



# LEGAL AID FUNDING

## IN THE WEST

Colorado lags behind most western neighbors on state funding for legal aid

# Colorado trails western neighbors on state funding for legal aid per capita

At a time when many Americans [struggle to pay](#) for [basic needs](#), critical legal services remain out of reach for countless victims of domestic violence, people saddled with medical debt, families facing eviction or foreclosure, people facing immigration proceedings, and other vulnerable groups. Many states—including some of Colorado’s neighbors—have stepped up to provide equal justice to their communities. This help has come in the form of civil legal aid programs for low income people to help them resolve their legal issues.

Based on an analysis of state budget information and appropriations reports, along with information provided by state bar associations, access to justice commission staff, legal services organizations, law librarians, and state budget staff, the Colorado Access to Justice Commission found Colorado ranks 10th out of 14 western neighbors in state appropriations for civil legal aid.

In Nevada, per capita state funding for legal aid is more than four times that of Colorado. Wyoming’s per capita funding is more than three times higher and New Mexico’s per capita funding is almost three times higher than Colorado’s.



In the West, Colorado ranks 10th out of 14 states for legal aid funding

# Data summary:

## Colorado trails western neighbors on state funding for legal aid per capita

State	Population	Funding for legal aid per capita	Rank	Funding compared to Colorado
California	39,538,223	\$5.08	1	7 times more funding than Colorado
Nevada	3,104,614	\$4.62	2	6.3 times more funding
Washington	7,705,281	\$4.14	3	5.7 times more funding
Wyoming	576,851	\$2.57	4	3.5 times more funding
Oregon	4,237,256	\$2.54	5	3.5 times more funding
New Mexico	2,117,522	\$2.05	6	2.8 times more funding
Nebraska	1,961,504	\$1.88	7	2.6 times more funding
Hawaii	1,455,271	\$1.51	8	2.1 times more funding
Alaska	733,391	\$0.96	9	1.3 times more funding
Colorado	5,773,714	\$0.73	10	
Utah	3,271,616	\$0.24	11	
Montana	1,084,225	\$0.11	12	
Arizona	7,151,502	\$0	13	
Idaho	1,839,106	\$0	13	



# Colorado by the numbers: Ranked 10 out of 14 western states



**\$0.73**

State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$230**

Dissolution of marriage filing fee <sup>1</sup>

**\$5**

Docket fee in domestic cases for legal aid

Colorado annually appropriates \$2 million from the general fund for the [Family Violence Justice Fund](#). About \$100,000 from a [small docket fee](#) in domestic relations cases also goes into the fund each year. Grants from this fund go to representing poor Coloradans in divorce and child custody cases, advice for victims of family violence, and emergency assistance. The [Eviction Legal Defense Fund](#), created in 2019, targets aid for people at immediate risk of, or experiencing, eviction. In FY 23-24, the fund awarded \$1.97 million in grants. Finally, the legislature [provided \\$350,000](#) in FY 23-24 for the Immigration Legal Defense Fund.

**Fee revenue: \$100,000**

**Other state appropriation: \$4.32 million**

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<sup>1</sup> Dissolution of marriage is included because all states assess a filing fee in these cases, most parties are unrepresented, and the definition is fairly universal.

# The rest of the West

In addition to Colorado, the Access to Justice Commission analyzed the following 13 western U.S. states' appropriations for legal aid. While funding structures for legal aid and court fees greatly vary, estimates of per capita state dollars and a snapshot of filing fees provide useful points of comparison. States are ranked according to per capita state funding for legal aid.

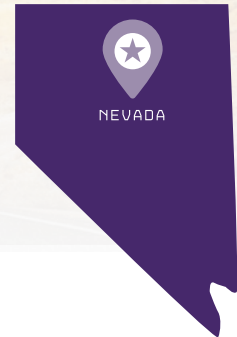
## California by the numbers: Ranked 1 out of 14 western states



The Equal Access Fund, part of the California Judicial Branch, provided [\\$70 million](#) for legal aid in 2022. The EAF is [funded through](#) an appropriation and about \$5 million in yearly revenue from [filing fees](#). The [Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Program](#) provides about \$12 million annually for legal aid from a \$25 filing fee on certain [post-judgment motions](#). Finally, \$115 million was appropriated for [Immigration Legal Services Programs](#) for FY 21-22.

