law, the online forms and interview are currently being updated along with the software used for the document automation. We are in the testing phase of the updated divorce forms and hope to launch several new automated pro se packets over the next year. In the past year, 864 new users created an account. Of those users, 271 used an automated interview and 124 printed court documents that were created using WISE.

**864 new users created an account  
271 used automated interviews  
124 printed completed court forms**

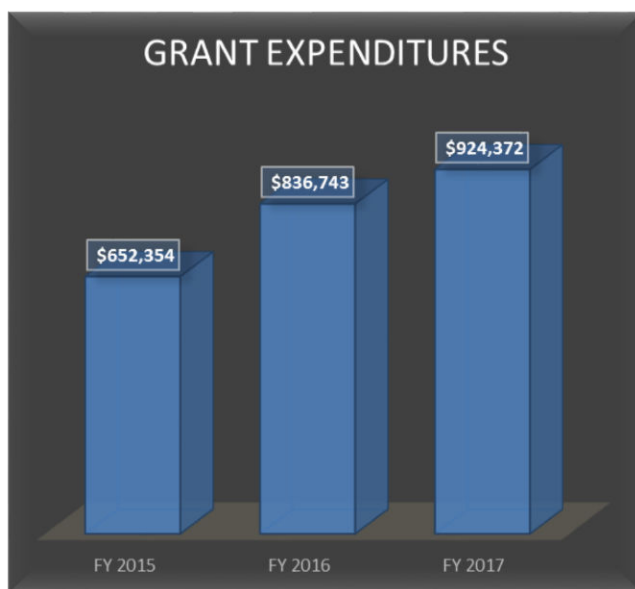


## Outreach

The staff of Equal Justice also engages in outreach to help people know their rights and to increase public awareness of available legal resources and programs. Staff held eight outreach events at various organizations, such as CLIMB Wyoming, Dads Making a Difference, Homeless Veterans Stand Down, and presentations at public libraries. We also partnered with the UW College of Law Civil Legal Services Clinic to hold an outreach at the Salvation Army. Through these outreach events, about 268 individuals learned about legal rights, available resources, and how to address their legal issues. The staff also provides outreach to social service providers and community partners. For instance, Equal Justice staff provided a training for public library staff to better familiarize librarians with legal resources that are available for library patrons with legal questions. Our staff will continue with these outreach efforts.

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## Supporting Statewide Civil Legal Services through Grants



The mission of Equal Justice to provide a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is largely carried out through our grants to legal service organizations. We are the largest single source of funding for civil legal services in Wyoming. In FY 2017, we provided \$924,372 in grants. Our grantees used the funds to provide legal assistance to eligible individuals throughout the state on a wide variety of civil matters. 3,076 eligible clients received legal services through the grant programs we fund.

**\$924,372 provided in grants**

## Legal Aid of Wyoming

Legal Aid of Wyoming is a statewide legal service provider. Equal Justice awarded three grants to Legal Aid of Wyoming that have expanded legal services to underserved areas of the state.

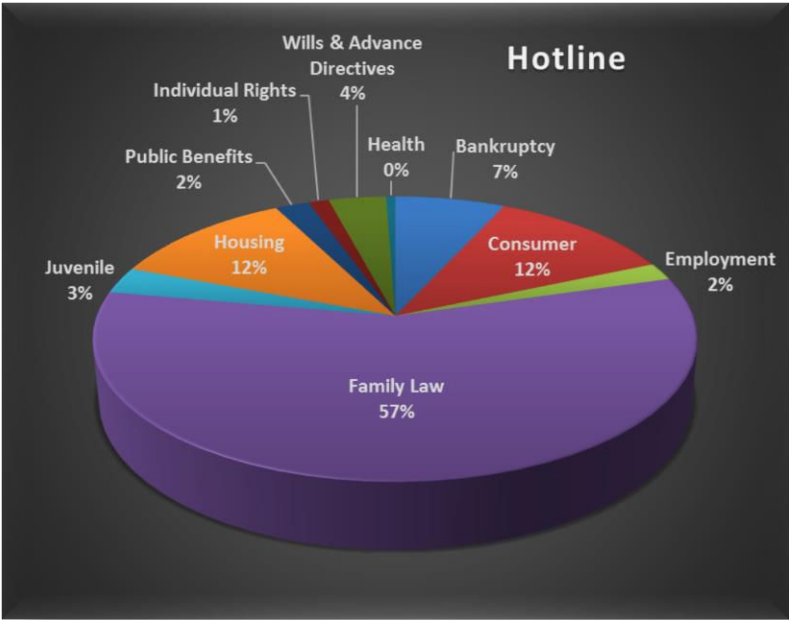
### Statewide Legal Advice and Intake Hotline Grant

