

Vermont Legal Aid SFY2027 Appropriations Request

Increase to Base Funding	\$885,620
Restore MAP Funding	\$528,815
Total	\$1,414,435

Summary

Vermont Legal Aid respectfully requests \$1,414,435 in SFY 2027 to restore funding for the Medicare Advocacy Project (MAP) and stabilize core civil legal services. Under the Governor's proposed FY 2027 budget, **VLA is not level funded** and loses support for MAP, **a critical safeguard that has protected Vermonters' access to Medicare since 1989**, at a moment when Vermont's health care system is at a breaking point. Additionally, despite rising inflation and sharply higher health insurance premiums, VLA has received has not received an increase from the Agency of Human Services. After three consecutive years of level funding and significant funding cuts, VLA is now operating at a structural deficit, **resulting in painful staff layoffs and a material reduction in civil legal services statewide**.

At the same time, the share of funding required to support mandated AHS services continues to grow, shrinking resources for general legal services and reducing federal match dollars for AHS, **since every dollar invested in General Legal Services leverages a 50% federal match for the Agency**.

This year, to quickly respond to the urgent needs of the community, Vermont Legal Aid launched a new, **largely unfunded Immigrant Minor Guardianship Project** to help families make a plan for their children in the event a parent is detained or deported.

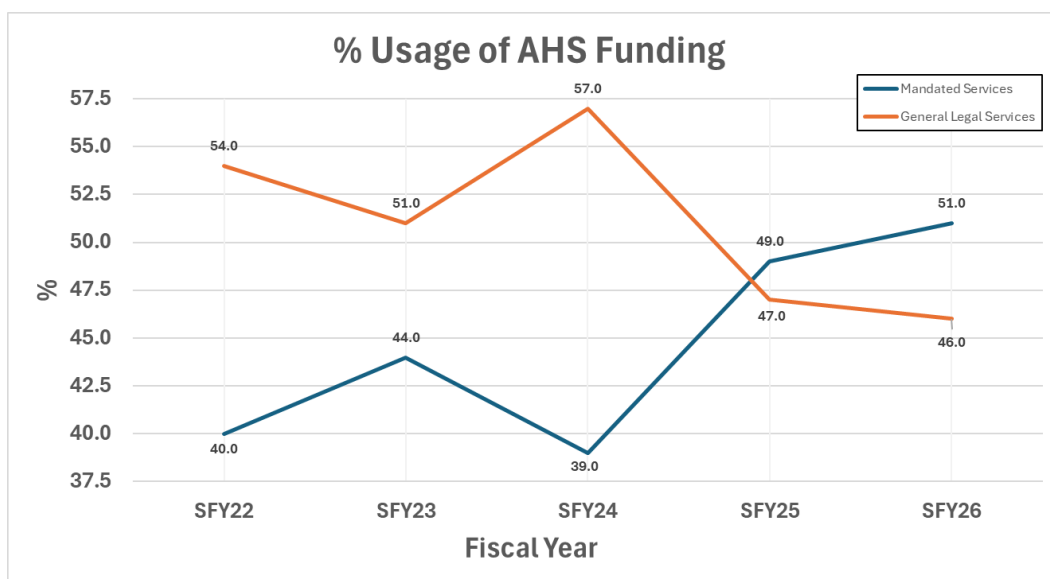
Demand for legal assistance has surged dramatically, increasing by **more than 104% since 2022**. Without an increase, we face further reductions in staffing and service levels at a time of exponential growth in legal need across Vermont.

