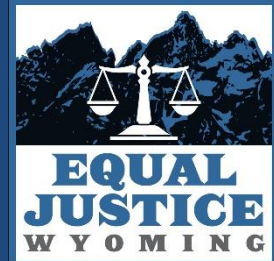


# Equal Justice Wyoming

## Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court July 2024



*"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

Jennifer Hanft, President  
Cathy Duncil, Vice-President  
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Elisa Butler, Ex Officio  
Walter Eggers, III, Ex Officio  
Shawn Wilde, Ex Officio

### Staff

Angie Dorsch, Executive Director  
Leora Hoshall, VISTA Supervisor  
Jessica Wales, Administrative Assistant  
Henry Wisdorf, Staff Attorney/IT Project Manager

**3,946 matters addressed  
through legal services and self-  
help assistance in FY 2024**



### Message from the Executive Director

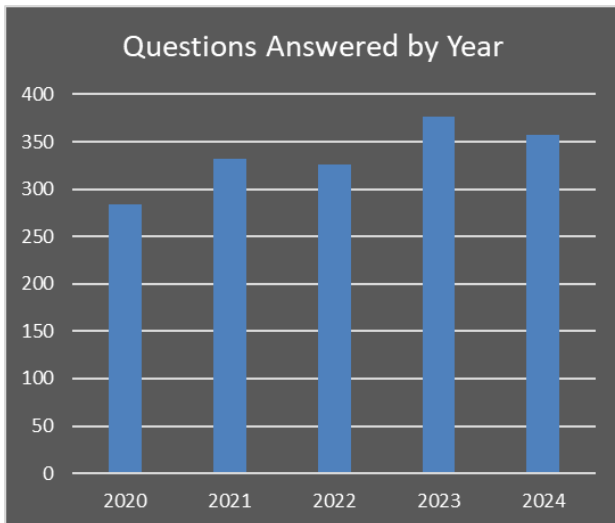
The following report summarizes the work of Equal Justice Wyoming, our grantees, and our volunteers for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. As we continue to face challenges in maintaining adequate funding, we are grateful for the many people who contribute their time and talents to support access to justice for the people of Wyoming. As always, we thank our volunteers and pro bono attorneys, legal aid staff, AmeriCorps VISTA members, and all of the individuals who make this important work possible. Fiscal year (FY) 2024 was a year of transition as the Wyoming Judicial Branch's Strategic Plan was implemented and Equal Justice Wyoming moved under the Administrative Office of the Courts. This shift has more closely integrated Equal Justice within the new structure of the Wyoming Judicial Branch. We look forward to continuing our work and exploring additional ways to help support the overall goals and mission of the Judicial Branch.

- Angie Dorsch

# Pro Bono Programs and Initiatives

## Wyoming Free Legal Answers

The Wyoming Free Legal Answers (WFLA) online portal, <https://wyoming.freelegalanswers.org/>, was launched in August 2016, in partnership with the American Bar Association, as a virtual legal clinic. The website screens applicants for eligibility and allows eligible individuals to submit civil legal questions and relevant documents via a secure portal. Attorneys licensed to practice law in Wyoming can register as volunteers to provide pro bono services through the site. Equal Justice provides the day-to-day administrative functions for the site. This includes ensuring that only Wyoming-licensed attorneys in good standing are permitted to respond to user submissions, as well as moderating questions, for example by removing questions about criminal issues. Equal Justice also sends updates to the volunteer lawyers and provides resources for both lawyers and clients.



**357 legal questions answered**

*"The volunteer lawyer was able to guide me in steps to take, which I did end up taking... It was a great resource and helped calm my mind."*

*"I appreciate the timely response. I appreciate all the feedback and resources you gave me. Thank you so much for your time."*

*– Feedback from clients who received legal assistance through WFLA in FY 2024*

The portal is a valuable resource that reaches Wyomingites in rural and underserved areas of the state, and it provides a from-anywhere service option for those with limited access to transportation or childcare. The portal can be accessed from a computer or cell phone, 24 hours a day. It is also a convenient way for attorneys to provide pro bono legal services. In FY 2024, twenty-two volunteer attorneys provided legal advice and assistance through WFLA to address 357 questions submitted on the site, resulting in a 96% answer rate.