Equal Justice has partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming to ensure individuals across the state have access to the advice of a lawyer through a hotline, which has been in operation since November 2012. Legal Aid of Wyoming operates the hotline Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The

hotline is a lifeline for many people in rural areas that have limited ability to go to a legal aid office. The hotline number is widely distributed by court clerks and librarians to people who are looking for legal advice and assistance.

The hotline is an effective and efficient way to provide advice and answers to legal questions across

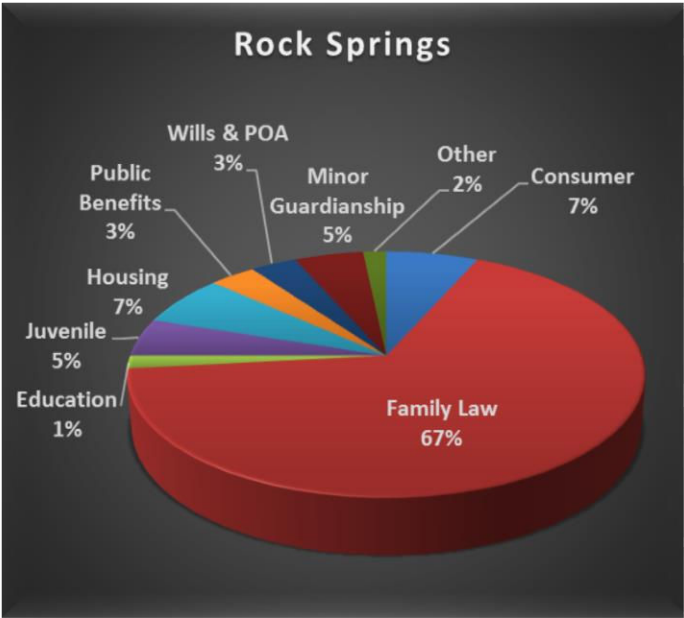
the entire state, including rural and underserved areas. In addition to providing legal advice, the hotline is also a central point to apply for legal services. Clients are screened for eligibility before any advice or services are provided, and an application is then taken. The hotline assists people from every county in Wyoming.



**2,604 callers received legal help from a hotline attorney**

**Rock Springs (Southwest Wyoming) Grant**

In June 2013, Equal Justice partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming, awarding a grant specifically to expand services to the southwest corner of Wyoming to open a legal aid office in that area of the state for the first time. Since the launch of the program, Equal Justice has continued to provide the necessary funds to maintain a full-time attorney in Rock Springs to serve Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Uinta Counties. The office space for the attorney is generously donated by the Sweetwater County Family Justice Center, which is a one-stop help center for victims of family violence. This partnership with the local community helps make it possible to expand services while leveraging the limited grant funds that are available.

