

## Montana Legal Services Association Brochures Order Form

Please complete this form and return it to:

**Montana Legal Services Association**  
**616 Helena Avenue, Suite 100**  
**Helena, MT 59601**  
**Fax: (406) 442-9817**  
**Phone: (406) 442-9830, (800) 666-6124**

Brochures can also be downloaded at [www.montanalawhelp.org](http://www.montanalawhelp.org) or [www.mtlsa.org](http://www.mtlsa.org).

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*Organization* *Contact Person*

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*Address*

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2005 Bankruptcy Law Changes		MontanaLawHelp.org & MLSA Business Card	
Bankruptcy		Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC)	
Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP)		Innocent Spouse Relief (LITC)	
Children and Domestic Violence		MontanaLawHelp.org	
Child Tax Credit (LITC)		Montana Legal Resources	
Dependent Exemptions (LITC)		Medicaid	
Dissolution of Marriage		MLSA Overview of Services	
Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault		Orders of Protection: How to represent yourself	
Earned Income Tax Credit (LITC)		Orders of Protection: Evidence for Petitioners	
Eastern Montana Self-Help Law Project (EMSHLP)		Parenting Plans	
EMSHLP Bankruptcy		Payday Loans	
EMSHLP Family Law		Post Dissolution Tax Information (LITC)	
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**Enclose a check or money order payable to MLS**

LAW AND JUSTICE INTERIM COMMITTEE  
 JANUARY 19, 2006  
**EXHIBIT 4**

- Whether one parent has been convicted of certain crimes, such as murder, rape, child abuse, or domestic violence.

### **How do I get a parenting plan changed?**

In general, you must file a request for an amended parenting plan in the same court that issued your original parenting plan. You must give the other parent proper notice of the action. A judge may order you to go through some form of dispute resolution, such as mediation, before returning to court. Dispute resolution may not be appropriate if one of the parties has abused the other and they do not have equal power. In that case, court action may be the only appropriate way to change the plan.

### **How is child support established?**

When the court establishes a final parenting plan, it also will order one or both parents to pay child support. If you already have a Child Support and Medical Support Order through the Montana Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) or another appropriate agency, the court may simply refer to that order and acknowledge it as valid. If you do not already have an order in place, the court will determine a child support amount based on Montana's guidelines. You may also apply for child support by contacting the CSED directly at 1-800-346-KIDS (or in Helena 444-9767.)

## **Montana Legal Services Association**

### **Hotline Numbers**

**(800) 999-4941**  
**(800) 666-6899**  
**(800) 926-3144**

### **[www.MontanaLawHelp.org](http://www.MontanaLawHelp.org)**

MontanaLawHelp.org is a Web site that contains legal information for Montana residents. On the MontanaLawHelp.org Web site, you can find information about common legal problems, such as divorce, parenting plans, landlord and tenant issues, and disability benefits. Additional legal information is provided in the following areas:

- Consumer
- Disability
- Employment
- Families and Children
- Health
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- Public Benefits
- Seniors

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## **Montana Legal Services Association**

### **Parenting Plans**



*Providing Civil Legal Representation,  
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Rev. 5/04

## **Introduction**

Both parents have the right and the duty to care for their minor child. Unless a court order is in effect, married parents have equal rights regarding parenting. If the parents are not married, the father does not have specific parenting rights until paternity is established.

### **What is parenting?**

Montana law does not use the words “custody” and “visitation.” Instead it uses the word “parenting” to promote the idea that both parents should be involved in the children’s lives.

### **What is a parenting plan?**

Every dissolution (divorce) or other court proceeding concerning the parenting of a child must include a parenting plan. The parenting plan will establish where the child will live, how much contact the child will have with the other parent, and how decisions will be made about the child. The plan is intended to protect the child’s best interest, to set out parental authority and responsibility, and to help prevent future court action.

Parents may or may not agree on a plan. If the parents agree, they may be able to avoid a long and expensive court case. If the parents cannot agree, the judge will hear both sides and decide what is best for the child.

## **Do I need a parenting plan?**

A parenting plan will help resolve disputes about your child when you and the other parent disagree. You and the other parent may already have an agreement about how to parent your child, but your agreement cannot be enforced without a court order. For example, without a court-ordered parenting plan, you cannot necessarily force the other parent to return your child after a visit or prevent the other parent from moving to another state.

### **How does the court decide on a parenting plan?**

To determine which parent a child should live with most of the time and how much contact the child should have with the other parent, the court considers what is best for the child. Some of the factors the court considers when trying to determine what is in the best interests of the child include:

- The wishes of the child and the parents;
- The relationship between the child and the parents or the child and his/her siblings;
- Whether one parent has physically abused or threatened to physically abuse either the child or the parent;
- If one parent has a problem with alcohol or drugs; and
- Whether one parent has refused to pay financial support for the child.