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*“This is a great opportunity to use my legal training and knowledge gained over 40 years to help people who need legal assistance. And I can do it online since I live outside of the state (Wyoming) in which I am licensed.”*

*“[WFLA] is the only website I have ever used for pro bono and given how simple it is to use, I can’t imagine using another.”*

*“It is easy to provide much needed service on our own time from anywhere.”*

*– Feedback from volunteer attorneys who provided services via WFLA in FY 2024*

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## Volunteer Reference Attorney Program

The Volunteer Reference Attorney Program (VRA) places attorneys in courthouses and libraries across the state to provide legal information, explain court procedures, and assist self-represented litigants in completing court forms. It is often difficult for self-represented litigants to understand the complex civil justice system, and the VRA helps people navigate confusing court processes and procedures. Equal Justice recruits volunteer attorneys who hold “office hours” in the participating locations.



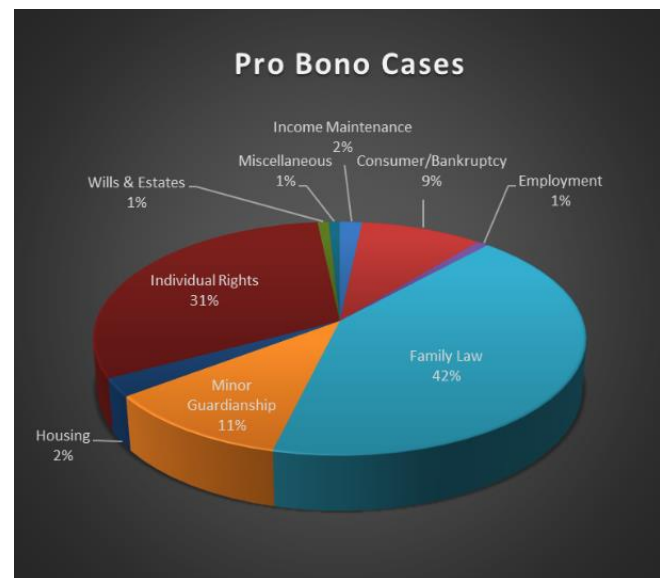
In December 2023, Equal Justice added Teton County to the program, bringing the total number of VRA locations to eight. The VRA sessions are held on the first Thursday of each month in all eight locations. The consistently high volume of court users attending the VRA necessitated increasing the frequency to two sessions per month in four counties: Laramie, Natrona, Sheridan, and Teton. These sites hold VRA sessions on the first and third Thursday of each month.

The VRA sessions are offered in the county courthouses in Albany, Carbon, Laramie, Sheridan, and Sweetwater counties. Sessions are offered in the county libraries in Casper and Gillette and in the county law library in Teton County, which also houses the Teton County Access to Justice Center. In total, 948 individuals were assisted by 69 Volunteer Reference Attorneys in FY 2024. This was a 94% increase in individuals assisted over FY 2023.

## Volunteer Lawyers Program

Equal Justice manages the statewide Volunteer Lawyers Program in partnership with the Wyoming State Bar. We provide resources and support to volunteer attorneys in order to encourage and facilitate the delivery of pro bono legal services to low-income clients. The type of assistance provided by the attorneys ranges from advice and brief services to full representation of clients in contested cases. The pro bono program handled 60 cases in FY 2024.

**60 cases in FY 2024**



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*"I had the most amazing experience and am super grateful for having this type of help! Thank you all so very much!"*

*"The professionalism and great attitude afforded to me really worked wonders. Everyone that worked on my case did a fantastic job and the outcome was remarkable. Thank you for coming through for me."*

*"[My attorney] was and still is amazing. I appreciate your program for people like me."*

*– Feedback from clients who received legal assistance through the Volunteer Lawyers Program in FY 2024*

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## Online Legal Information and Resources

Equal Justice launched our website, <https://equaljustice.wy.gov/>, in November 2012. Since then, we have continually expanded the site and updated the content to provide information, resources, videos, and forms for self-represented litigants that address the most common civil legal issues faced by low-income individuals. The website is an important tool that allows the public to understand their legal rights and to access legal information in plain language. In FY 2024, our website had 32,627 site visits by 19,880 unique users.

