



Vermont Legal Aid SFY2027 Appropriations Request

Maintain Funding in House Passed Budget for Immigration	\$200,000
Maintain Funding in House Passed Budget for Statewide Legal Helpline	\$100,000
Increase Base Funding	\$745,620
Total	\$1,045,620

Summary

Vermont Legal Aid respectfully requests **\$1,045,620 in SFY 2027** to stabilize core legal services, fund two immigration attorneys, and sustain a proven eviction prevention pilot program serving Vermonters at risk of losing their homes. Despite rising inflation and sharply higher health insurance premiums, VLA 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.**

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.

Additionally, Vermont Legal Aid has launched an immigration practice for the first time in response to an urgent surge in enforcement and need across the state. At a time of heightened enforcement and growing fear, this work is critical - helping families stay together, access safety, and navigate complex legal systems. **But these attorney positions are not fully funded. We need your support to sustain this essential work.**

Funding Request Breakdown:

Maintain \$200,000 in House Passed Budget for Immigration

- The Immigration Community Lawyering Initiative is a new, first-of-its-kind program at Vermont Legal Aid, launched in partnership with the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP) to expand access to immigration legal services across the state. For the first time, VLA is building an in-house immigration practice, placing two staff attorneys in central and southern Vermont to provide community-based, trusted legal support. **At a time of heightened enforcement and growing fear, this work is urgent** - helping families stay together, access safety, and navigate complex legal systems.



- **We are incredibly thankful to the House for including a \$200,000 appropriation in its budget and respectfully ask that the Senate maintain this funding.** These positions are currently funded only through January, creating a real risk of disruption just as demand is increasing. Sustaining this investment ensures Vermont’s immigrant communities continue to have access to critical legal support when they need it most.

Maintain \$100,000 in House Passed Budget for Legal Helpline

- We are deeply grateful to the House for including \$100,000 in the budget to strengthen Vermont Legal Aid’s statewide Legal Helpline, and we respectfully ask that this funding be maintained. The Helpline is the front door to civil legal services in Vermont, **fielding more than 26,000 calls each year**, yet it remains significantly underfunded - receiving just \$100,000 from AHS toward a \$900,000 operating cost.
- **Demand for help has surged by more than 104% since 2022**, driven by rising housing instability, benefit denials, and economic strain across the state. Without this increased investment, we risk reducing staffing and turning away Vermonters at the moment they need help most. Sustaining this funding is one of the most efficient ways to ensure people can access legal support early, resolve issues quickly, and prevent crises from escalating into far more costly outcomes.

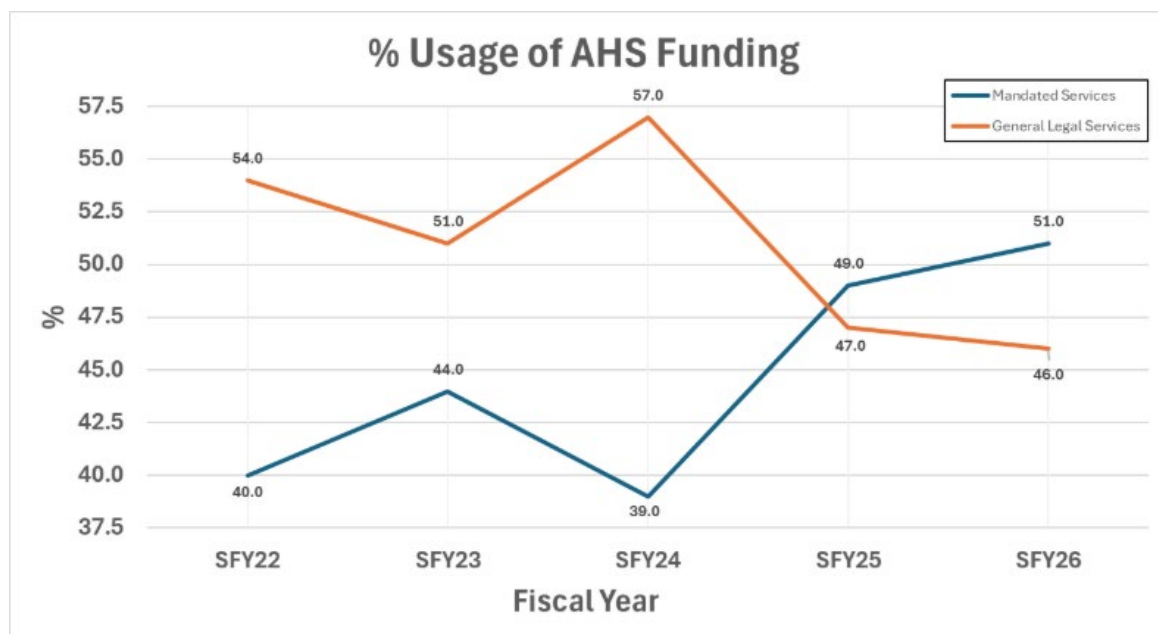
Legal Helpline

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

Vermont Legal Aid requests \$745,620 over the House Passed Budget

- Vermont Legal Aid requests \$745,620 to sustain critical legal services and prevent further gaps for low-income Vermonters. This includes funding to continue the Tenant Representation Pilot (TRP) Program – that was authorized by Act 47 but set to expire on October 31, 2026 - and an adjustment to address three years of flat funding under our state funding through the Agency of Human Services (AHS) contract.
- The funds we receive through AHS is the only state funding supporting our core civil legal services such as housing and help accessing public benefits - has remained level at \$2,617,994 despite rising costs and growing demand. Inflation has steadily eroded its value, while AHS-mandated work has increased, leaving fewer resources for essential services through the Poverty Law Project. The result: reduced staffing and fewer Vermonters served during a time of heightened need. This investment will both sustain a high-impact eviction prevention program and stabilize the foundation of civil legal services statewide.

- The Tenant Representation Pilot Program is a proven, cost-effective intervention: between August 2025 and March 2026, **more than half of tenants facing eviction who received assistance in the program, were able to stay in their homes**, avoiding displacement and reducing reliance on emergency systems.
- 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.**



Program Impact

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.

Resulting Consequences

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.

Current Financial Strain

- For the third straight year 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
Tenant Representation Program	\$510,000
Inflationary increase on the \$2,617,994 base at 3% per year since 2025 through 2027	\$235,620
Maintain Funding from House Passed Budget for Immigration	\$200,000
Maintain Funding from House Passed Budget for Statewide Legal Helpline	\$100,000
Total Budget Request	\$1,045,620

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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