

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. LSC Self-Evaluation

To what extent has a comprehensive, integrated and client-centered legal services delivery system been achieved in a particular state?

1) *What are the important issues that impact upon low income people within your state? How is your state responding to these issues?*

As always, the lack of adequate funding for civil legal assistance is an overall issue that impacts low-income people in the state. In response, we are implementing new and creative projects to increase access to legal assistance through the use of technology such as video conferencing and creative outreach efforts such as the development of community legal clinics. More specifically, the lack of housing, domestic violence, and access to legal assistance for the working poor are critical issues that impact low-income people in the state.

Rhode Island is facing a severe housing crisis. Because housing is the beginning, the foundation, the stability, that people must have to go to work each day, send their children to school, arrange transportation and child care, and generally succeed in life, the housing crisis in Rhode Island is an extremely important issue that impacts on the lives of our clients. Decent, safe and sanitary housing is essential to the betterment of persons for their education, income support and employment prospects, and for family unit integrity. Eviction from one's home is a traumatic event that can have far-reaching consequences for all the members of a family.

Unfortunately, Rhode Island is one of the least affordable housing markets in the country.¹ On average, for a low-income renter in Rhode Island, rent for a two-bedroom apartment consumes 44% of income.² Many of the units affordable to low-income families are in need of repair and have housing code violations such as roach and rodent infestation, lead exposure, faulty wiring, inadequate heating systems, and unsanitary plumbing problems. This housing shortage, combined with high rental prices, results in thousands of clients who come to RILS each year with housing problems.

In response, Rhode Island Legal Services has reorganized its Housing Law Center and Eviction Defense Clinic into three specialized units. One is the Fair Housing Unit, the second is the Housing Preservation and Development Unit, and the third is the Eviction Defense Unit.

Rhode Island Legal Services is currently collaborating with the RI District Court to respond to the large number of daily evictions from public subsidized and private housing that destabilizes families and increases the likelihood of

¹ The State of Rhode Island Consolidated Plan FY 2002-2005 (January 2000). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation.

² 2001 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook/Economic Well-being, Pg. 16.

homelessness. We are seeking additional funding to hire staff to increase the number of attorneys doing eviction work from two to four. We anticipate involving the RI Community Mediation Center to increase availability of mediation as a possible alternative to the eviction process. We also are involved in working with the District Court to establish a pro se advocate to assist unrepresented litigants in eviction proceedings.

As Domestic Violence continues to be a problem, we have applied for and secured funding for an additional two years to support our domestic violence work. This legal assistance to victims of domestic violence project has been a complete success, increasing the number of clients served in families where violence has been abated from sixty-one in 1997 to four hundred per year. We plan to allocate an additional attorney to represent victims of domestic violence seeking a divorce from the abuser.

2) *What are the components of the delivery system?*

Rhode Island Legal Services has two offices with its main office located in Providence. The offices are staffed by twenty-three attorneys and nine paralegals. The main office is organized into three substantive law centers. Each center is supervised by an experienced a Managing Attorney or Unit Head.

These Centers are as follows:

- **The Housing Law Center and Eviction Defense Clinic** is managed by Steven Fischbach, Esq., who has extensive experience in housing matters. RILS' Housing Law Center and Eviction Defense Clinic consists of: The Housing Preservation and Development Unit; The Eviction Defense Unit; and the Fair Housing Unit. Our work in this area ranges from representing clients who are denied admission to public and subsidized housing, to delivering legal education programs to the community regarding illegal housing discrimination, to working with low-income tenant groups to preserve and/or develop subsidized housing. Environmental justice cases, which usually involve land use issues, are also handled here.
- **The Public Benefits and Employment Law Center** is headed by Gretchen Bath, Esq. who has 20 years of legal experience. Our Public Benefits and Employment Law Center has had a significant impact on the lives of indigent clients in Rhode Island. Income maintenance for our client community is of paramount importance. Tens of thousands of Rhode Island's poor depend on the Family Independence Program (FIP), food stamps, unemployment compensation or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Providing this assistance involves the commitment of substantial program resources to maintain income and secure public benefits for the state's low-income, disabled, and elderly populations.
- **The Family Law Center** is headed by Elizabeth Segovis, Esq., who has 21 years of legal experience. The Family Law Center makes legal representation accessible; enabling men, women and their respective families to secure a

divorce, settle custody disputes, determine spousal/child support, arrange visitation, and advocate for continuation of temporary restraining orders which protect and represent victims of domestic violence. RILS' Family Law Center consists of The Family Law Unit, The Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project, The Family Preservation Project and The Responsible Parent Project.