## **Can parental contact be limited?**

Montana law assumes that it is usually best for the child if both parents have significant and frequent contact with the child. Sometimes, however, it is not in the best interests of the child to have frequent contact with a parent. The court may decide to limit contact with that parent if it is necessary to protect the child from harm.

### **What if a parent violates the parenting plan?**

Once a parenting plan has been ordered by the court, both parents have an obligation to follow the plan. If one parent violates the plan, the other parent must still follow the plan. Violation of the plan is punishable by contempt of court and can be a criminal offense.

### **When can I get a parenting plan changed?**

If the child’s circumstances have changed and you think it would be best for the child if the parenting plan was changed, you can ask the court to modify the parenting plan. Some factors that the court will consider are:

- Whether both parents agree to the change;
- Whether one parent has changed or intends to change the child’s residence;
- Whether one parent has refused contact with the other parent; and

## Do I need an attorney?

You do not have to have a lawyer to get a dissolution. However, if there are any issues on which you and your spouse disagree, you may need a lawyer to help you protect your rights. You may also have rights that you do not know about and will lose if you do not get expert advice. If you and your spouse agree about all issues, it may be fairly easy for you to get a dissolution without a lawyer. You may be eligible to use the following:

### Summary dissolution proceedings

A summary dissolution is a simple, uncontested dissolution. The forms and instructions are available at the county courthouse. The summary dissolution proceeding is for parties who either do not have children or who have already agreed upon parenting arrangements and obtained a child support order. The parties must have limited assets and debts and they must have already decided how their assets and debts will be divided.

### Dissolution clinics

In some areas, Montana Legal Services sponsors a class for qualified people with low incomes. The class teaches you how to file your own uncontested dissolution. Participants are provided with the forms that they need, receive help filling out the forms, and are told how to file their own actions. Please contact the MLSA office in your area for more information.

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## Montana Legal Services Association

### Dissolution of Marriage



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## **How do I get a divorce?**

In Montana, the legal name for divorce is dissolution. The court will grant a dissolution whether your spouse wants a dissolution or not, as long as you meet the following requirements:

- You must be married either legally or through common law marriage;
- The petitioner must have lived in Montana for at least 90 days before filing for dissolution;
- If there are children of the marriage, in general the children must have lived in Montana for six months; and
- One spouse must believe that the marriage is irretrievably broken (the relationship cannot be fixed.)

## **What issues are settled in a dissolution case?**

In a dissolution action, the judge will end the marriage. The judge will also:

- Divide the property and debts of the parties;
- Order any appropriate maintenance (alimony) or child support;
- Change the name of the wife, if she asks for it to be changed; and
- Determine living arrangements and support for the children.

## **What about legal separation?**

In a legal separation, the judge decides the same issues as in a dissolution. It is different from dissolution in that the marriage does not end. You cannot legally remarry unless the legal separation is first changed into a dissolution. Six months after the legal separation decree is entered by the court, either party can ask that the separation decree be converted to a dissolution decree.

## **What about having the marriage declared invalid?**

Under certain specific circumstances, a marriage can be declared invalid or annulled. For example, a marriage can be declared invalid if one spouse was too young to marry, if one spouse is married to someone else, or if the spouses are related by blood. A declaration of invalidity (commonly known as an annulment) states that the marriage never existed.

## **What do I need to do to start a dissolution?**

To start a dissolution, you must file a petition for dissolution of marriage with the Clerk of Court at the local county courthouse. You must have the petition and a summons officially delivered (served) to your spouse. The petition tells the court and your spouse what you are asking for in the dissolution. Depending on the circumstances of your case, there are a number of other forms which must

also be filed with the Clerk of Court and served on your spouse.

## **Is there a fee to file for dissolution?**

Yes, the court charges fees to file the petition as well as at the end of your dissolution when the dissolution decree is issued. For more information about the court fees, you should contact your local Clerk of District Court. There may also be costs to serve the petition on your spouse. If you cannot afford to pay the fees and costs, you can ask the judge to excuse you from paying them.

## **How long will my dissolution take?**

An uncontested dissolution (in which you and your spouse agree on the terms of the dissolution) may be finalized 20 days after the other spouse is served with the dissolution papers. If the parties are not in agreement, it usually takes much longer.

## Do I qualify for Innocent Spouse Relief?

You may be eligible for innocent spouse relief if you signed a joint return that understated the tax due because of unreported income or incorrect deductions by your spouse. In order to be eligible for the relief you must show that you did not know about the error when you signed the joint tax return.

