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**COURT HELP PROGRAM**  
**Montana Supreme Court**  
**January 2011**

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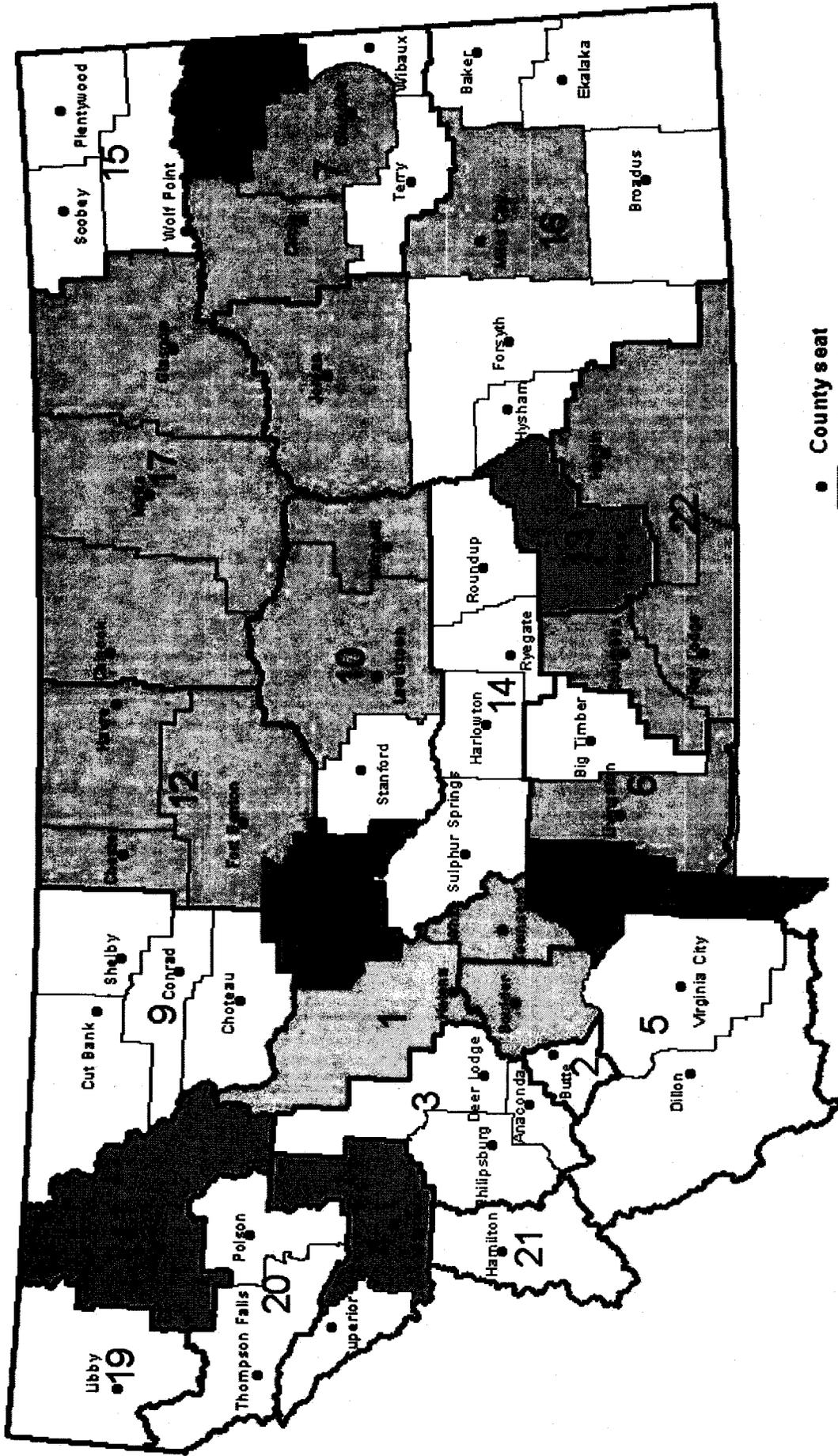
- The Supreme Court is asking the 2011 Legislature to appropriate \$591,445 from the state's general fund to keep the Court Help Program in operation for FY 2012 and FY 2013.
- The Court Help Program provides tools and information to assist Montanans who do not have an attorney navigate their way through the legal process in civil matters. The program also works to increase and support the pool of attorneys willing to provide free (pro bono) legal services to low-income Montanans.
- The Court Help Program primarily provides services to low to moderate income Montanans but services are not limited by income. Any person facing a civil legal issue can access services through the project.
- The program has partnered with non-profit and private groups as well as colleges to greatly expand services through grants and volunteer programs. A partnership with Montana Legal Services Association has more than tripled the service capacity through the addition of 6 AmeriCorps service volunteers.
- Both the 2007 and 2009 Legislatures have provided partial financial support to the Court Help Program, which was a product of the 2005 – 2006 Law and Justice Interim Committee.