RILS utilizes trained paralegals and attorneys on-call to respond to clients. Attorneys and paralegals from each of the above mentioned centers provide intake services in their area of expertise, drawing upon their substantive training and experience. The intake system currently in place includes: analysis and initial screening decisions concerning what kind of assistance or referral is needed; appropriate advisement on relatively routine matters and referral to other non Legal Services organizations that can provide assistance regarding the problems identified as a result of the screening. Additionally, written materials, pamphlets and other self- help materials that address the particular issues identified in the screening are offered to the applicant for services when appropriate.

Rhode Island Legal Services' intake system is extremely flexible and varies from unit to unit to enhance client access. Within specialty units, intake may be composed of telephone intake, walk-ins, court referrals, and recently, internet contact.

3) Has this system created mechanisms to assess its performance in relationship to commonly-accepted external guides such as the ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor, the LSC Performance Criteria or some other set of objective criteria? What is the protocol for undertaking system performance review and when was a review last undertaken?

Rhode Island Legal Services has adopted the ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor, the LSC Performance Criteria and the LSC Evaluation Guidelines FY1998. There is no set protocol for undertaking system performance review. We strive to meet the standards as set forth and recommended by the ABA.

4) Does your statewide system work to ensure the availability of equitable legal assistance capacities to clients -- regardless of who the clients are, where they reside or the languages they speak? How does your system ensure that clients have equitable access to necessary assistance including self-help, legal education, advice, brief service, and representation in all relevant forums? Please describe what steps you anticipate taking to ensure equitable access in the coming years.

Rhode Island Legal Services is the only statewide program providing full-service civil legal assistance to low-income people in the state. RILS has two offices strategically located to provide access to all clients throughout the state.

The main office in Providence may be reached from anywhere in the state by bus and is within walking distance of all federal and state courts. This office primarily serves central and northern Rhode Island where the vast majority of the poverty population resides. The Newport Office may be reached from all points in southern RI within 40 minutes. Many low-income people living in this area may feel intimidated at the prospect of coming into downtown Providence or do not have easy access to public transportation coming into Providence. Our South County clients can call on a toll-free line, as well as communicate by fax, thanks to the cooperation of South County CAP.

RILS also relies on telephone contact to maintain client accessibility, maintaining "800" numbers so that toll-free access to our offices are available to clients throughout the state. Since almost all of our initial client contact is by telephone, this makes access substantially equivalent whether the client resides forty miles away or around the corner from the office. RILS also has a sophisticated phone system with voice mail messaging for all advocates, call forwarding, and the ability to give instructions to callers in English and Spanish. RILS has a TDD machine that allows us to communicate with hearing-impaired clients who need legal services. In addition, RILS' self-help materials and forms are printed in English, Spanish and in some cases Laotian. We also have a diverse staff, which can provide services to clients in Spanish and in English.

5) How does the legal service delivery system employ technology to provide increased access and enhanced services to clients throughout the state? What technological initiatives are currently underway and how will they support the integrated statewide delivery system?

As part of the last statewide planning process, the statewide planning committee recommended the increased use of technology to enhance the delivery of services and legal educational materials. Specifically, a recommendation was made that RILS' should increase the dissemination of legal education materials by making them available on the world wide web in English, Spanish and Laotian or Cambodian. A second recommendation was that RILS should expand its outreach through collaboration with other agencies serving the client population, especially in hard to reach communities.

