



February 8, 2021

BILL NO: HB514 - Maryland Legal Services Corporation Funding –
Abandoned Property

COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc.

POSITION: SUPPORT

Mid-Shore Pro Bono (MSPB) recommends a favorable report on HB514. By increasing the amount of financial resources eligible to be supplied by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation Fund from \$2 million to \$8 million, this bill would provide critical funding needed to respond to skyrocketing demand for legal services that are sought during COVID by underserved populations throughout our state.

Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc. is a Maryland nonprofit that connects low-income clients throughout Maryland's Eastern Shore with essential community resources. Each year, MSPB helps over 3,000 of our community's most vulnerable people access the legal system in times of need. Our network of volunteer lawyers provides free legal services on family law, landlord/tenant, mortgage foreclosure, elder law, consumer debt, and immigration. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure home environments for children, which is especially important in times of crisis.

Since the COVID-19 emergency began, the number of family law services requests our organization has received has tripled. Urgent requests from people who have or are about to lose their homes have also spiked. Due to crisis levels of job and wage loss, many more households now qualify for free legal services, far outpacing our ability to serve them. As demand for help explodes, our ability to respond is diminished because proceeds keyed to low interest rates and decreased collection of court fees leaves our community with less resources when we need more.

MSPB relies on funding through the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to ensure that we have staff resources to conduct intakes, recruit volunteer attorneys, and place and manage cases. Significant reduction in this funding would directly result in a reduction in MSPB's capacity to provide vital legal assistance. Increasing the distribution of funding to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation from the Abandoned Property fund would ensure stability in delivery of legal services to individuals and families in dire financial and legal distress due to the pandemic.

For these reasons, MSPB urges the House Appropriations Committee's support for HB514. If you have any questions regarding our position on this bill, please contact Meredith Lathbury Girard, Esq., managing attorney, Mid-Shore Pro Bono at 410-690-8128 or mgirard@midshoreprobono.org.

*Connecting Low-Income
Individuals and Families who
need Civil Legal Services with
Volunteer Attorneys and
Community Resources*

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