**Program Components and Accomplishments**

- ❖ **Full-time Self-Help Law Centers.** Two full-time self-help law centers are open, one in Flathead County and another in Yellowstone County. Each is staffed by an employee and volunteers -- college interns, community volunteers, and AmeriCorps members -- who assist people with finding legal forms and legal information. As of January 2011, the full-time centers have served over 12,300 people since opening in January 2008. Customer satisfaction surveys have been overwhelmingly positive.
- ❖ **Part-time Self-Help Law Centers.** Four centers, staffed by AmeriCorps volunteers and part-time employees, are operating in Bozeman, Great Falls, Missoula and Sidney. The State Law Library in Helena also houses a center staffed entirely by students from Carroll College. The programs started at various dates since 2009. To date more than 4,000 people have received services.
- ❖ **Rural Services.** Through the AmeriCorps collaboration with the Montana Legal Services Association and Montana Attorney General's Office, the Court Help Program has six AmeriCorps members who travel and provide services to 16 counties (Carbon, Stillwater, Big Horn, Custer, Fergus, Park, Liberty, Hill, Choteau, Blaine, Phillips, Valley, McCone, Dawson, Garfield, Prairie).

- ❖ **Montana Attorneys for Montana Veterans.** In partnership with the University of Montana School of Law, the Court Help Program developed a pro bono program to assist veterans with disability benefits claims before the Veterans' Affairs Board. The program has also coordinated pro bono legal services at Veterans' stand down programs throughout Montana.
- ❖ **Legal Forms.** Through a partnership with the Montana Legal Services Association, user-friendly, plain language legal forms and instructions have been developed to assist self-represented litigants. Forms and instructions for name changes, emancipation, stepparent adoption, modification of parenting plans, and landlord tenant actions have been completed and posted on public websites. Forms for debt collection actions and simple wills and probate are nearing completion.
- ❖ **Library Partnership.** The Court Help Program and State Law Library are working with the State Library to provide Montana public libraries with the tools, training, and support they need to assist library users who are experiencing legal problems.
- ❖ **Technology Initiatives.** The Court Help Program has partnered with Montana Legal Services Association to obtain grant money to fund course work at the University Of Montana School Of Law and to support the law school students' production of three educational videos addressing the needs of self-represented litigants. A second grant will fund work stations for self-represented litigants in at least three sites in rural Montana.
- ❖ **Local Pro Bono Programs.** The Court Help Program has worked extensively with judges to encourage judicial involvement in developing and sustaining pro bono programs throughout the state. The program has been instrumental in developing and expanding local pro bono programs in 10 judicial districts, ranging from fully developed urban-based programs to rural start-up programs.
- ❖ **Access to Justice Forums.** In 2008, the Court Help Program coordinated six community forums to allow attendees to explain unmet legal needs to community leaders. Participants committed to developing local solutions to meet the legal needs of low-income people.
- ❖ **Family Law Materials.** Together with the Yellowstone County Bar Family Law Project, the Court Help Program developed and completed a *Family Law for Non-Lawyers* DVD. The material -- made available to all district courts -- provides a solid primer for individuals who have to represent themselves in family law matters.
- ❖ **Legal Education for Attorneys.** The Court Help program has developed programs to provide legal education to attorneys who may not routinely practice in areas most often targeted for free legal help. Providing legal education ensures that attorneys will be comfortable providing pro bono services in areas where they may not routinely practice.

# Montana Court Help Program



- County seat
- Judicial Districts
- County Boundary
- Staffing
  - Americorps Operated
  - Americorps Outreach
  - Court Staffed
  - State Law Library Based Program

