

Funding Crisis Forces Idaho Legal Aid to Cut Services

Boise, May 12, 2011: Idaho Legal Aid Services, Inc. (ILAS), the largest provider of free civil legal services to low-income Idahoans, will initiate limited office closures beginning in May due to funding cuts. ILAS is a statewide legal services program which provides legal assistance to low income Idahoans through seven regional and two satellite offices as well as through two statewide attorney staffed toll-free advice lines. The majority of clients are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, abused and neglected children, seniors, veterans, homeowners facing wrongful foreclosure, persons with disabilities and others with critical legal needs.

ILAS is dependent on grants and donations to serve its clients. Due to a reduction in federal and other grants ILAS offices will be closed one to two days a month effective immediately, said Ernesto Sanchez, Executive Director. The first office closure is scheduled for Friday, May 27th. Staff will not be paid during these office closures. Sanchez stated that, "these office closures are only one of the steps being taken to deal with the crisis." ILAS is looking at potential layoffs, permanent office closures, and a reduction in staff levels of employment. More than half of ILAS's staff already works less than full time due to budget cuts.

To address the funding crisis, ILAS sought funding from the State through a filing fee surcharge on civil cases during the 2011 legislative session. The legislation passed the House but was stalled in the Senate. "Idaho is the only state in the country that does not provide any state funding for its legal aid provider," said Sanchez. "We hope that in 2012 the Idaho legislature will enact legislation that will enable ILAS to serve more than the roughly 20% of eligible Idahoans we are currently able to serve. Most of the remainder are left to navigate the court system alone," Sanchez stated.

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