Need for Funding

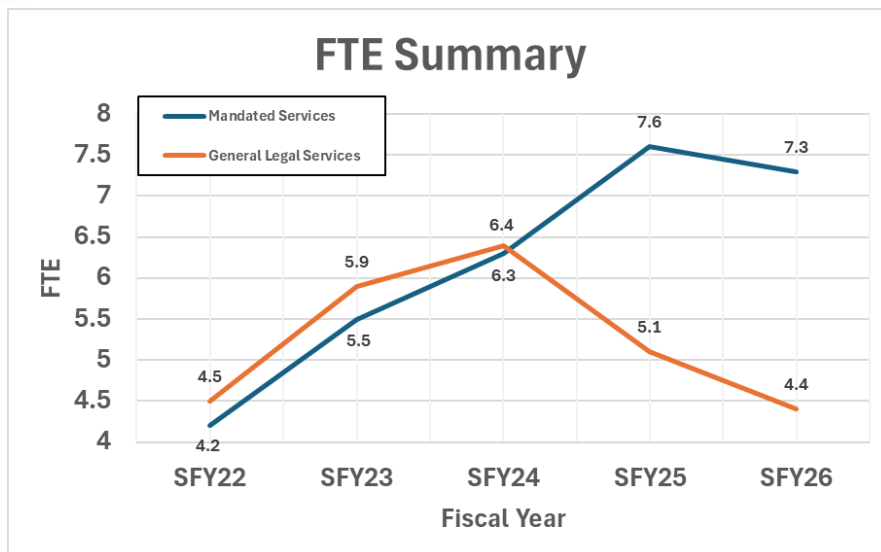
- **Restore funding for the Medicare Advocacy Project:** MAP ensures that older and disabled Vermonters receive the benefits they are legally entitled to, often stepping in when wrongful denials would otherwise leave people without access to essential health care. At a crucial turning point for Vermont's health care system, **eliminating MAP would leave a significant number of seniors to navigate an increasingly complex system in crisis alone**. MAP is a proven cost-saver for the State. Since 2000, MAP has secured nearly \$17 million in Medicare reimbursements and recoupments for DVHA. In 2025 alone, MAP opened 92 cases worth nearly \$1 million in Vermont Medicaid dollars. MAP is an

essential safeguard for older Vermonters at a time when our healthcare system is at a breaking point.

- The state supports several programs at VLA, **but our AHS grant is the only state funding that covers our core legal services.** This grant currently funds VLA at \$2,617,994 annually. This amount has remained level while inflation has averaged approximately **3% per year since 2025**, resulting in a substantial gap between the cost of delivering services and the funds received.
- **AHS-mandated services have grown steadily since FY22**, requiring more staff time and resources. As a result, the funding intended to cover **“all other Title XX client civil legal services”** (social security block grant funds) per our contract - continues to diminish at a time when the needs of low-income Vermonters are significantly increasing.



Program Impact	Resulting Consequences
The Poverty Law Project (PLP) - the primary program supported by this flexible portion of the AHS contract- has been significantly impacted by the funding shortfall . Staffing for the PLP has been greatly reduced since FY22.	As a result, fewer clients are being served and the level of legal services has declined for Vermonters facing housing instability, access-to-benefits issues, and other civil legal crises.



- Protecting Children in Immigrant Families:**
 After the election, VLA saw a surge in calls from immigrant parents fearing detention or deportation – and the possible placement of their children in State custody. In response and with the support and cooperation of DCF, we launched the **Immigrant Minor Guardianship Project** to help families make a plan in case of family separation. Through clinics held statewide, **we have helped over 67 families and more than 117 children** secure plans that keep children with a familiar adult and avoid being put into State custody until adulthood. **This work is largely unfunded**, with attorneys and staff volunteering evenings to meet demand. A \$150,000 budget request would allow us to cover staff time and clinic costs and ensure the continuation of this critical program and the protection for immigrant children and families.
- Our statewide Legal Helpline** is the front door to civil legal services in Vermont, fielding more than 26,000 calls each year, yet it remains **drastically underfunded**, receiving just \$100,000 from AHS toward a \$900,000 operating cost. **Demand for our help has surged by more than 104% since 2022**, driven by rising housing instability, benefit denials, and economic strain across the state. Without increased funding, Vermont Legal Aid will be forced to reduce Helpline staffing and service levels, turning away callers at a moment when more Vermonters than ever are seeking help. Investing in the Helpline is one of the most efficient ways to stabilize the civil legal system, resolve problems early, and prevent crises from escalating into far more costly interventions.

Legal Helpline

	2022	2023	2024
Total Calls:	10,723	11,160	21,883

Current Financial Strain

- VLA is **currently operating with a deficit** directly tied to stagnant funding, growing costs, and federal cuts.
- In the past year, we have had to **reduce staff** and **reduce the level of services provided**.
- This is happening while the number of **Vermonters seeking civil legal help has more than doubled - an increase of 104% since 2022**.

Need	Amount
Restore MAP funding	\$528,815
Inflationary increase on the \$2,617,994 base at 3% per year since 2025 through 2027	\$235,620
2 FTE attorneys/staff for PLP restoration	\$300,000
Statewide Legal Helpline Funding	\$200,000
Immigrant Minor Guardianship Project	\$150,000
Total Budget Request	\$1,414,435

Conclusion

A budget increase is essential to prevent further erosion of civil legal services and maintain Vermont's commitment to supporting the state's most vulnerable residents. This funding will ensure Vermonters are not left without legal help during life-altering crises.

Respectfully,



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