The Equal Justice website remains a valuable tool, but it is in need of an overhaul. Utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the website will be redesigned as part of a larger Wyoming Judicial Branch website redesign project. A request for proposals was issued and a vendor for the website

redesign has been selected. A kick-off meeting will occur soon to get the project underway. Part of the website redesign will focus on search engine optimization (SEO). This will help increase our website's search ranking so that more people searching for assistance will find the site. We look forward to this opportunity to modernize and improve our website in the coming year.

## Live Chat

In order to assist individuals accessing our resources online and direct them to the information they need, Equal Justice's website has a Live Chat component. This feature helps users navigate our expansive website to find appropriate resources that address their needs. The Live Chat does not provide legal advice but instead helps guide people to relevant information and trusted resources. In FY 2024, 136 visitors to our website received assistance from a trained Live Chat operator. An AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) member serving at Equal Justice recruits student volunteers, provides training on the Live Chat software, and helps manage the volunteer schedule.

**136 visitors to the website  
received assistance from a  
trained Live Chat operator**

## Supporting Statewide Civil Legal Services through Grants

Equal Justice's mission to provide a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is carried out in large part through our grants to nonprofit legal service organizations. In FY 2024, Equal Justice and the Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation provided a total of \$1,397,422, including \$300,000 of Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds from the Division of Victim Services to increase civil legal services to victims of crime; \$68,289 in Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds to provide legal services to support housing stability; and \$843,172 in joint Equal Justice and Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation funds.

**\$1,397,422 provided in grants  
2,445 clients received services**

The Equal Justice Wyoming Foundation, a separate nonprofit with an aligned mission, continued to jointly fund grants with Equal Justice and contributed \$200,000 to the joint grants provided over the past year, as well as \$185,961 in additional funds paid directly to legal aid providers.

The ERAP funding that Equal Justice received over the past two years was instrumental in addressing the legal issues encountered by many individuals who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ERAP funds were used to provide civil legal services with the aim of helping ERAP-eligible clients obtain or maintain safe and stable housing. The ERAP funding supporting civil legal services ended, as mandated by the State of Wyoming, on September 30, 2023. This has significantly reduced the resources available to help low-income individuals address their housing issues.



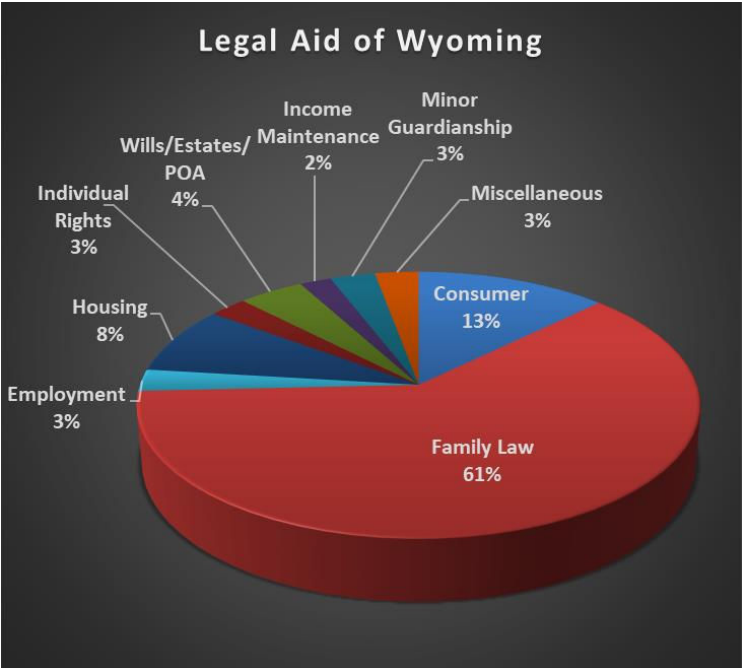
The EJW Foundation also saw the end to pandemic relief funds received from the Laramie County Commissioners through the American Rescue Plan Act. This funding ended in December of 2023.