**Fee revenue: \$16.8 million**  
**Other state appropriation: \$184 million**

## Nevada by the numbers: Ranked 2 out of 14 western states



**\$4.62** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$285** Average dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$25** Legal aid fee on civil filings

[Nevada](#) imposes a \$25 filing fee in civil actions and a \$14 fee in [domestic cases](#) in counties where legal aid organizations provide no-cost services. Counties must give part of the fee revenue to their local legal aid providers. Counties [can levy additional](#) fees in civil [and criminal](#) cases to generate more revenue for legal aid. For FY 22-23, legal aid organizations received \$11.4 million in fee revenue from counties, per the Nevada Access to Justice Commission. The legislature also appropriated [\\$2.97 million](#) for legal aid to the [Consumer Protection Legal Account](#).

**Fee revenue: \$11.4 million**

**Other state appropriation: \$2.97 million**

## Washington by the numbers: Ranked 3 out of 14 western states



**\$4.14** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$314** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

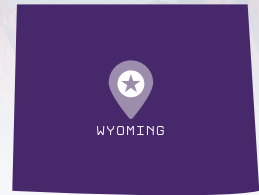
In the 2023-2025 biennium, state [lawmakers appropriated](#) to the [Office of Civil Legal Aid](#) \$5 million to advise tenants at risk of eviction, \$32.2 million to represent tenants in unlawful detainers, \$2.39 million to help [vacate drug convictions](#), \$80,000 to legally advise people 60 and older, \$700,000 to a legal hotline for kinship caregivers, \$4 million to domestic violence survivors, and \$2 million to the statewide reentry legal aid project.

Another \$1.21 million went to foreclosure prevention, \$16 million to represent indigent people in immigration cases, and \$300,000 to aid indigent foreign nationals in domestic cases.

**Fee revenue: \$7.95 million (included in appropriation)**

**Other state appropriation: \$31.9 million**

## Wyoming by the numbers: Ranked 4 out of 14 western states



**\$2.57** State funding for legal aid per capita

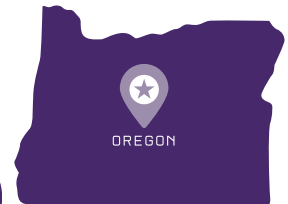
**\$140** Average dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$10** Legal aid fee on civil filings, transcripts and appeal docket

Wyoming generates legal aid funds through a \$10 filing fee authorized by [statute](#). This fee applies to initial filings in civil cases, transcripts of Supreme Court appeals, and docketing in any appeal or transcript of judgment. The revenue is [distributed as grants](#) to legal aid providers. In FY 22-23, Equal Justice Wyoming distributed \$1,482,216 in [Equal Justice state funds](#) from court fee revenue.

**Fee revenue: \$1,482,216**  
**Other state appropriation: \$0**

## Oregon by the numbers: Ranked 5 out of 14 western states



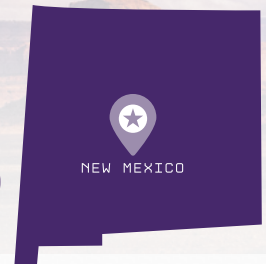
**\$2.54** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$301** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

State funding for legal aid was [disconnected](#) from court filing fees in 2011, and the Oregon State Bar's Legal Services Program now receives a biannual appropriation. The 2023-2025 budget [appropriated](#) \$14 million to the program. State legislators also established a Universal Representation Fund last year to represent clients in immigration proceedings. In the [latest budget](#), they provided \$6.7 million in one-time dollars for the fund, plus \$818,000 to the State Bar for immigration legal services.

**Fee revenue: \$0**  
**Other state appropriation: \$10.7 million**

**New Mexico by the numbers:  
Ranked 6 out of 14 western states**



**\$2.05** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$285** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$25** Legal aid fee in civil actions

In 2001, New Mexico’s legislature established the [Civil Legal Services Fund](#) and [Civil Legal Services Commission](#). For each [initial filing fee](#) assessed in an original or reopened civil action, \$25 goes into the fund. The Commission reviews proposals and contracts with organizations delivering free civil legal aid. In 2022, the legislature also [appropriated](#) \$2.69 million for civil legal services.

**Fee revenue: \$1.65 million**  
**Other state appropriation: \$2.69 million**

**Nebraska by the numbers:  
Ranked 7 out of 14 western states**



**\$1.88** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$162** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$15** Legal aid fee on domestic filings

For FY 22-23, [Nebraska appropriated](#) \$3.69 million from court fees to two cash funds for civil legal aid, both of which are administered by the [Nebraska Commission on Public Advocacy](#). Legal Aid of Nebraska, the [only organization](#) that provides free civil legal services in every county in the state, received 13% of its [annual funding](#) from the state in 2021.

