

Commentary: Kentucky's civil legal aid programs brace for unprecedented need for legal help

As we begin the process of reopening the economy and emerging from the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic, health, and social/emotional hardships facing our communities will become clearer.

COVID-19 will leave countless Kentuckians with new and unanticipated challenges. Many of the challenges will involve civil legal issues: keeping one's home, protection from abuse, securing benefits like unemployment, and much more.

We must use every available resource to provide relief during the COVID-19 recovery. Lawyers, specifically civil legal aid lawyers, will play an integral role in our front-line response.

Civil legal aid must be a crucial component of the Commonwealth's comprehensive approach to the recovery. Unlike in criminal cases, people dealing with the civil justice system are not guaranteed representation from a public defense attorney.

In every county in Kentucky, legal aid programs and volunteer lawyers have quickly adapted to serve as many people as they can through remote client consultations, virtual clinics, and representation in telephonic emergency hearings.

Kentucky's legal aid programs are looking for new and innovative ways to serve those in need. The programs have launched Together Lawyers Can, a statewide pro bono project to connect Kentucky lawyers with people in crisis as a result of the pandemic. Over 200 lawyers from across the Commonwealth have volunteered so far.

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