Although the end of these pandemic relief programs caused significant reductions in available grant funds to Equal Justice and the Foundation, our grantees nevertheless provided legal services in 2,445 matters in FY 2024 using the grants we fund and administer.

## Equal Justice Wyoming Grantees

### Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.

Sincer 2013, Equal Justice has partnered with Legal Aid of Wyoming to ensure individuals across the state have access to legal advice through a telephone hotline. The hotline allows individuals to receive advice in real time and to apply for legal services over the phone. Legal Aid of Wyoming operates the hotline Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The hotline is vital for many people in rural areas with limited access to a physical legal aid office. The hotline number is widely distributed by court clerks and librarians to individuals who are looking for legal advice and assistance.

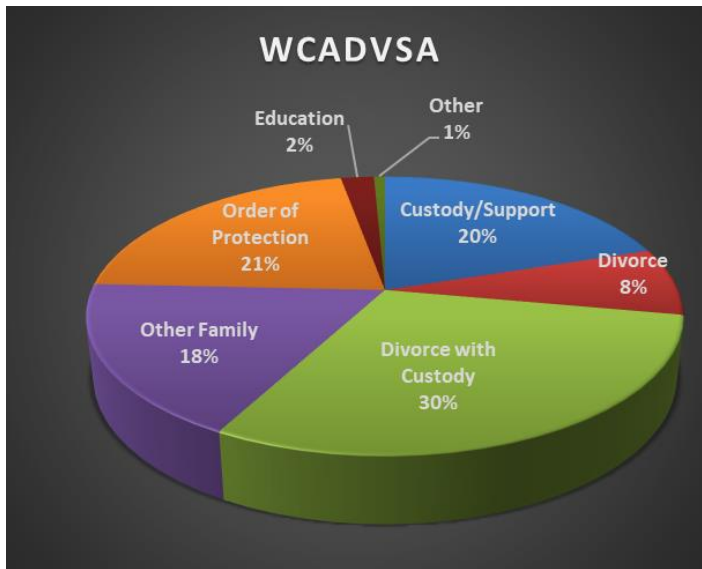


**2,004 legal matters in FY 2024**

As people increasingly need to access legal help remotely, the hotline is an effective and efficient way to provide legal advice and to process applications for people across the entire state, including rural and underserved areas. 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.

In addition to the hotline services, Legal Aid of Wyoming offers services ranging from brief assistance to full representation. In total, Legal Aid of Wyoming handled 2,004 legal matters through Equal Justice grants in FY 2024.

## Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



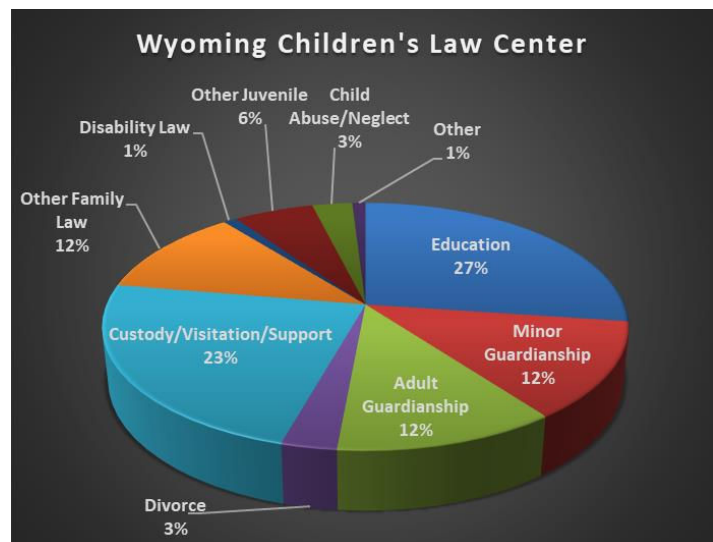
**140 cases handled in 2024**

The Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (“the Coalition”) is a statewide legal aid provider serving victims of abuse and other interpersonal crimes. The services the Coalition provides are vital for protecting victims from further harm. The Coalition’s services go beyond getting protective orders. Holistic services are employed to address various issues related to abuse. Many of the Coalition’s cases are complex and time-consuming; however, these services are vital to help stabilize families and individuals who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Equal Justice has provided funding to support the work of the Coalition since 2012. The Coalition currently operates out of their primary office in Laramie. In FY 2024, the Coalition determined that they needed to close their physical offices in Casper and Fort Washakie due to staffing constraints. The Coalition is currently in the process of restructuring and rebuilding their legal program. The Coalition handled 140 cases in FY 2024.

