

## **Legal Aid Program**

When the mayor of **Hammond, Indiana** (83,000), was in law school, he learned firsthand of the importance of free legal assistance for single parents and the elderly who could not otherwise afford legal advice. When the mayor took office, he kept a campaign promise to set up a city-run legal aid program. Hammond believes that its clinic is the first such program to be run directly by a U.S. city.

### **Leadership/staffing**

The clinic is headed by a former county magistrate and has one full-time attorney on staff. Every attorney who conducts business for the city is required to contribute a certain number of hours to the clinic; the number is based on the amount of business that individual does with the city. Rounding out the staff are student interns from a local law school.

### **Timeline**

The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new clinic took place in October 2004. The clinic officially opened the following month.

### **Budget/funding**

The clinic has a \$200,000 annual budget, which is funded with discretionary funds from Hammond's riverboat casino revenue.

### **Program description**

The clinic is housed in city hall and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The office was renovated by the clinic's director and staff. It has now been painted and furnished to look like a law office, so that clients who need legal aid feel comfortable and respected. To qualify for services, individuals must be residents of Hammond for at least nine months and have little or no earned income. However, the residency requirement can be waived in cases of domestic violence. Those seeking assistance from the clinic fill out a two-page application form and provide proof of income and residency.

The clinic's decisions about whether to take on a case are based on whether the individual meets the clinic's eligibility criteria, whether the case is appropriate for the clinic, and whether the clinic's caseload can handle the new case. In many instances, individuals whose cases do not qualify for assistance from the clinic are referred elsewhere, often to local social service programs. In some cases, these individuals are referred to attorneys who are willing to take on the case for a reduced fee.

After an application is accepted, a letter is sent to invite the individual to make an appointment. The client may meet initially with an intern, who does background research for the attorney who eventually works on the case. Many of the clinic's cases involve child support, domestic violence, landlord-tenant disputes, contractor fraud involving senior citizens, and advanced directives. The clinic does not offer assistance with criminal cases.

## **Results**

In the clinic's first six months, approximately 175 individuals requested service, and almost 95 percent of these cases were accepted.

## **Contact**

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