

Summary of State Bar of Montana's Modest Means Program

The State Bar of Montana's Modest Means program is a reduced fee civil representation program providing referral services for low to moderate income Montanans. When Montana Legal Services is unable to serve a client due to a conflict of interest, lack of available assistance, or income below 200% of the federal poverty level, they refer that individual to the State Bar. Based on the legal issue and the client's location, Modest Means will match clients with participating attorneys.

Not all legal issues are offered through the program. The main demand seems to focus on family law including dissolution and custody determination, bankruptcy, landlord/tenant issues, simple wills, adoption and guardianship. We provide a suggested fee schedule to both the client and attorneys referred which is attached to the referral letter. In addition, we provide benefits for attorneys participating in the program such as CLE credit, malpractice insurance through MLSA and mentoring by a more experienced attorney.

As of October 30, 2017, the program has completed 275 referrals and has 125 participating attorneys from all areas of Montana. There remains a large need for additional attorneys to participate in the eastern part of the state. Outside of Yellowstone County the program only has one participating attorney. Some attorneys that reside in urban areas will take cases in rural areas to the east utilizing technology to do most of the communication.

Family law and bankruptcy had the most referrals to this point in 2017. The program received 139 referrals for family law, with two referrals including tribal law issues, and 85 referrals for bankruptcy.