RILS has established its own website at www.rils.org which enables clients with access to the world wide web to obtain pro se self-help materials, as well as court forms, over the internet, thus eliminating their need to travel to one of our offices to get this information. In addition, RILS has received a grant to create a unified legal information system in Rhode Island that will be locally managed by project participants, yet be integrated with state and national content. This web site at www.helprilaw.com will provide a wide range of Internet-based legal resources for Rhode Island's public interest law community (including staff-based programs, pro bono organizations, volunteer lawyers,

courts, and law students), as well as deliver crucial legal information and assistance to low-income, elderly and disabled clients in Rhode Island. Helprilaw has the ability to efficiently link the low-income public to accurate referral and intake information about legal services programs, legal education and self-help materials, courts, and other government agencies and social services. We will build on our existing collaborations with the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program, The RI Disability Law Center, Roger Williams University School of Law, the RI Commission for Human Rights, the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the many other community organizations that we have built working relationships over the years.

6) *How has the legal service delivery system expanded its resources to provide critical legal services to low income clients including hard to reach groups such as migrant farmworkers, Native Americans, the elderly, those with physical or mental disabilities, those confined to institutions, immigrants and the rural poor?*

Rhode Island has an almost negligible migrant farm workers population. Any migrant farmworkers are serviced regionally by Pine Tree Legal Assistance, however they are still eligible to seek legal assistance through Rhode Island Legal Services. The Native American population is integrated into the larger population and does not reside on reservations. RILS has a client eligible board member appointed by the Rhode Island Indian Council, who provides input on the needs and services required by this community.

Increased access to legal assistance for the elderly, particularly the at-risk elderly, socially and economically needy and rural elderly is the overall goal of Rhode Island Legal Services' Elder Law Project. The direct representation of elderly clients from all counties of Rhode Island in matters such as Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, Landlord/tenant problems, public and subsidized housing issues, consumer problems, nursing home issues, and real estate tax exemptions in legal matters is the primary work of the Elder Law Project. To achieve this, RILS has developed a legal helpline that provides improved access to assistance, more timely and responsive services and less delay in accessing advice only, brief service and appropriate referrals. Any senior can call in and go through a simple one-step intake process which eliminates the wait for a callback, scheduling an appointment and coming into the office for a matter which only requires advice, brief service, self-help materials, and/or referral.

In 2001, RILS began a collaborative effort, with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, to provide education and outreach about housing discrimination and fair housing rights and remedies, particularly to immigrant populations. There is a lack of citizen awareness as to the available rights and remedies concerning housing discrimination under state and federal laws. This is especially true among the populations most likely to be victims of

discrimination. These populations are recent immigrants, especially non-English speaking, the disabled and racial/ethnic minorities. Under this effort, RILS is conducting community legal education seminars about housing discrimination at 40 different community sites over a two-year period. This is the first time a state agency has collaborated with RILS in an effort to stop housing discrimination.

In order to better serve the rural poor, as well as the elderly, RILS is working on setting up remote videoconferencing sites community-based organizations throughout the state. The areas being considered for these sites are Woonsocket, Wakefield, and Block Island. If the client lives in an area that is not easily accessible to the main office or the southern Rhode Island office, the appointment will be scheduled in the virtual legal service's office within their community. The client will go to the partner site for the videoconference meeting with their advocate. Any relevant paperwork can be scanned and sent directly to the advocate. A RILS' advocate and the client will review the forms, correct mistakes, and discuss how to proceed through the court process. The ability of the client to have access to an attorney is not dependent upon getting to RILS' office.

These videoconferencing sites will allow rural clients the ability to confer directly with a RILS' advocate without having to travel outside of their community.

7) What steps have been implemented within the legal services delivery system and among client communities to identify and nurture new leaders? Do the existing leaders reflect the diversity within the state and within client communities that your delivery system serves? Do your state's equal justice leaders reflect the gender, race, ethnic and economic concerns of important but sometimes overlooked groups within your state? Does the leadership provide opportunities for innovation and experimentation; does it support creative solutions to meet changing needs; are new ideas welcomed; are clients nurtured as leaders? Has the leadership been given sufficient authority and resources to implement needed changes?

There currently exists a leadership crisis within the legal services equal justice community in general. As leaders within the legal services community age, it is important for the existing leadership to reach out to our young attorneys and the client population and nurture their growth and maturity. The Executive Director has taken an interest in this problem, and is an active participant with the Northeast Training Consortium in designing a leadership development course for the legal services community. That training instrument is being developed by Ellen Hemley. Further, the Executive Director is involved with the African American Director's Association to make leadership development an issue of concern for that organization.