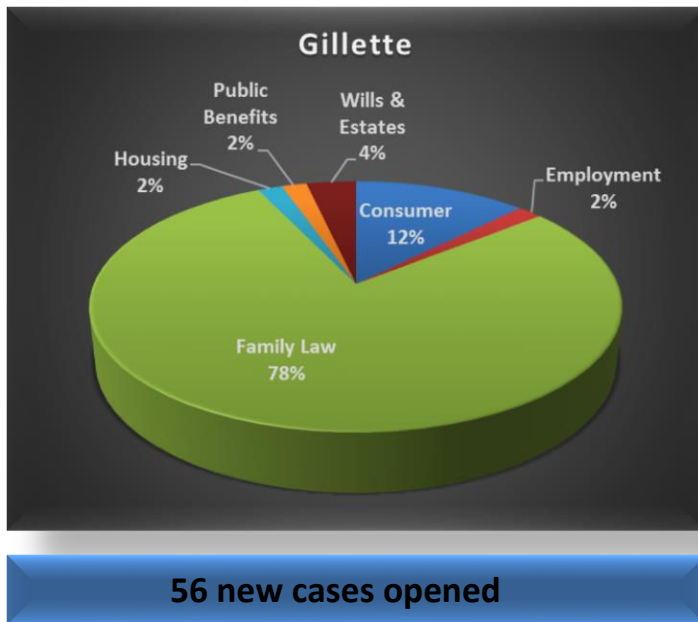


**60 new cases opened**



## Gillette (Northeast Wyoming) Grant

The northeast corner of Wyoming had never had a legal aid office until September 2013, when a grant from Equal Justice provided the resources for a full-time legal aid attorney in Gillette for the first time.

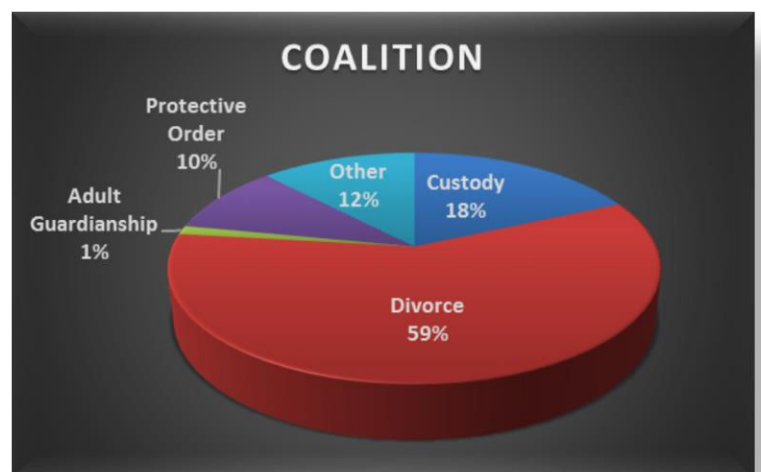


Equal Justice focused on the successful model of the Rock Springs expansion to leverage limited resources. Equal Justice approached the Council of Community Services in Gillette, who agreed to donate the office space for the attorney's office. The Council of Community Services is a one-stop shop for a variety of social services for low-income individuals. An onsite attorney adds to the comprehensive set of available services. The attorney provides services to Campbell, Crook, Johnson, Sheridan, and Weston Counties.

## Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

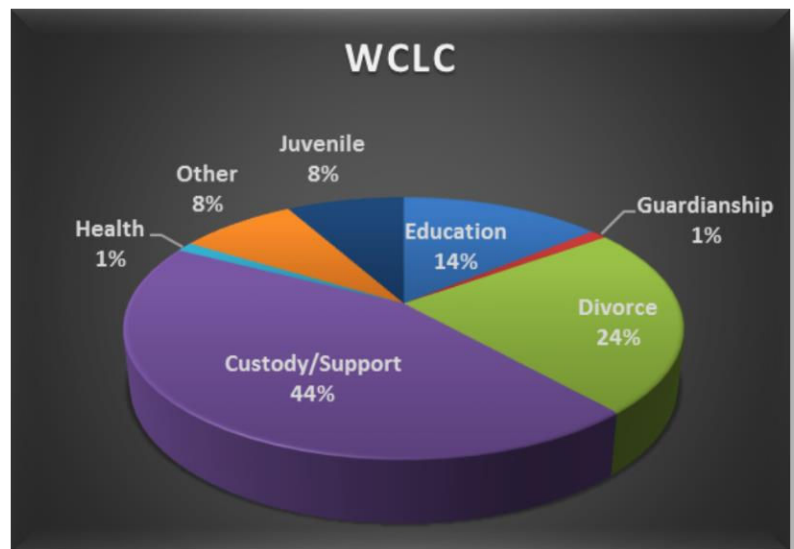
The Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault ("the Coalition") is a statewide legal aid provider serving victims of abuse. The services the Coalition provides are vital to protect victims from further harm. The services they offer go beyond getting protective orders. The Coalition provides holistic services to help victims with all issues related to the abuse, including cases such as divorce or custody, which help protect victims from further abuse.

