

3742 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

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On June 1, 1967, Wisconsin Judicare was one year old. In the short period that Judicare has been in operation, many facts have been learned about legal services to the poor.

Twenty-six counties in northern Wisconsin were chosen to begin the Judicare program. This area of over 24,000 square miles has been an area of progressive economic depression since the decline of the lumber and mining industries. Approximately 150,000 of the almost one-half million population living in this area exist on poverty standards.

As is true with traditional legal aid, the right to legal assistance through Judicare is based on a means test adopted by the Judicare Board—a board made up of representatives who either qualify for benefits under the program or are intimately familiar with the needs of the people served by the program. Each person who qualifies for benefits under Judicare receives a Judicare identification card upon application, which may be taken to any attorney in the county or an adjoining county.

The Judicare client has a free choice of attorney, the same as does a paying client. Through free choice, Judicare does make available to the client, first-rate legal services.

Legal services for which other assistance is already available are excluded, as well as those matters which are capable of generating their own fee.

As of July 26 of this year, 2,688 persons have applied for legal services through Judicare. Two hundred seventy-two attorneys have already reported 1,448 conferences with clients, and 706 cases have been completed. The average cost per case has been between \$75 and \$80, despite the fact that 49 percent of the cases completed and paid were involved in litigation. Had the attorneys been paid on an hourly basis at the minimum bar fee schedule, their legal fees would have been \$250,000 rather than the \$50,000 that has been paid thus far.

Attorneys accepting clients under Judicare agree in advance to work for a percentage of their normal fee with the balance as their contribution to the program. No attorney under Judicare is paid more than \$3,000 in any one year, and he agrees that the maximum he will be paid under any one case will be \$300.

A look at the cost of the purely administrative functions of Judicare indicates that it is less than 10 percent of the total budget, and that the program could be extended to many other counties without additional administrative cost. This has been demonstrated by the expansion of Judicare to all of the state correctional institutions without additional appropriations. (As of July 26, 234 inmates have applied for legal assistance and 226 conferences have been held; 105 attorneys have participated and 135 cases in the institutions have been completed.)

Most of the administrative budget of Judicare is for research, community education, attorney education, legislation, and other related matters. While these services are worthwhile to fulfill the broad needs of the program. They are not necessary for the service portion of the program and should not be considered as true administrative costs.

This cost should also be excluded if a comparison of the cost of the neighborhood law office and the Judicare operation is to be meaningful. For example, in Milwaukee, the legal aid society has the services of Marquette University for research and educational purposes and the Office of Economic Opportunity has funded the Marquette program in the sum of \$156,536 for this effort.

The education, research and reform efforts of the Judicare office have ranged from special legislation drafted and introduced at the request of Wisconsin Judicare to several appeals to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The Judicare program has also conducted 19 research projects in the first year and distributed the results of these efforts to the attorneys through the monthly newsletter.

To supplement the 33 education conference and seminars held throughout the Judicare area, an informational program called Judicare Alert was developed. Forty-two low income persons were used in this program to contact persons eligible for Judicare services in all 26 counties in northern Wisconsin. During the first month of the Alert program, the number of persons seeking legal assistance through Judicare was increased by 163 percent.

Judicare in its first year has provided a wide range of legal representation including: real estate, juvenile matters, domestic relations, aspects of consumer protection, simple contracts, disputes with state, county, and city agencies, defense in auto accident cases, legislation, as well as a request to the attorney general of Wisconsin for a formal opinion in the matter involving the ten Indian tribes in Wisconsin.