You may also be eligible for relief by separation of liability. With this type of relief, the IRS separates the understatement of unpaid taxes between you and your spouse.

If you do not qualify for either innocent spouse or relief by separation of liability, you may still be relieved through equitable relief if the IRS finds that it would be unfair to hold you responsible for the tax debt.

## How do I request Innocent Spouse Relief?

Fill out Tax Form 8857, which can be found at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). You must attach a statement explaining why you think you qualify for Innocent Spouse Relief. Include your name and Social Security number on the statement. If you are requesting Innocent Spouse Relief for more than one year, you should file one petition, but make a separate statement for each year explaining why you qualify.

## When Can I File for Innocent Spouse Relief?

Do not file Form 8857 with your income tax return. You should file Form 8857 as soon as you become aware of the tax debt.

## Tax Information and Resources

The following resources can provide you with more tax information and/or assistance with filing your taxes:

- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA): 1-800-829-1040
- I-CAN e-filing allows you to file your taxes and apply for the Earned Income Credit for free at: [www.icanefile.org](http://www.icanefile.org).
- IRS Tax Information for Individuals: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/index.html>
- MLSA Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic gives low-income taxpayers free legal assistance on federal tax matters year round: (406) 543-8343 or MLSA hotlines.

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## Montana Legal Services Association

### Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic



## Post-Dissolution Tax Information

*The clinic listed herein is partially funded through matching grants provided by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to the Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998. The partial funding by the IRS does not imply that the clinics have a preferential relationship with the IRS. The decision of whether to use these clinics is your own and their use will not affect your rights before the IRS.*

Rev. 3/04

### **I just got a divorce. What is my status for filing taxes?**

In general, your marital status for tax filing purposes is determined on the last day of the year. If you are married on December 31, you must file as married (either jointly or separately) for that year. If you are divorced as of December 31, you must file as single (either as head of the household or not) for that year.

### **What is a Dependent Exemption?**

A dependent is a person – not you or your spouse – that you support. A dependent exemption is a tax deduction on your tax return. A tax deduction helps you pay less income tax. A tax deduction might even increase your tax refund.

### **Who can claim my child as a Dependent if I am divorced or separated?**

In order to claim a child as a dependent, you must provide over one-half of the child's total support for the year. In most cases, the parent who the child lives with for most of the year is treated as the parent who provides more than half of the child's support. Generally, if you have physical custody of your child for most of the year, you can claim the child as a dependent.

### **Can the Dependent Exemption be given to the other parent?**

Yes. The parent without physical custody (non-custodial parent) can claim the child as a dependent, but only if the following are true:

1. The non-custodial parent can prove that he or she provided more than half of the child's support, AND
2. The custodial parent must sign a release form giving the exemption to the other parent. This is IRS Form 8332, which you can get at: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). The non-custodial parent must attach this form to his or her tax return in order to claim the exemption.

You should not sign Part II of IRS Form 8332. This gives the other parent the right to claim your child in future years. Your tax situation might change. Part I of Form 8332 only gives the other parent the right to claim your child in the current year.

### **If I do NOT claim the dependent exemption, can I still claim the child for the Earned Income Tax Credit?**

Yes. Even if you do not claim a child as a dependent, you may be able to claim the child for the Earned Income Tax Credit. The dependent exemption and Earned Income Tax Credit have different rules. Generally, if the child lived with you for more than half the year, you can claim the Earned Income Tax Credit for that child. However, you cannot claim the Earned Income Tax Credit if you

are filing your taxes as "Married filing separately."

### **Can the Earned Income Tax Credit be given to the other parent?**

No. The Earned Income Tax Credit can only be claimed by the parent who had physical custody of the child for most of the year. Only one person can claim the Earned Income Tax Credit for a child.

### **If I do NOT claim the dependent exemption, can I still get the Child Tax Credit?**

No. You must claim the dependent exemption to get the Child Tax Credit.

### **What if the IRS says I owe money from my former spouse's earnings?**

When you get married and sign a joint income tax return, both you and your spouse are agreeing to be responsible for any tax debt listed on the tax return. This means that you could be responsible for the entire tax debt, even if you did not earn any money that year or the debt belongs to your spouse.

Depending on your circumstances, knowledge of the tax debt, and other factors you may qualify for relief as an "Innocent Spouse." If you qualify for innocent spouse relief you may not be responsible for all or part of the joint tax debt.

