



MID-MINNESOTA LEGAL AID
MINNESOTA DISABILITY LAW CENTER

**Statement of Goals and Priorities
Fiscal Year 2026**

How do we choose what we can work on?

1. Our clients are people with disabilities whose problem is related to their disability.
2. You must live in Minnesota or your issue must have happened in Minnesota.
3. We help people with all levels of income.
4. 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](#).
5. 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.
6. We need to believe the law can solve your problem. We focus on cases that we believe are likely to be successful.
7. We focus on cases where a person is not able to advocate for themselves or does not have someone to advocate for them. We may give you advice to solve your problem on your own (self-advocate). We may also give you information about different professionals or organizations that may be able to help.
8. We focus on having a larger impact on issues. We may take cases that can help many people with disabilities before we take cases that may help one person.
9. We focus on cases that are critical to help a person with a disability access the services they need to live in the community of their choice.
10. We look at whether a person with a disability may be a member of another protected class and if there are other barriers/challenges because of that.
11. Many people ask for help from the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC). We do not always have enough time, money, or staff to help everyone that calls.

MDLC cannot represent on every issue, including, but not limited to: criminal matters, evictions, guardianship, civil commitment, child protection, Social Security Disability appeals, Social Security Overpayments, family law, worker compensation issues, personal injury cases, unemployment, and taxation issues. We are no longer representing non-Social Security disability beneficiaries in employment or reasonable accommodation cases. 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 [DLC-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.

For groups of individuals 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.
3. Conduct monitoring of, and investigate where appropriate, Juvenile facilities licensed by the department of corrections that serve people with disabilities with the goals of creating systemic change/impact.
4. Conduct monitoring of, and investigate where appropriate, mental health crisis response providers that serve people with disabilities, with the goal of creating systemic change.

Education

For individuals and groups of individuals with disabilities:

Priority: Giving priority to cases that may have systemic resolutions and can be addressed through legal tools,

1. Advise and/or represent clients whose safety is at risk because of restraint, seclusion, abuse, or neglect.
2. Help students who are excluded from school because of disability related conduct, including suspension, expulsion, informal removal such as calling home for parental pickup, or inappropriately seeking truancy.
3. Empower families and provide self-advocacy resources to access special education and related services in the least restrictive settings.

Access and Rights

For individuals and groups of individuals with disabilities:

Priority:

1. Advise clients and provide self-advocacy resources for access to public services (services provided by local, county, or state government, including correctional settings), and public accommodations (businesses/organizations serving the public), focusing on systemic solutions.
2. Advise clients and for cases with strong legal merit, ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to people with disabilities in facilities, such as jails and prisons, especially related to communication, with a focus on significant policy changes and systemic solutions.
3. Ensure access to accessible voting.

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. Ensure access to employment with necessary and appropriate reasonable accommodations for Social Security disability beneficiaries in employment, for cases with strong legal merit.

For groups of individuals with disabilities:

Priority:

1. 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.

Housing

For individuals with disabilities:

Priority:

1. Help clients maintain housing with waiver-funded housing supports so that they keep the housing of their choice in the most integrated setting that meets their needs.
2. Provide self-advocacy resources and in cases with strong legal merit, ensure reasonable accommodations and modifications individuals with disabilities need to get or keep housing.

For groups of individuals with disabilities:

Priority:

1. Ensure that groups of individuals with disabilities are not subjected to discriminatory policies in housing that deny reasonable accommodations or modifications needed to access housing. Focus will be on systemic/impact policy and cases with strong legal merit.
2. Prioritize systemic change for Housing Stabilization Services (HSS)

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. 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.****