RILS is a unique organization with its diverse leadership. The chairman of the Board of Directors, Walter Stone, Esq. is an African American man of significant prominence in the legal services community and in Rhode Island generally. The Executive Director, also an African American serves on the Rhode Island Bar Association's Committee on Legal Services and on the RI Supreme Court Task Force on Affordable Legal Services.

RILS seeks to develop new talent and leaders by increasing the number of leadership positions in the organization and supporting the development of its young staff.

RILS has client board members who are encouraged to take a leadership role in the organization by providing guidance and input. In its statewide planning processes, RILS invited and welcomed the participation of many groups representing client communities, such as the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the International Institute of Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Disability Law Center. RILS has formed partnerships with community groups to obtain and administer grants to provide services to the client population. These partnerships include planning committees that include members of client community. For example, the Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project steering committee includes representatives who are survivors of domestic violence.

8) What do you envision will be your next steps to achieve a client-centered integrated and comprehensive delivery system within your state or territory? How will clients be actively involved in the determination of these next steps?

Despite the achievement of Rhode Island Legal Services and other providers to collaborate and provide a client centered delivery system, much needs to be done.

- a) A client advisory board or council should be established that would provide RILS and other providers of legal services valuable insight and advice regarding improving the delivery systems currently in place.
- b) Implementation of video conferencing at two sites within the state would greatly improve the comprehensiveness of the delivery system.
- c) Implementation of the LSC funded interactive website will also enhance greatly the comprehensiveness of the delivery system.
- d) The establishment of a pro se center at the Garrahy Judicial Complex to provide valuable information on the eviction and divorce process to pro se litigants.
- e) Greater utilization of mediation to resolve landlord/tenant disputes in the District Court.

- f) Greater involvement between the RI Bar Association's Committee on Legal Services and the RI Supreme Court's Committee on Affordable Legal Services can result in significant improvements to the overall delivery system.

In addition, the use of new technology will facilitate a client centered comprehensive delivery system throughout the state. When a potential client calls RILS, the client is qualified financially and by case type, checked for past case history and conflict situations. If the client needs pro se information they will be instructed on how to access the information on line. If they are eligible for service, an appointment will be set up for the client with an attorney or paralegal. If the client lives in an area that is not easily accessible to the main office or the southern Rhode Island office, the appointment will be scheduled in the virtual legal service's office within their community.

The client will go to the partner site for the videoconference meeting with their advocate. Any relevant paperwork can be scanned and sent directly to the advocate. A RILS' advocate and the client will review the forms, correct mistakes, and discuss how to proceed through the court process. The ability of the client to have access to an attorney is not dependent upon getting to RILS' office. If the client's case can be handled pro se, they will be shown how to access the appropriate information and forms, how to access web-based interactive tutorials and video-formatted workshops on RILS' interactive web browser. The partnering agency will have a person available to help with any technical difficulties the client may encounter in using this technology. These agencies will donate space, time and trained personnel to help clients overcome any technical difficulties they may encounter.

9) *What has been the greatest obstacle to achieving a statewide, integrated, client-centered delivery system and how was that obstacle overcome or, alternatively, how do you plan to overcome that obstacle?*

Having already merged with the only other major legal services provider in Rhode Island, the Legal Aid Society of Rhode Island, the remaining major obstacle to achieving a statewide, integrated, client-centered delivery system in Rhode Island has been and continues to be the lack of monetary resources which results in a lack of manpower to provide the necessary services.

RILS has sought to expand its financial support by increasing the amount of non-LSC funding for civil legal assistance. This has been accomplished by obtaining an increase in IOLTA funds, securing fee for service contracts with the State to provide previously unmet needs for legal services to the indigent, and pursuing foundation, private and other grants.

10) *Has any benefit-to-cost analysis been made in terms of creating a comprehensive, integrated and client-centered legal services*

delivery system in your state? If yes, what does your analysis show?

