Statement of Goals and Priorities
Fiscal Year 2024

HOW DO WE CHOOSE WHAT WE WORK ON?

1. Our clients are people with disabilities.
2. You must live in Minnesota, or your issue must have occurred in Minnesota.
3. Your problem must be related to your disability.
4. We serve people regardless of their income.
5. Our funding sources have rules for service. You and your problem must meet these rules. Additional information can be found on MDLC’s website.
6. Your problem must be one we can solve. The law must be able to give you the help you are asking for. We prioritize cases that are likely to be successful.
7. Every year, our Board, Council, the community, and our staff set what we will focus on or prioritize for the next year.
8. If we can give you information to solve your problem on your own (self-advocate) or your problem can be solved by another professional or organization, we may give you that information instead of taking your case.
9. To help the most people possible, we may need to focus on cases that can help many people before we take cases that may only help one person.
10. The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) gets many requests for help and sometimes we do not have enough time, money, or people to help everyone that calls, even if the case is within our priorities.
11. We focus our efforts on cases where our advocacy would likely result in services being provided in a more integrated setting or manner.
12. We also consider whether the person with a disability is also subject to barriers as a member of another protected class.

MDLC cannot represent on every issue, including, but not limited to criminal matters, evictions, guardianship, civil commitment, child protection, Social Security Disability appeals, family law, worker compensation issues, personal injury cases, and taxation issues. We have a survey up all year to get feedback from the community about our priorities.
OVERVIEW OF MDLC AND STRATEGIC GOALS

Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid’s (MMLA) Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) provides free legal advice and representation for persons with disabilities in Minnesota. The mission of MDLC is to advance the dignity, self-determination, and equality of individuals with disabilities.

MMLA is designated, through executive order, as the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System for Minnesotans with disabilities. MMLA performs this function through its statewide MDLC. The P&A has the authority to protect and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and to investigate incidents of abuse and neglect. MDLC recognizes the importance of taking action on the issues impacting people with disabilities who are also subject to barriers as a member of another protected class, specific concerns of persons of color, persons with multiple disabilities, and those with language or communication concerns.

To guide its work, MDLC has adopted a Five-year Strategic Plan with four broad goals.

MDLC’s four strategic goals are to:

- Eliminate Abuse and Neglect;
- Increase Integration and Decrease Discrimination;
- Increase Access to Appropriate Services; and
- Increase Statewide Awareness of MDLC as an Advocacy Resource.

MDLC SERVICES:

MDLC’s advocacy includes:
- Individual and group legal advocacy for persons with disabilities;
- Monitoring visits and investigations to ensure safety and appropriate services;
- Outreach to individuals with disabilities, families, advocates, and service providers;
- Training and information on legal rights and self-advocacy; and
- Educating policy makers on issues that affect people with disabilities.

MDLC acknowledges the values within the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA). Consistent with the MHRA, and with its mission to promote the principles of Disability Justice, MDLC recognizes that disability status may intersect with other protected classes. These include a client’s race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, marital status, disability, public assistance, age, sexual orientation, and familial status. MDLC is committed to diversity, inclusion, and equity. MDLC also uses MMLA’s Racial Justice Values Statement to guide our work. Under this guidance document, MDLC prioritizes cases and issues that seek to advance the cause of racial justice.

Every year, MDLC identifies important issues under the four strategic goals that affect people with disabilities. These important issues then become the priorities (focus areas) of MDLC’s annual work.
The order in which the following priorities are listed does not imply any higher or lower ranking.

**Abuse and Neglect**

For individuals with disabilities:
- **Priority:**
  1. Help clients whose health or safety is at risk because of abuse. (physical & sexual assault, chemical restraint, restraint, seclusion, etc.)
  2. Help clients whose health or safety is at risk because of neglect. (failure to provide adequate medical care, required supervision, etc.)
  3. Help clients who are financially exploited.
  4. Help clients whose residential/treatment providers are not providing or are denying them access to critical care or supports.

For groups of people with disabilities:
- **Priority:**
  1. Conduct monitoring visits to facilities where persons with disabilities reside, learn, or receive services.
  2. Conduct investigations when we have probable cause that abuse or neglect has occurred in a program or facility serving a group of individuals with disabilities.

**Housing**

For individuals with disabilities:
- **Priority:**
  1. Help clients obtain or keep the housing of their choice in the most integrated setting that meets their needs.
  2. Help clients get access to reasonable accommodations and modifications in housing.

**Transportation**

For groups of people with disabilities:
- **Priority:**
  1. Help clients secure appropriate and accessible transportation to activities in the community of their choice.

**Education**

For individuals and groups with disabilities:
- **Priority**
  1. Help children/students who are excluded from daycare or school because of disability related conduct.
2. Help students obtain positive behavior interventions and avoid being inappropriately disciplined in school settings.
3. Help students get access to special education and related services in the least restrictive settings.
4. Help students obtain accommodations and supports at school that they need to access all the benefits of school in the most integrated setting.
5. Help students obtain transition-based services.

**Employment**

For individuals with disabilities:

**Priority:**
1. Help clients get full services from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, State Services for the Blind, and Independent Living Centers.
2. Help students with disabilities get the services they need to transition from school to employment.
3. Help Social Security Disability beneficiaries (i.e., people who receive SSI and/or SSDI) who are engaged in return-to-work efforts or in securing, maintaining, or regaining employment and who need consultation or legal advocacy.
4. Help school-age and young adults who are served within state, school, and county service systems to fully participate in independent or supported employment to the maximum extent feasible.
5. Help clients understand and obtain reasonable accommodations in employment to address their disabilities. However, we do not regularly represent client in employment discrimination lawsuits.

For groups of people with disabilities:

**Priority:**
6. Work to ensure that people with disabilities are offered job exploration, training, and coaching and can access customized employment opportunities and that all people with disabilities who work are paid at least minimum wage.

**Access and Rights**

For individuals and groups with disabilities:

**Priority:**
1. Help clients obtain or retain access to activities in the community of their choice in the most integrated setting that meets their needs.
2. Ensure access to public services (services provided by local, county, or state government, including correctional settings), and public accommodations (businesses/organizations serving the public).
3. Work to protect clients’ access to voting.
4. Ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to people with disabilities in facilities, such as jails and prisons, especially related to communication.
5. Help clients get the services they need to live in the community, including move from restrictive to integrated settings, obtaining access to health care programs, and obtaining Assistive Technology.
7. Work to ensure contact with law enforcement and the criminal process is safe and fair.

**Increase Awareness of MDLC**

For individuals with disabilities and their families, service providers, and community groups

**Priority:**
1. Conduct targeted in-reach to historically underserved communities, including communities of color and communities that include non-native English speakers;
2. Develop partnerships and relationships with key contacts and service providers in these communities;
3. Participate in outreach events sponsored by other local, regional, and statewide disability groups and other partners; and
4. Deliver presentations on disability law issues to self-advocacy and community.
5. Work on solutions to problems that affect many persons with disabilities through group advocacy such as class actions, policy work, and other systemic efforts.
6. Conducts outreach about the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in the electoral (voting) process groups.

***People with problems not included within MDLC’s priorities may receive referrals, self-help advice, and/or self-help materials.***

While MDLC focuses many of its priorities on individual case work, we also work to create change through systemic advocacy, such as policy change, task force and committee involvement, and representing groups of people with disabilities.