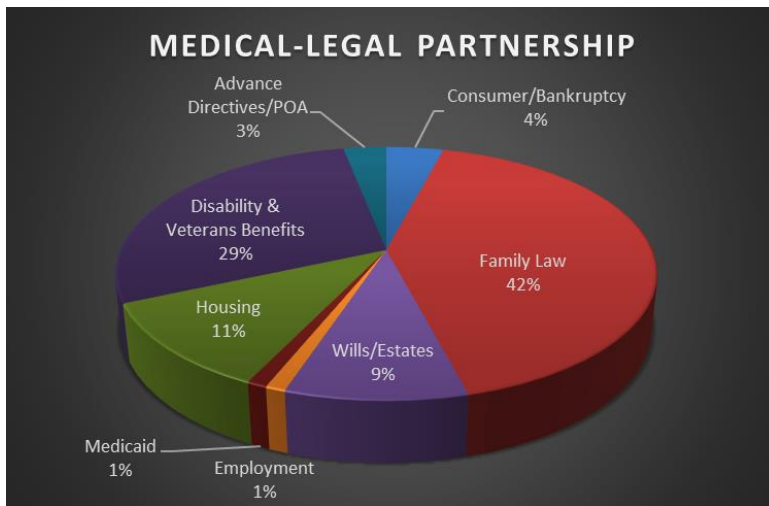
## Wyoming Children’s Law Center

The Wyoming Children’s Law Center (WCLC) provides legal services in cases involving children and families. The WCLC’s services include traditional family law cases as well as other matters that are vitally important to children’s well-being. For example, the WCLC provides advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled. The WCLC fills a great unmet need, particularly in the areas of education and disability law. The grants from Equal Justice support a wide variety of civil legal services, which allowed the WCLC staff attorneys to handle 103 cases in FY 2024.



**103 cases handled in 2024**

## Medical-Legal Partnership



**98 cases handled in 2024**

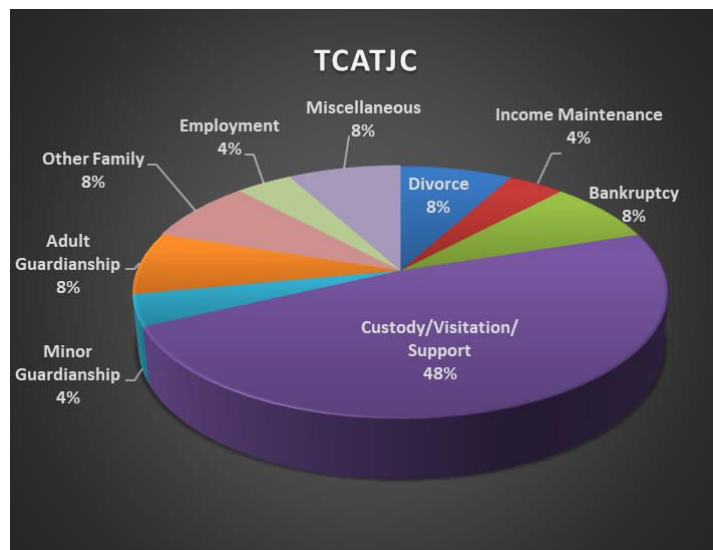
Equal Justice and the EJW Foundation provide support for Wyoming's first Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP), which was launched in 2015. MLPs are being developed across the country to address health-harming legal issues. The MLP handles various legal matters ranging from landlord-tenant cases involving unsafe housing to denials of public benefits that leave individuals unable to afford healthcare. The MLP incorporates a lawyer into the medical team to identify and address a patient's unmet legal needs that impact health. The MLP partners with

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center and HealthWorks medical clinic in Cheyenne, and it receives referrals from other health care providers. In total, the two MLP attorneys handled 98 legal matters in FY 2024.