Equal Justice has provided substantial funding to support the work of the Coalition since 2012. The funds have expanded the availability of legal services and support the opening of a satellite office in Cody that was opened in 2016. We fund two full-time attorneys and a portion of a third attorney. The Coalition opened 45 new cases and handled an additional 37 which remained open from the previous year.



## Wyoming Children's Law Center

The Wyoming Children's Law Center (WCLC) provides legal services in cases involving children and families in a variety of areas of law. For example, the WCLC provides advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled, represents children with special needs, and handles family law cases. Last fiscal year, the WCLC hired an additional full-time attorney, which was made possible with the grant funds from Equal Justice. WCLC opened 22 new cases in FY 2017 and handled an additional 64 cases that were still pending from the previous year.

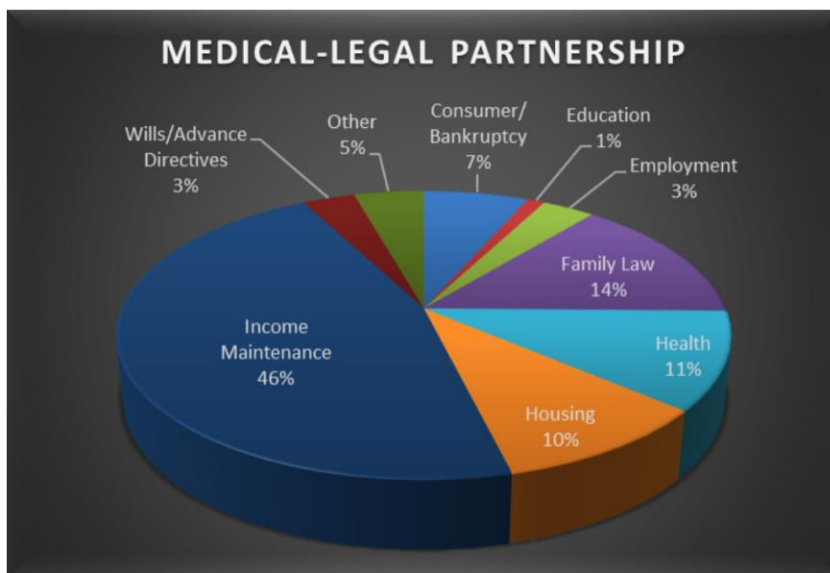


**86 cases handled in FY 2017**

## Laramie County Community Partnership

The Laramie County Community Partnership ("LCCP") received a grant from Equal Justice to launch Wyoming's first Medical-Legal Partnership ("MLP"). MLPs are quickly expanding across the country to

address health-harming legal issues. The MLP addresses a wide range of legal issues ranging from legal help to have a landlord address mold that is causing asthma attacks to helping clients receive benefits under their health insurance or public benefits to which they are entitled in order to obtain and pay for medical care or necessary medications. The MLP places a lawyer into the medical team to identify and address patients' legal needs to improve their health. The MLP