While a benefit-to-cost analysis has not been done, RILS continues to operate efficiently. As stated earlier, we are the only organization that offers comprehensive civil legal assistance to low income people in Rhode Island and as a result there is no duplication of administrative or other costs. The 1994 merger of Rhode Island Legal Services and the Legal Aid Society of Rhode Island has already realized significant savings and developed efficient and integrated client centered legal services.

11) What resources, technical assistance and support would help you meet your goals?

In order to meet the most pressing issues impacting low-income people in the state, additional funding is needed for:

- a) Additional funding is needed to hire a information technology person
- b) Additional staff attorneys
- c) Support in establishing a client advisory board

To what extent have intended outcomes of a comprehensive, integrated client-centered legal service delivery system been achieved including but not limited to service effectiveness/quality; efficiency; equity in terms of client access; greater involvement by members of the private bar in the legal lives of clients, and client-community empowerment?

1) In terms of the issues impacting upon low-income persons within your state, what strategies have you designed to address these issues and how do you plan to measure your future success in addressing your objectives?

The Affordable Legal Services Task Force of the Rhode Island Bar Association recognizes the need to increase funding and manpower for civil legal assistance. Their recommendations to increase the availability of affordable legal services include:

- Supporting an increase of funding for Rhode Island Legal Services by allocating money from the State Budget for civil legal assistance.
- Roger Williams University School of Law should expand its public service requirement to encourage students to participate in more extensive internship/externship programs designed to provide affordable legal services.
- Roger Williams University School of Law should expand the number and type of student-manned law clinics serving low-income people, by adding a family law clinic and expanding their disability law clinic.

- Establish a special bar membership for law school faculty who perform pro bono work or practice in the school's law clinics
- Increase access to alternative dispute resolution in the areas of family law, housing-landlord/tenant matters, and small claims
- Establish a special "no dues" bar status for retired judges and lawyers that allows them to handle pro bono cases in the state and require the to perform 40 hours of pro bono service a year to maintain this status.
- Give incentives to attorneys who participate in reduced fee or no fee legal service programs by offering a reduced fee for continuing education seminars
- Create a loan forgiveness program for attorneys who provide legal services in the public service area
- Require all attorneys to provide pro bono service annually

2) Has the legal services delivery system expanded access and services through coordination with providers throughout the state? Can this be quantified?

Although RILS is currently the only LSC funded program in the State of Rhode Island, there is a reasonable degree of interagency referrals among other agencies that provide free or reduced fee legal assistance to lower-income people in certain types of cases. RILS refers those cases which do not fall within its priorities, or in which the client is above the income guidelines set by the board of directors, to these organizations/ agencies (see chart of current civil legal service providers).

RILS has also contracted with the RI Court System to take referrals directly from them for indigent Rhode Islanders in need of representation on child welfare and child support cases. The Rhode Island Family Court has set aside an office in the Providence Courthouse for RILS' advocates. This office would allow low-income clients access to a RILS advocate and reduce the number of pro se clients and post-judgement visits to RILS. In addition, RILS has undertaken a joint project with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. RILS and The Coalition are collaborating on The Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project to create a comprehensive network of abuse victim advocates, emergency shelters, and legal advocates, which addresses the civil legal needs of battered women. Coalition and shelter staff coordinate appointments and pre-screen clients regarding their legal needs. RILS' paralegals and attorneys conduct intake at the shelters, interviewing clients and determining legal options. A project attorney will enter an appearance on behalf of the victim, work in partnership with the advocate to prepare the victim for her court appearances, prepare other witnesses, and provide full representation in court.

RILS has increased the number of groups and organizations, which we work with directly, to deliver services to the client community. In 2001, RILS began a collaborative effort, with the Rhode Island Commission for Human

Rights, to provide education and outreach about housing discrimination and fair housing rights and remedies, particularly to immigrant populations. Under this effort, RILS is conducting community legal education seminars about housing discrimination at 40 different community sites over a two-year period. This is the first time a state agency has collaborated with RILS in an effort to stop housing discrimination.

RILS has also begun planning on a joint project with the Providence Community Mediation Center to work cooperatively with them on a pilot program to lighten the court's caseload through employing mediation in eviction cases, with both parties' consent.