In 2024, MLP services were expanded to include Albany County, and work is currently underway to begin serving Natrona County. We look forward to the continued expansion of MLP services to other areas of the state.

## 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 that space with the county law library. The TCATJC provides legal information and self-help services to individuals in 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 cost to the client. Those services are paid by TCATJC at a reduced rate using Equal Justice grant funds. In FY 2024, the TCATJC handled 25 cases.



**25 cases handled in FY 2024**

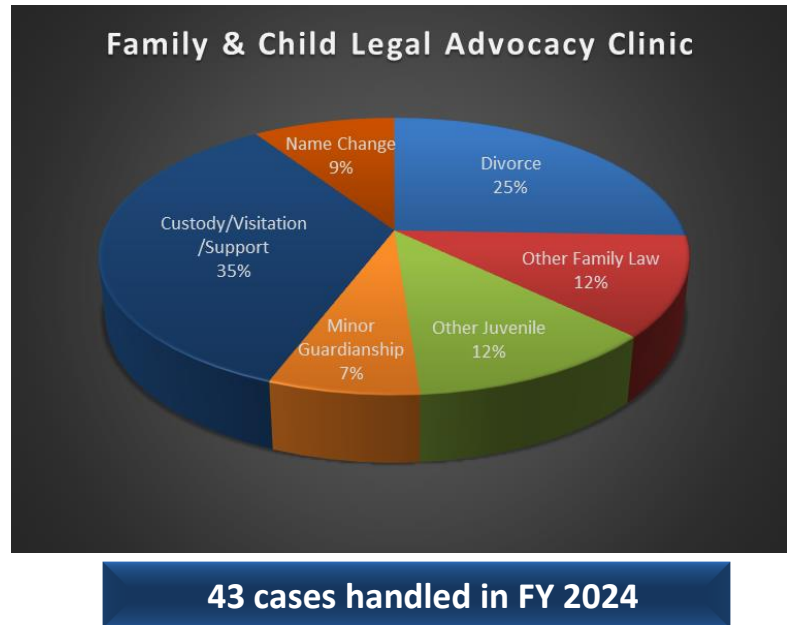


## University of Wyoming College of Law

The University of Wyoming College of Law operates several legal clinics that provide experiential learning for law students. Law students assist low-income individuals under the supervision of a law school professor. Equal Justice provides financial support, as discussed below, for the Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic and the Civil Legal Services Clinic.

### Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic

The Family and Child Legal Advocacy Clinic handles a wide variety of cases, including divorce, child support, adoption, paternity, child custody, modifications, domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault protection orders, guardian ad litem appointments in juvenile and child custody cases, representation of parents in juvenile court, termination of parental rights, and other civil actions involving children. In FY 2024, the clinic handled 43 cases.



### Civil Legal Services Clinic



The Civil Legal Services Clinic assists clients with a wide range of civil legal needs. This includes housing, expungements, consumer rights, education, veterans' service-connected disability benefits, and other public benefits. The clinic handled 32 cases in FY 2024.

## **Supporting Access to Justice Initiatives and Committees**

In addition to Equal Justice’s work supporting legal and self-help services, the Equal Justice staff also contributes to projects that advance access to justice initiatives. Over the past year, our staff members served on many committees and working groups, including Access to Justice 2.0 (ATJ 2.0) committees.

In response to a proposal by the ATJ 2.0 Forms Working Group, in 2023, the Wyoming Judicial Council (WJC) created a Permanent Standing Committee for Pro Se Forms (Forms Committee). Equal Justice staff, in collaboration with other AOC staff members, assists with the development and maintenance of court forms designed for self-represented litigants. Over the past year, the Forms Committee has revised the forms packets for domestic violence protection orders, stalking protection orders, and sexual assault protection orders. The Forms Committee collaborated with the Attorney General’s Office, Division of Victim Services and victim advocates during this process. The Forms Committee is currently in the process up creating forcible entry and detainer forms, as well as other housing-related forms. The Committee is also updating the small claims, garnishment, and family law forms.

Equal Justice staff members are also involved in and help to support the work of the ATJ 2.0 Committees.

