



MID-MINNESOTA LEGAL AID
MINNESOTA DISABILITY LAW CENTER

**Statement of Goals and Priorities
Fiscal Year 2024**

How do we choose what we can work on?

1. Our clients are people with disabilities.
2. You must live in Minnesota, or your issue must have happened in Minnesota.
3. Your problem must be related to your disability.
4. We help people no matter what their income is.
5. Our grants have rules about who we can help. You and your problem must meet these rules. More information about this can be found on [MDLC's website](#).
6. We need to believe the law can solve your problem. We focus on cases that we believe are likely to be successful.
7. Every year, our Board, Councils, the community, and our staff help set our priorities. We decide what kinds of cases we will focus on for the next year.
8. Sometimes we may give you information to solve your problem on your own (self-advocate). We may also refer you to a different professional or organization that may be able to help you.
9. We may focus on cases that can help many people with disabilities before we take cases that may only help one person with a disability.
10. Many people ask for help from the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC). Sometimes we do not have enough time, money, or staff to help everyone that calls.
11. We focus on cases that increase a person's choice and will help a person with a disability be as independent and connected to the community as possible.
12. We look at whether a person with a disability may be a member of another protected class and if there are other barriers because of that.

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](#) on our website. We always welcome input 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 people with disabilities in Minnesota. Our mission is to advance the dignity, self-determination, and equality of people with disabilities.

A state executive order named MMLA as the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System for Minnesotans with disabilities. MMLA does this work statewide through MDLC. The P&A has the authority to:

- protect and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities, and
- investigate incidents of abuse and neglect.

MDLC recognizes the importance of taking action on the issues impacting people with disabilities. Especially those who also face barriers because they are part of other protected classes. For example, the specific issues of people of color, people with multiple disabilities, and people with language or communication concerns.

To guide its work, MDLC has a [5-year Strategic Plan](#) with 4 main 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:

Some things we do are:

- Individual and group legal advocacy for people with disabilities;
- Monitoring visits and investigations to make sure services for people with disabilities are safe and appropriate;
- Outreach to people with disabilities, families, advocates, and service providers;
- Train people and provide information on legal rights and self-advocacy; and
- Educate policy makers on issues that affect people with disabilities.

The Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA) has a mission to uphold the principles of Disability Justice. MDLC recognizes this and does the same. We know that people with disability status may also be part of 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. We also use [MMLA's Racial Justice Values Statement](#) to guide our work. This document helps us to prioritize cases and issues that seek to advance the cause of racial justice.

Every year, MDLC identifies important issues under our strategic goals that affect people with disabilities. These important issues become the priorities (focus areas) of MDLC's annual work.

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.

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 whose safety is at risk because of restraint or seclusion.
4. Help students get access to special education and related services in the least restrictive settings.
5. Help students obtain accommodations and supports at school, that they need to access all the benefits of school in the most integrated setting.
6. Help students obtain transition-based services.
7. Help clients get accommodations in post-high school education settings.

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 clients 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.
6. Help clients obtain reasonable modifications and accommodations in health care settings.
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.****