



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

December 6, 2024

1. Introduction: The United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts (the “Court”) requests proposals to staff the *Pro Se* Legal Assistance Pilot Program (the “Program”) to serve unrepresented litigants in the Court. The term would begin on March 3, 2025, with a duration of one year, subject to renewal for an additional year. The Program would be staffed by one attorney with experience in legal services representing indigent clients.

2. Background: The Court has courthouses in Boston, Worcester, and Springfield. The Court’s jurisdiction includes both civil and criminal cases, but the Program will be focused on *pro se* civil litigants who are not prisoners. *Pro se* filings represent a sizable portion of the Court’s civil docket. Over the past five years, and with the exception of a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, the unrepresented case load in the Court has been rising. In 2023, *pro se* cases represented 26% of the Court’s total civil caseload. Although the type of civil cases filed by *pro se* litigants in the Court is similar to those filed in state court, the majority of filings concern contracts, real property (including foreclosures), torts, civil rights (employment), and consumer-protection claims and other statutory claims. Following models that have been implemented successfully in other federal district courts, this Court has concluded that launching a “limited assistance representation” (“LAR”) pilot program to provide guidance to *pro se* litigants would benefit not only the self-represented litigants, but the bench and bar, as well and promote access to justice.

3. Purpose: The purpose of this Request for Proposal (“RFP”) is to solicit proposals from legal service organizations for this Program. The Court will evaluate any RFP based on the criteria set out herein and the best fit for the Program.

4. Project Description: The Program would provide limited scope assistance to non-incarcerated, *pro se* litigants with federal civil cases. The Court will provide a grant to a legal services organization to cover the salary and benefits of the Program attorney who would remain in the employ and under the supervision of the legal services organization. The Court envisions that the Program’s support to *pro se* litigants with civil cases would be subject to a LAR signed by the *pro se* litigant and would not involve the Program attorney appearing in proceedings. The Program attorney’s services to the *pro se* litigants would include:
 - a. Counseling potential litigants on filing cases in federal court, including on the issue of whether the Court is the appropriate jurisdiction for their matters;
 - b. Explaining federal court procedure and the law as it applies to the facts as the litigant describes them;
 - c. Helping to explain court orders, rulings and settlement offers;

- d. Assisting with preparation for hearings, conferences and other proceedings;
- e. Providing referrals to other agencies and organizations that provide civil legal services and/or social services agencies; and
- f. Sharing information about the Court's *pro se* mediation program.

5. Terms and Conditions:

- a. Guarantee a timely response to individuals seeking assistance, which includes an intake process;
- b. Provide consultation following an intake with *pro se* litigants who request it;
- c. Maintain a full-time Program Attorney with contemplation of in-person and virtual consultation with *pro se* litigants;
- d. Provide appropriate services to all Program *pro se* litigants within the purview of the Program;
- e. Provide input and guidance about making court forms/information more accessible to *pro se* litigants; and
- f. Prepare and submit to the Court periodic reports on the Program's operations and services to allow the Court to review the work performed against the standards outlined in the proposal.

6. Court's Role:

- a. Provide funding (through the use of grants from the Attorney Admission Fund) to operate the Program to the legal services organization;
- b. Provide courthouse space free of rent or utility charges;
- c. Provide technical and logistical support;
- d. Provide a comprehensive orientation for the Program attorney, including introductions to key Courthouse personnel and Court procedures and resources;
- e. Review the Program's periodic reports; and
- f. Coordinate with all stakeholders concerning support of the Program.

7. Information Required to be in the Proposal:

A successful proposal will include:

- a. Detailed demonstration of legal services organization's expertise in providing the types of services to be offered by the Program and its experience with the types of cases brought by civil *pro se* litigants in this District;
- b. Information about the experience and background about the proposed Program attorney (or a recruitment plan for same), particularly as to the attorney's experience working with indigent clients, providing legal advice

- about litigation, managing client appointments and consultations, working independently and contributing to the development of the Program;
- c. A menu of services to be offered by the Program, highlighting and explaining any differences from the services listed in paragraph 4 above;
 - d. A discussion of how the legal services organization proposes to satisfy the terms and conditions set forth in paragraph 5 above including the resources your organization will bring to bear in meeting those terms and conditions;
 - e. Any suggestions for improving, supporting and sustaining the functioning of a successful Program;
 - f. Any constraints the legal services organization anticipates in assisting civil *pro se* litigants in this Court; and
 - g. The applicant's access to social work resources for *pro se* litigants who may have needs beyond the reach of judicial resolution.
8. Funding requirements. The Court anticipates, based upon research and the programs already in place in other federal district courts, that the initial grant would be \$125,000 to cover the salary and benefits of the Program attorney.
 9. Deadline: Proposals are to be submitted to proposal@mad.uscourts.gov by **January 10, 2025**.
 10. Contact: Robert M. Farrell, Clerk, U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts, Rob_Farrell@mad.uscourts.gov.