**Fee revenue: \$3.69 million**  
**Other state appropriation: \$0**



## Hawai'i by the numbers: Ranked 8 out of 14 western states

**\$1.51** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$240** Average dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$35** Legal aid fee on district court civil filings



Per [Hawai'i statute](#), a surcharge on most initial filings in civil actions goes to the [Indigent Legal Defense Fund](#). No surcharges are collected in small claims or petitions for temporary restraining orders. In FY 22-23, [\\$1 million](#) was distributed from the fund. The Hawai'i State Legislature also appropriated \$1.2 million for indigent legal assistance in FY 23-24, the state's Supreme Court Law Library confirmed.

**Fee revenue: \$1 million**  
**Other state appropriation: \$1.2 million**

## Alaska by the numbers: Ranked 9 out of 14 western states

**\$0.96** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$250** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

**10%** Max filing fee revenue for legal services

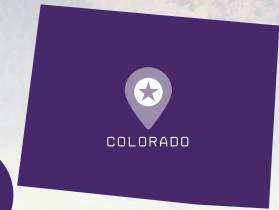


ALASKA

Under Alaska statute, the legislature can appropriate up to [10% of filing fees](#) received in the most recent fiscal year to the Civil Legal Services Fund. For FY 23-24, [\\$301,214](#) was [appropriated from filing fees](#). The legislature also provides an annual general fund appropriation, which amounted to \$400,000 in 2022.

**Fee revenue: \$301,214**  
**Other state appropriation: \$400,000**

## Colorado by the numbers: Ranked 10 out of 14 western states



**\$0.73** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$230** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$5** Docket fee in domestic cases for legal aid

Colorado created the first fund for any form of legal aid in 1999, to expand the availability of legal assistance for low income [victims of family violence](#). That fund totaled \$2.1 million dollars last year. A small portion of that total — roughly \$100,000 — comes from a \$5 [docket fee](#) in domestic cases.

In 2019, the [Eviction Legal Defense Fund](#) was created to expand the availability of legal assistance for low-income people experiencing an eviction or at immediate risk of an eviction. Last year \$1.97 million in grants were awarded to six nonprofit legal services organizations in Colorado providing eviction legal defense.

A fund to expand access to [Immigration Legal Defense](#) was created in 2021 and totaled \$350,000 in FY 23-24

**Fee revenue: \$100,000**

**Other state appropriation: \$4.32 million**

## Utah by the numbers: Ranked 11 out of 14 western states



**\$0.24** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$325** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

Utah provides grant funding for legal assistance in [family law and domestic violence cases](#) under a program authorized by [statute](#). This amount is \$795,000 each year.

**Fee revenue: \$0**

**Other state appropriation: \$795,000**

**Montana by the numbers:  
Ranked 12 out of 14 western states**



**\$0.11** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$200** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

**\$19** Legal aid fee on dissolution of marriage petitions

Montana provides legal aid funding through a [\\$19 filing fee surcharge](#) on dissolution of marriage petitions. Fee revenue goes into the [Civil Legal Assistance for Indigent Victims of Domestic Violence Account](#) to provide legal representation for domestic violence survivors and alternative dispute resolution in family law cases. In FY 23-24, \$120,000 was allocated for legal aid from filing fee revenue.

**Fee revenue: \$121,000**  
**Other state appropriation: \$0**

**Arizona by the numbers:  
Ranked 13 (tied with Idaho)**



**\$0** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$234** Dissolution of marriage filing fee

As of October 2023, Arizona did not legislatively appropriate funds or allocate fee revenue for civil legal aid, the Arizona Bar Foundation confirmed. [Historically](#) and [today](#), Arizona receives a higher-than-average portion of its legal aid funding from the federal Legal Services Corporation.

**Fee revenue: \$0**  
**Other state appropriation: \$0**

**Idaho by the numbers:  
Ranked 13 (tied with Arizona)**

**\$0** State funding for legal aid per capita

**\$207** Divorce filing fee



Idaho does not provide any funding for legal aid through a state appropriation or a filing fee. In 2018, Idaho Legal Aid Services led a [legislative effort](#) to establish the [Children and Families Legal Services Fund](#) in the state treasury, but the bill [died](#) in a state Senate committee.

**Fee revenue: \$0**

**Other state appropriation: \$0**

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*We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to the Colorado Access to Justice Commission.*

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