



Hard times for legal services

Providers look for new fund sources

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At the same time an increasing number of impoverished Californians are seeking free legal help, the already hard-pressed legal services organizations that serve the poor are seeing some of their own funding sources fall on hard times.

Trust fund and government grants have shrunk, charitable foundations have less money to give away and the state budget crisis has virtually dispelled any hope of stopgap funding.

"We're in a very concerned fiscal state at the moment," said Gary Smith, executive director of Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC), which serves 23 counties.

Another organization, Legal Aid of the North Bay, had to shut down its full-time office in Napa this spring, later reopening in much smaller quarters to assist senior citizens just two days a week. "It is a source of great pain, at least as far as I'm concerned, that we are not helping non-senior poor people (in Napa)," said William Kransdorf, legal services director of the Marin County-based program. "It's just that at the moment we can't do it. We don't have the resources." California's Legal Services Trust Fund Program (IOLTA), an important funding source for many legal services agencies, has seen its distributions shrink 44 percent in just two years.



Santa Clara County Bar Association leaders James Towery and Phil Hammer launched a fundraising campaign several years ago to help seven local legal services programs, inviting partners of the largest local law firms to join the campaign's board with an annual contribution amounting to one billable hour (set at \$250) for every attorney at the firm.

Last year, the campaign raised more than \$400,000 from law firms and corporations (a 13-fold jump in private funding) and leveraged \$750,000 more for legal services. "[The drop in IOLTA funding] has affected all of us," said John Hedges, executive director of the Pro Bono Project of the Silicon Valley.