3) *Has the quality of services provided by the legal services delivery system improved. How?*

We strongly feel that the quality of services provided by the delivery system has improved. As a result of RILS' Statewide Planning Processes in 1995 and 1998, goals, recommendations and a plan of action for the future were developed. The merging of the Legal Aid Society into Rhode Island Legal Services in 1995, consolidated the financial resources available for family law issues and resulted in the ability to handle a far greater number of family law cases. Additionally, during the latter part of 1995, it was determined, through meetings with the Rhode Island Family Court and other participating agencies, that representation was needed for indigent parents accused of neglect, dependency and abuse, in cases where one parent could not be represented by the Public Defender due to a conflict of interest. RILS began providing this representation under a contract with the RI Supreme Court and as increased the number of attorneys available to provide this representation.

In 1998, during a statewide planning process, it became evident that there was an unmet need for representation of indigent parents in danger of being incarcerated for non-payment of child support, as well as a lack of legal representation for victims of domestic abuse. RILS obtained state contracts to provide representation to parents facing incarceration for non-payment of child support. This contract has also increased over the years, giving RILS the capacity to hire more attorneys to handle these cases. Additionally, RILS applied for a grant in 1998 from the United States Department of Justice to provide legal assistance to victims of domestic violence. In 1998, prior to starting this grant, only 62 restraining order cases were handled by RILS. In 2001 RILS opened 461 cases representing victims of domestic violence seeking restraining orders against their abusers through the family court and closed 507 cases. This assistance exceeded the stated goal of 300 cases.

Prior to this Project, RILS assisted domestic violence victims only in second hearings for restraining orders when the abuser was represented by an attorney. Currently, RILS represents all domestic violence victims for restraining orders. Prior to the project, lay advocates from the Rhode Island Coalition

Against Domestic Violence, only had a presence in District Court. Presently, lay advocates assist victims in Family Court as well.

In November 2000, RILS applied for and received funding under the Fiscal Year 2000 Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) to address the need to educate Rhode Islanders as to the rights and remedies available under the Federal and State fair housing laws. This funding was used to create and distribute fair housing informational pamphlets, hold educational training seminars for community-based groups, develop a fair housing informational website www.rifairhousing.org for the state, and hold state and regional fair housing conferences. This is the first time that a state agency has collaborated with RILS to provide fair housing services to the low-income community. Over the past several years, which includes last year, RILS has been continuing to work on implementing the goals and recommendations set forth in this statewide planning process.

Goals set by the Statewide Planning Committee were to:

- Identify and address the most important legal needs of eligible clients, as determined by appropriate needs assessments, taking into account the diversity of persons and needs in the state and its various communities.
- Strive to provide low-income persons throughout the state broad and equal access to legal services, regardless of such obstacles as disability, geographical isolation, culture and language.
- Provide high quality legal services to clients throughout the state, regardless of regional distinctions in demography, the economy, or the presence or absence of other local resources to provide or support the provision of legal services to low-income persons.
- Encourage innovation in the delivery of legal services accompanied by appropriate assessment of results.
- Minimize duplication of capacities and administration and make the best use of resources available to the delivery system as a whole and its component parts.
- Have the capacity and flexibility to respond effectively and efficiently to new and emerging client needs and other changes affecting the delivery of legal services to the poor.

In implementing these recommendations, has:

- Developed a Critical Mass Award website: www.rils.org;
- Developed a Fair Housing Information website: www.rifairhousing.org;
- Expanded its priorities to include: traditional family matters, restraining orders, representation of indigent parents in danger of incarceration for failure to pay child support; representation of indigent parents in neglect, dependency & abuse cases; housing discrimination.

- Increased the dissemination of legal educational materials through the World Wide Web and by making such materials available to state agencies, shelters, community action programs, etc.
- Strengthened its use of technology to allow advocates unlimited access to automated legal research databases, more efficient time keeping and client database programs, and updated financial management program, and formed an ongoing technology committee.
- Developed cooperative relationships and/or grant applications with organizations such as: the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence; the Roger Williams Law School; the RI Commission for Human Rights.