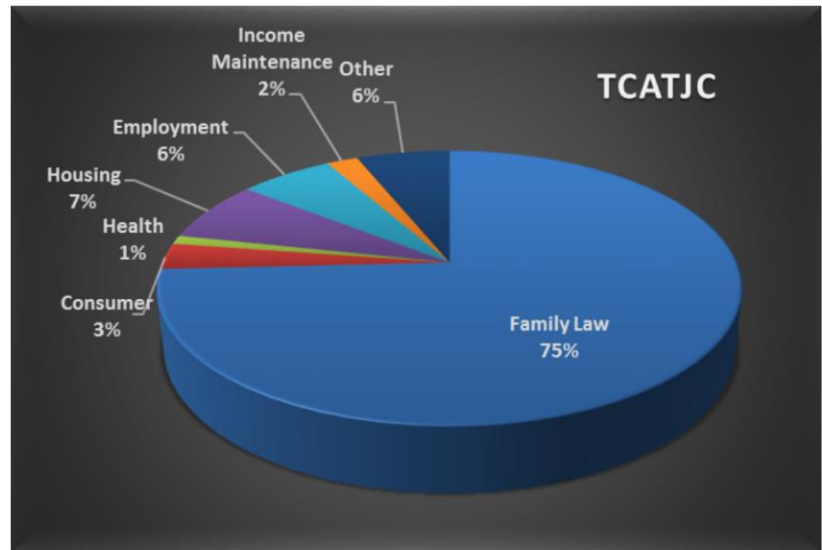


**91 new cases opened in FY 2017**

entered into a partnership with HealthWorks clinic in Cheyenne, but also receives referrals from other health care providers. The MLP fully launched in September 2016 when they began taking cases. Since its launch, the MLP provided services to address 91 legal matters.

## Teton County Access to Justice Center

The Teton County Access to Justice Center (“TCATJC”) was launched in 2012 with funding from Equal Justice. The TCATJC is housed in space donated by Teton County and shares the space with the county law library. The TCATJC provides legal information and self-help services to Teton, Sublette, and Lincoln Counties. Eligible applicants may also apply for legal representation through a panel of private contract attorneys who provide legal services at no charge to the client. The services are paid at a reduced rate from the Equal Justice grant funds. The TCATJC opened 97 new cases for services from an attorney and had two cases that remained open from last year that were still being handled.



**99 cases handled in FY 2017**

## Summary

Equal Justice continually strives to leverage our limited resources to provide legal services to as many low-income individuals as possible. Over the past year we have been successful in utilizing volunteers to help expand services, but we are meeting only a fraction of the legal needs of the low-income in our state. Too many people are forced to appear in court without an attorney because they simply cannot afford a lawyer. Although we hope to make it easier for self-represented individuals to navigate the civil justice system, we will also look for additional ways to expand full-representation for more individuals.

We also made progress this year with the launch of a new online platform for legal assistance. In the coming years, we will continue to look towards technology as a way to bridge the divide in access to legal service in rural and underserved areas as we strive to meet our mission to expand legal services throughout the state.

## Financial Summary

The revenue generated from filing fees which provide the funding for Equal Justice decreased in the 2017 fiscal year. In the coming years, Equal Justice will continue to closely monitor any changes in the special revenue that funds our programs. We have funds available to meet our obligations and remain within our spending authority.

The largest change in spending from the 2016 fiscal year was an increase of \$87,629 in grant expenditures. This accounts for the majority of the increased spending in the 2017 fiscal year.

## Additional Revenue

In 2015, Equal Justice also began receiving additional funding from the increase in pro hac vice fees paid by out of state attorneys. The Wyoming State Bar increased the fees by \$200 with 100% of the increased fee going to Equal Justice Wyoming to help support civil legal services. The fees generate approximately \$30,000 per year and are earmarked to be used for grants. We sincerely appreciate the State Bar's support for access to justice. As we continue to add new resources, programs, and initiatives, we will also continue to explore additional funding to support our work.

## Summary of Expenditures

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Salaries and Benefits | \$346,025 |
|-----------------------|-----------|

|                           |          |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Office Expense and Travel | \$26,672 |
|---------------------------|----------|

|                    |         |
|--------------------|---------|
| Telecommunications | \$3,122 |
|--------------------|---------|

### Grants

|                      |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Legal Aid of Wyoming | \$393,040 |
|----------------------|-----------|

|                                                              |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault | \$306,419 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

|                               |          |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Wyoming Children's Law Center | \$69,500 |
|-------------------------------|----------|

|                                       |          |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Teton County Access to Justice Center | \$95,371 |
|---------------------------------------|----------|

|                                      |          |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Laramie County Community Partnership | \$60,042 |
|--------------------------------------|----------|

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Special Services | \$2,649 |
|------------------|---------|

|               |                    |
|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Total*</b> | <b>\$1,302,840</b> |
|---------------|--------------------|

\*Total includes the June 2017 grant expenditures which were paid in July 2017.

**Vision** - Equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming.

**Mission** - Serving the legal needs of low-income persons of Wyoming through community engagement, education, information, and expansion of legal services throughout the state.

**Equal Justice Wyoming**

**2300 Capitol Ave. 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002**

**[www.equaljustice.wy.gov](http://www.equaljustice.wy.gov)**