Number of Persons in Your Family	150% of the Federal Poverty Level
1	\$14,355
2	\$19,245
3	\$24,135
For each additional person, add	\$4,890

- You must live in Montana for two years before you can use Montana exemptions. Exemptions are property that you can keep when you file for bankruptcy. Property that is not exempt has to be sold to help pay the money you owe.
- If you bought your vehicle within 2 1/2 years of filing for bankruptcy and want to keep it, you may pay back all of the money that you owe on it.
- Your landlord can ask you to pay for:
  - o he gets a judgment against you
  - o you put a lien on your car in the 30 days before you filed for bankruptcy.
  - o you never had filed for bankruptcy.
  - o you used illegal drugs or alcohol on the property in the 30 days before you filed for bankruptcy.

• You may still need to pay all of your student loans. This means you may have to pay private lenders.

**This sounds hard. Who can help me?**

The Montana Legal Services Association Hotline provides free legal advice and referrals to people who have low incomes. Call the Hotline at (800) 926-3144, (800) 999-4941, or (300) 666-6899.

**Montana Legal Services Association**  
**Hotline Numbers**  
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- Social Security

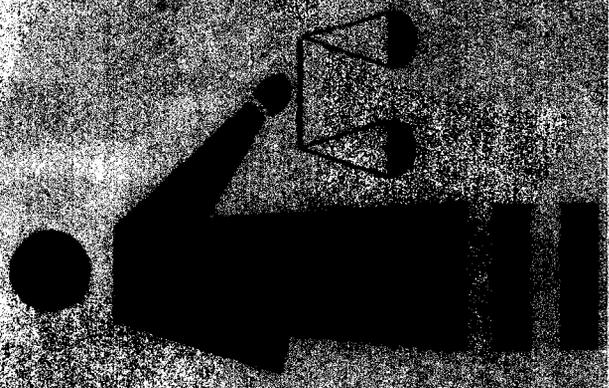
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**Montana Legal Services Association**

2005 Bankruptcy Law Changes



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Rev. 7/05

What happens if I can't afford to pay my debts?

When does the new law start?

The new law will apply to people who file for bankruptcy on or after October 17, 2005. It will not apply to people who file for bankruptcy before October 17, 2005.

What happens if I can't afford to pay my debts?

You must pay your debts as you are able to. The new law changes your rights to file for bankruptcy.

What should I know about the new law?

There are many changes. The biggest change for poor people is that it will make filing Chapter 7 bankruptcy harder for many people. It will force more people to file Chapter 13 bankruptcy instead. This means that more people will need to pay back money that they owe.

What are Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 bankruptcy?

With a Chapter 7 bankruptcy, most of your debts are completely discharged. This means that you no longer have to pay them. With a Chapter 13 bankruptcy, you have to set up a payment plan to pay part or all of your debts over a certain period of time.

How can I tell if the law will affect me?

Under the new law, most people who make more than the average income in the state will no longer be able to file Chapter 7 bankruptcy. In

What happens if I can't afford to pay my debts?

If you make more than \$24,372 per year, you may not be able to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. After October 17, 2005, you will need to file Chapter 13 bankruptcy.

My property income is less than the Montana median income. What about me?

You may still be able to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

What about me?

No. There are other changes to the bankruptcy law.

- If you file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy, you must wait eight years before you can file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy again.

- You must get credit counseling before you file for bankruptcy. You must get this counseling less than 180 days before you file for bankruptcy. The credit counselor must be approved by the Court.

- You must pay a money management class after you file for bankruptcy. The Court won't get rid of your debts until you take this class.

- You can give up to 15% of your income to charity. (This may allow you to qualify for Chapter 7 instead of Chapter 13.)

- You must pay the child support and maintenance (alimony) that you owe first. Child support and maintenance must be paid before taxes and any other unsecured consumer debt.

You must pay any property settlement debts.

You must give the Court a list of your assets and liabilities. This must be done at least 7 days before the meeting of the creditors.

- You may not be able to get rid of some debts for yourself and your spouse. Expenses are those that are not necessary for supporting you or your family. Expenses are included if they were your debt when you were married.

Usually you have to pay a filing fee when you file for bankruptcy. The filing fee is \$205 for Chapter 7 is \$209. Under the new law, you can ask the Court to "waive" the filing fee. This means that you may not have to pay the filing fee. The Court will only waive the filing fee if:

- you cannot make monthly payments and
- if you and your family make less than 150% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Following chart shows the most that your family can earn each year and still be eligible for the filing fee to be waived.

Keep a copy of the letter you send to your landlord. If you and your landlord still disagree, you may have to file an action in Small Claims Court.