4) *Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity of client access throughout the state for all low income clients regardless of who they are, where in the state they reside, what languages they speak, their race/gender/ national origin, or the existence of other access barriers? How is this equity achieved?*

Rhode Island is a unique state due to its size so that access to civil legal assistance is within a forty-five minute drive. However, the real perception of our client population may be that the geographic distance is a barrier. Access to civil legal assistance is available through a toll free telephone number for all individuals in the state. Advocates are available to service our growing Latino population in the language in which they speak.

5) *Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity in terms of the availability of the full range of civil equal justice delivery capacities throughout the state? What mechanisms have been developed to ensure such relative equity is achieved and maintained? Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity in the development and distribution of civil equal justice resources throughout the state? Are there areas of the state that suffer from a disproportionate lack of resources (funding as well as in-kind/pro bono)? If so, is there a strategy to overcome such inequities?*

As set forth above, RILS believes that relative equity has been achieved in Rhode Island in terms of the availability of the full range of civil legal assistance to the statewide population.

6) *Does this legal services delivery system operate efficiently? Are there areas of duplication?*

The work provided by Rhode Island Legal Services as a statewide program is unduplicated. We believe that the work performed by other civil legal services providers only supplements the work of RILS. The legal services delivery system is efficient.

7) *Has the system expanded the way it involves private lawyers in the delivery of essential services to low-income persons? Does the system effectively and efficiently use the private bar to deliver essential services to low income people?*

Private attorneys are involved in the delivery of civil legal assistance to low-income people through the Volunteer Lawyer Program, which is funded by Rhode Island Legal Services and administered by the Rhode Island Bar Association. The malpractice insurance for VLP attorneys is paid for by Rhode Island Legal Services. RILS' attorneys are also available for mentoring with attorneys handling pro bono cases through the VLP. Frequently private attorneys will contact managing attorneys at RILS for advice on handling various family law or eviction cases. Currently there are approximately 1,010 lawyers that participate in the Volunteer Lawyer Program.

Since continuing legal education is mandatory in Rhode Island, it is considered to be one of the most effective tools for recruiting attorneys. On an annual basis, The Volunteer Lawyer Program sponsors at least two free seminars that provide CLE credits for its members and others agreeing to accept two cases free of charge. This has been extremely successful. Another project, designed to provide greater incentive for current VLP members to remain active participants, is to match Roger Williams Law students with VLP attorneys working on pro bono cases. The availability of students to handle research and certain aspects of cases helps increase their interest in future involvement in public activities, as well as encourages private attorneys to accept a greater number of cases. The RI Bar Association is in the process of establishing a judicial pro bono initiative to specifically support the VLP, and Pro Bono Elderly Program.

In an effort to expand private attorney involvement in the delivery of civil legal assistance to low-income people, the Affordable Legal Services Task Force is recommending that:

- Roger Williams University School of Law should expand its public service requirement to encourage students to participate in more extensive internship/externship programs designed to provide affordable legal services.
- Roger Williams University School of Law should expand the number and type of student-manned law clinics serving low-income people, by adding a family law clinic and expanding their disability law clinic.
- Establish a special bar membership for law school faculty who perform pro bono work or practice in the school's law clinics
- Increase access to alternative dispute resolution in the areas of family law, housing-landlord/tenant matters, and small claims
- A special "no dues" bar status be established for retired judges and lawyers that allows them to handle pro bono cases in the state and require them to perform 40 hours of pro bono service a year to maintain this status.

- A loan forgiveness program be created for attorneys who provide legal services in the public service area
- All attorneys are required to provide pro bono service annually.

Are the best organizational and human resource management configurations and approaches being used?

