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# Civil legal aid is tool in helping victims of partner violence



## Civil Legal Aid: A Proven Tool Against Domestic Violence

By [Lonnie A. Powers](#), Executive Director, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation.  
(From the [Huffington Post](#)).

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When domestic violence makes national news—often involving high-profile celebrities like Chris Brown (2009) or Ray Rice—these tragic stories frequently

spark public debate and, in some instances, [legislative action](#) on how to better aid victims and prevent future incidences.

## A Public Health Problem

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Domestic violence is a complex public health problem that defies an easy solution. However, when addressing victims who are living in poverty, access to civil legal services is **\*\*proven to prevent further violence and save lives\*\***.

### Key Research Findings on Legal Services

- → The availability of civil legal services significantly reduces the likelihood that someone will again be the victim of intimate partner violence.
- → A study analyzing data from the National Crime Victimization Survey and the U.S. Census concluded that access to services was a primary reason for the decline in domestic violence rates during the 1990s. (Source: [U.S. Department of Justice report](#))

## Violence Went Down When Legal Aid Went Up

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While emergency shelters, counselors, and hotlines are vital during a crisis, legal services are crucial for long-term stability. These services offer victims real, lasting alternatives to abusive relationships by assisting with:

- ✓ Protective Orders
- ✓ Child Custody and Support
- ✓ Divorce and Property Distribution
- ✓ Disputes concerning Immigration, Housing, and Public Benefits

### Statistical Trend Confirmed

**IMPORTANT:** Between 1994 and 2000, the availability of civil legal services for domestic violence victims increased by a massive **\*\*245 percent\*\*** (from 336 programs to 1,441), directly correlating with the documented decline in incidences of domestic violence.

## Strong Legal Advocacy is Key

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The court system is scary and overwhelming for anyone. For vulnerable victims, the lack of strong legal advocacy means abusers can easily persuade or intimidate them out of pursuing necessary legal action. The fact that a majority of the victims in the foundational study were living in poverty reinforces the **\*\*dire need for civil legal aid\*\***.

*If we are serious about preventing domestic violence, the expansion of civil legal aid for victims must be central to the policy mix. It is a proven tool that helps individuals and families break free from the cycle of violence to live safe, healthy, and productive lives.*

### Need Legal Assistance?

If you or someone you know is a low-income victim of non-criminal legal issues, civil legal aid can provide representation, advice, and critical information. Seek help today.

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