The ATJ 2.0 Pro Bono Committee was formed to identify and examine obstacles that prevent attorneys from providing pro bono legal services. The Committee consists of Equal Justice and Wyoming State Bar staff, private attorneys in larger firms and solo practice, judicial staff, and other stakeholders. The Committee is exploring ways to encourage and expand pro bono services in Wyoming.

The ATJ 2.0 Family Law Solutions Committee consists of judges, attorneys, court staff, and Equal Justice staff. The Committee is tasked with convening stakeholders to share and work through proposals and identify possibilities for improvements in the family law arena.

The ATJ 2.0 Partnerships Committee consists of individuals representing a variety of organizations both within and outside the legal community. The Committee’s goal is to identify opportunities for partnerships outside the traditional access to justice environment in order to expand service delivery and identify ways to provide upstream services.

The ATJ 2.0 Pipelines Committee is focused on identifying ways to support and engage with a new generation of access to justice champions. This group has collaborated with the University of Wyoming College of Law and young lawyers to develop new ideas for outreach and engagement.

The ATJ 2.0 Alternative Service of Process Committee is exploring options for serving legal documents. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, service by publication rarely provides actual notice to a litigant, and it is expensive. The Committee is researching alternative service methods that have been adopted by other states to identify options that may be well-suited for Wyoming.

Financial Summary	Summary of Expenditures																								
<p>The revenue generated from filing fees that fund Equal Justice continues to decline significantly. We have been able to offset some of the decreased revenue through new sources of funding and by reducing our staff. We have not filled a vacant Staff Attorney/Pro Bono Coordinator position due to the reduced revenue.</p> <p>Access to justice programs across the country are faced with challenging economic outlooks. We will continue to explore additional ways to support the important work of our program and our grantees.</p> <p><b>Additional Revenue Sources:</b> Pro hac vice fees paid by out-of-state attorneys. Used to supplement our grants.</p> <p>Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds. Used to provide civil legal services to victims of abuse and other crimes.</p> <p>Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds. Used to supplement grants that provide civil legal services to help individuals obtain or maintain safe and stable housing. This funding ended September 30, 2023.</p>	<table> <tr> <td>Salaries and Benefits</td><td>\$372,859</td></tr> <tr> <td>Office Expense and Travel</td><td>\$15,445</td></tr> <tr> <td>Telecommunications</td><td>\$3,299</td></tr> <tr> <td><b>Grants*</b></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Legal Aid of Wyoming</td><td>\$403,882</td></tr> <tr> <td>Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence &amp; Sexual Assault</td><td>\$684,386</td></tr> <tr> <td>Wyoming Children's Law Center</td><td>\$122,000</td></tr> <tr> <td>Teton County Access to Justice Center</td><td>\$50,167</td></tr> <tr> <td>Medical-Legal Partnership</td><td>\$126,528</td></tr> <tr> <td>UW College of Law Legal Clinics</td><td>\$10,459</td></tr> <tr> <td><b>Total*</b></td><td><b>\$1,789,025</b></td></tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">*Includes the June 2024 grant expenditures paid in July 2024. Includes EJW, VOCA, ERAP, EJW Foundation and Laramie County ARPA grant payments.</td></tr> </table>	Salaries and Benefits	\$372,859	Office Expense and Travel	\$15,445	Telecommunications	\$3,299	<b>Grants*</b>		Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$403,882	Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	\$684,386	Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$122,000	Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$50,167	Medical-Legal Partnership	\$126,528	UW College of Law Legal Clinics	\$10,459	<b>Total*</b>	<b>\$1,789,025</b>	*Includes the June 2024 grant expenditures paid in July 2024. Includes EJW, VOCA, ERAP, EJW Foundation and Laramie County ARPA grant payments.	
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<p><b>Vision</b> - Equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming.</p> <p><b>Mission</b> - Serving the legal needs of low-income persons of Wyoming through community engagement, education, information, and expansion of legal services throughout the state.</p>																									
<p><b>Equal Justice Wyoming</b>  <b>2300 Capitol Ave. 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002</b>  <a href="https://equaljustice.wy.gov">https://equaljustice.wy.gov</a></p>																									