- 1) For calendar year 2001, what is the current configuration of programs (LSC and non-LSC) that deliver services to low income clients -- i.e., what are the components (size, areas of responsibility, governance) of the delivery system? What are the funding sources and levels for each of these components of the delivery system?***

Rhode Island Legal Services is the only LSC funded program providing free civil legal assistance for a comprehensive range of issues affecting the poor and elderly. The non-LSC programs that deliver services to low income clients are listed in the chart below:

Legal Services Provider	Target Area	Target Population	Priorities
American Civil Liberties Union	Statewide	no eligibility guidelines	Civil liberties
Attorney General Civil Division	Statewide	n/a	n/a
Court Appointed Special Advocate	Statewide	Children of parents accused of abuse/neglect	
International Institute	Providence		Immigration
Rhode Island Bar Association Elderly Referral	Statewide		Clients above 60
Rhode Island Bar Association Reduced Fee Program	Statewide	Income above 150% of poverty level	
Rhode Island Bar Association Volunteer Lawyer Program	Statewide	125% to 150% of poverty level	RILS' Priorities
The Disability Law Center		Disabled	Access to services; abuse & neglect; commitment hearings
R.I. Mental Health Advocate	Statewide	Mentally Ill	Civil Commitment
Roger Williams University School of Law Clinical Program	Providence		Disability cases & Family Law

2) Since October 1998, what other configurations and/or approaches have been seriously explored? Were any adopted? Were any rejected? Are any changes contemplated in the coming year?

We already have a comprehensive statewide plan that we will continue to develop and build upon. The Supreme Court has focused on RILS to strengthen the delivery of civil legal assistance.

3) Is there any identifiable duplication in capacities or services in the state? How many duplicative systems -- accounting systems, human resources management systems, case management systems, etc. -- currently exist? Does the service delivery system now in use minimize or eliminate duplications that existed prior to October 1, 1998?

Because Rhode Island Legal Services is the only existing LSC funded program in the state, there is no identifiable duplication in capacities, services, accounting and management systems, etc.

4) *Since October 1998, what innovative service delivery systems/mechanisms/initiatives been adopted in the state? Have any been explored and then rejected?*

Since 1998 RILS has explored the creation of separate centers within the main office attempting to maintain both the efficiency of a large office while developing the expertise and specialization that may be achieved in a small branch office or specialized unit. Rhode Island Legal Service's main office is separated into three delivery system centers: the Public Benefits and Employment Law Center; the Family Law Center; and the Housing Law Center and Eviction Defense Clinic. Rhode Island Legal Services has expanded its outreach to the community with various community legal education projects and clinics. First, with funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, RILS has created the Fair Housing Unit within the Housing Law Center and Eviction Defense Clinic which launched an education and outreach project to inform the communities of their rights under various state and federal laws and the remedies that protect those rights. This outreach effort includes: community seminars; newspaper advertisements; a statewide fair housing conference and the development of a website to inform the public of their rights, located at www.rifairhousing.org.

In addition, as set forth earlier, RILS has launched two community legal clinics, one a school based legal clinic and the other a hospital based legal clinic. Both are innovation in their own right. The hospital based legal clinic is one of only several medical-legal collaboratives around the country. This medical-legal collaborative will aid doctors in developing a holistic approach in treating their patients' medical problems while affording access to legal assistance and training that addresses legal problems that may impact upon a patient's health. The school based legal clinic, called the Community Legal Clinic, provides access to our clients in an enterprise zone that allows them to obtain legal assistance after they drop off their children at school. It is also an outreach effort into the Portuguese community utilizing an advocate fluent in the Portuguese and Cape Verdean languages.

In an ongoing effort to increase access to the working poor, RILS has implemented late office hours on Thursdays when the office is open until 6:00 PM.

Our collaborative effort with other entities is in itself innovative and extensive. First, our Domestic Violence Project is collaboration with the RI Coalition against Domestic Violence. Deborah DeBare, the Executive Director of the Coalition, called the collaboration a "national model" in 1998. Subsequent to

our project, the Department of Justice has required such collaboration from all grantees.

In establishing the fair housing education and outreach project mentioned above, the collaborative effort with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights is the first collaboration of a state agency with a non-profit agency in Rhode Island according to Gene Booth, former Executive Director of the Commission.

The Responsible Parent Project utilizes an innovative approach that reverses the current trend of demonizing parents who have failed to pay their child support and writing them off as "deadbeat dads". RILS' project instead focuses on assessing the barriers that these indigent and working poor non-custodial parents face in paying their court assigned child support. Through appropriate legal representation and advice, the project's emphasis is on changing the long-term behavior of its clients to allow them to responsibly assume their fair share of the cost of supporting their child.