

SEATAC MUNICIPAL COURT

Your City.  Your Court.

“The Role of Poverty in the Legal System”

Did you know.....?

- While approximately 14% of Washington state’s population had an annual income at or below the poverty level in 2013, approximately 21% of SeaTac residents live with incomes at or below the poverty level according to the US Census Bureau.
- In 2014, the level of the state’s population that lived at or below the poverty level did not deviate much from the 2013 numbers, while the population in the City of SeaTac living at or below the poverty level grew to almost 23%.
- For more information on US statistics, or local statistics, visit the US Census Bureau at www.census.gov.

Recently a survey conducted by Washington State University assessed the needs for civil legal aid. The study was conducted by surveying more than 1,600 low-income households and their needs for legal assistance. The results indicated that the average number of legal problems per low-income household has tripled over the last decade, and more than 75 percent of those with civil legal problems struggle without a lawyer or any type of legal assistance.

“We must recognize the consequences of a system of justice in our state that denies a

(Continued on next page....)



(.....Continued from previous page)



Vicinity Map, City of SeaTac

significant portion of our population the ability to assert and defend their core legal rights. We can and we must do better.” – *Washington State Supreme Court Justice Charles Wiggins, Chair of the Civil Legal Needs Study Update Committee.*

The nationally recognized minimal level of service is one legal aid attorney for every 5,000 eligible low-income residents. The state of Washington currently has one state-funded legal aid attorney for every 11,628 eligible residents, significantly lower than the national standard. Legal aid helps residents with issues related to debt collection, employment discrimination, healthcare, and the like. The survey determined that low-income persons of color, victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, disabled persons, and youth experience substantially higher rates of legal problems than the general population. “We need to ensure that low-income residents understand their legal rights and know where to look for legal help when they need it.” – *Justice Charles Wiggins.*

Nearly half of the respondents to the 2014 Civil Legal Needs Survey reported that they were employed at least part-time. One third of all of the respondents reported at least one problem related to employment. - 2015 Washington Civil Legal Needs Update

What are the legal issues most often faced by low-income Washington residents?

In the Civil Legal Needs Study survey conducted in 2003, the most prevalent legal problems facing low-income Washington residents revolved around housing issues. In the survey conducted in 2014, the most prevalent legal problems revolved around health care issues.

Other common legal problems faced by low-income households include those related to medical care cost recovery, and unfair collection practices, where legal remedies may be available. Low-income residents often attempt to address these issues and others such as landlord disputes, unsafe housing conditions, and problems related to eviction or termination of a lease without the assistance of an attorney.

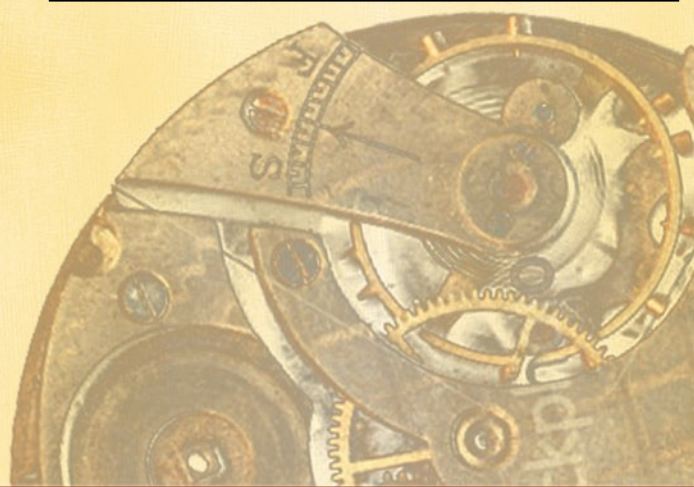
Some legal problems arise from family conflict, including child custody and support, and problems associated with being a victim of domestic violence. Quite often the low-income resident faces many of these issues all together at one time, such as a mother and her three young daughters that faced eviction from their apartment following a domestic violence dispute, because the landlord believed “if the police have to come, she is somebody we don’t want in the building.” – *Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update*.

There are likely legal remedies for each situation, but unfamiliarity with the law and the inability to afford legal counsel may make remedies completely unattainable for the low-income resident. Regardless of income level, we should strive to ensure justice is accessible to everyone.

“Desperate to stop her abusive ex-spouse from gaining custody of their daughter but unable to afford a lawyer, Anna spent hours in the local library with court documents spread on the counter and plugging quarters into the copy machine.

She didn’t understand how the judicial system worked and admitted to making “a lot of mistakes.” She missed so many days of work to be in court that she lost her job at a Skookum shipyard.” – Story included in 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, name changed for Report; Civil Legal Needs Study Update Committee.

“My homelessness was the result of job loss, due to an extended illness and hospitalization.” – 2014 Survey Respondent, 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, Civil Legal Needs Study Update Committee.

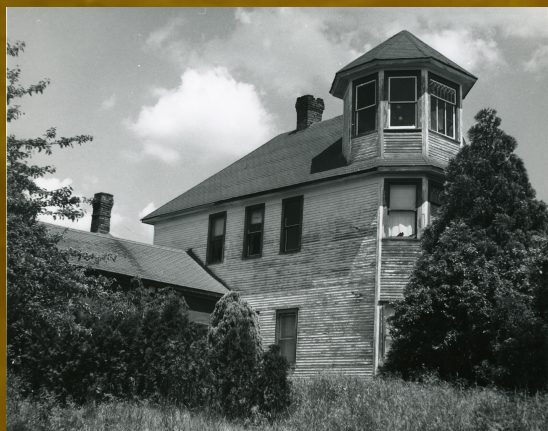


Low-income Washingtonians who have been a victim of domestic violence or of sexual assault experience an average of 19.7 legal problems per household, twice the average experienced by the general low-income population. – 2015 Washington Civil Legal Needs Update

“When you’ve worked all your life and find yourself, at almost 60, with nothing, it’s quite a shock.” –

2015 Washington Civil Legal Needs Update.

To review the 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Update Report, go to: http://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CivilLegalNeedsStudy_October2015_V21_Final10_14_15.pdf



“Des Moines Highway 152 – 154”, 1969, photographer Werner Lengenbacher, State Library Photograph Collection, 1851-1990, Washington State Archives, Digital Archives, <http://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov>, 1/22/2016



Any websites, web pages, links, or other internet content referred to or contained within this newsletter are for reference purposes only and neither the SeaTac Municipal Court nor the City of SeaTac endorse, support, or recommend any advertisement contained within a referenced website, web page, or link that is external to the SeaTac Municipal Court webpage.

The SeaTac Municipal Court Newsletter is written by Judge Elizabeth Cordi-Bejarano. Any copying, reproduction or distribution of this document, in whole or in part, without her explicit written permission is strictly prohibited.

To receive this newsletter via email, visit www.cityofseatac.com, and under the tab, “I want to...” select “Sign up for...”, “eNotifications”, and select “Municipal Court Newsletter”

If you do not wish to receive future editions of this newsletter via email, simply notify the Court Administrator, Ms. Gail Cannon, at: gcannon@ci.seatac.wa.us

SEATAC MUNICIPAL COURT

4800 S. 188th Street
SeaTac, Washington 98188
206-973-4610

<http://www.cityofseatac.com/court>