### **What do I need to show the court to get all or part of my deposit back?**

You should tell the court if you did not get a written statement of the condition of the property upon renting the unit. If you did not get such a statement, it is up to the landlord to clearly show that any damages were caused by you.

You also should inform the court if you did not get a written explanation of why your deposit was not returned. Your landlord cannot keep your security deposit if he does not give you a written explanation within 30 days of the end of your rental agreement.

If you received the required notices but disagree with your landlord's deductions, you should show that your landlord is wrong by getting written statements or testimony from current or former tenants and anyone else with knowledge of the rental unit's conditions when you moved in or moved out. You may also want to show pictures of the unit from before you moved in and/or after you moved out. The burden is on the landlord to show that you caused any damages to the unit.

### **Can I get attorney fees if I win my case?**

Yes. The judge may award you attorney fees if you win. He may also award attorney fees to the landlord if the landlord wins.

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## **Montana Legal Services Association**

### **Security Deposits**



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### **What is a security deposit?**

A security deposit is money (or its equivalent) that your landlord asks you to pay when you first move into a rental unit. The money is used to protect the landlord from losses caused by:

- Unpaid rent;
- Unpaid utilities;
- Late charges;
- Damages caused by you, your family, or your guests; and /or
- Other money you owe to the landlord when you move out.

### **What can I do when I move in to protect my security deposit?**

When you move in, your landlord should give you a signed statement of the condition of the rental unit. You should go through the statement carefully to make sure that everything is accurate. If there are damages to the unit that are not included, write them in. Finally, send a copy of the corrected statement back to your landlord and keep a copy for yourself.

### **Do I have to clean before I move out?**

Yes. You must leave the rental unit in the same condition as when you moved in. However, you are not responsible for the ordinary wear and tear caused by living there or for normal maintenance performed by the landlord.

### **Can my landlord deduct cleaning expenses from my security deposit?**

Yes. Your landlord can charge you for any cleaning expenses necessary to get the rental unit back into the condition it was in when you rented it. However, your landlord can not take cleaning expenses from your security deposit until he gives you written notice of the cleaning that still needs to be done.

After you receive the notice, you have 24 hours to complete the cleaning. If you have not finished the cleaning in 24 hours, your landlord can subtract the cleaning expenses from your security deposit.

Your landlord does not have to notify you about cleaning that needs to be done if you have moved out without giving proper notice. Also, if you have damaged the property, your landlord does not have to notify you before making repairs.

### **How long does my landlord have to return my security deposit?**

In general, your landlord has 30 days from the end of your rental agreement to give you:

- A written explanation of why all or part of your security deposit is being kept by the landlord; and
- The amount owed to you, if any, after the landlord has subtracted permitted expenses.

The notice and deposit must be mailed to you. Be sure to give your landlord a new address

when you move out. If you did not give your landlord a new address, it will be mailed to your last known address.

### **Is there any way to get my security deposit back sooner than 30 days?**

Yes. Your landlord must return your full security deposit within 10 days of the final inspection, if there are:

- No damages,
- No additional cleaning necessary, and
- No unpaid rent or utilities.

### **What if my landlord does not give me a written explanation of why he kept all or part of my security deposit?**

If your landlord does not give you a written explanation within 30 days of the end of your rental agreement, he can not legally keep any of your security deposit. You should write your landlord a letter requesting that he return your security deposit. Keep a copy of the letter. If your landlord still does not return your security deposit, you may have to file an action in Small Claims Court.

### **What should I do if my landlord wrongly keeps my security deposit?**

If you disagree with the amount your landlord has kept from your security deposit, you should write a letter that explains why you disagree with the amount deducted and asks the landlord to send you the additional money.

**Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED)**

Services include absent parent location; paternity establishment; and financial, medical, spousal, and child support – establishment, modification, and enforcement.  
(406) 444-9855 (800) 346-KIDS

**Montana Human Rights Bureau**

Provides advice and assistance with housing and unemployment complaints.  
(406) 444-2884 (800) 542-0807

**MontPIRG Tenant-Landlord Hotline**

Montana Public Interest Research Group’s hotline for questions about rental situations.  
(888) 345-7474 http://www.montpirg.org

**American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**

The mission of the ACLU is to advance, preserve, and defend civil liberties and civil rights in Montana. (406) 443-8590

**Public Defender**

Free legal assistance for low-income people in criminal cases.  
Check phone book under County Government

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**Montana Legal Services Association**

**Overview of Services**



*Providing Civil Legal Representation, Counsel, and Referrals Since 1968*

## What is the Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA)?

MLSA is a federally and privately funded program that provides free legal assistance in civil cases to low-income people.

### What help can I find at MLSA?

- Legal advice and representation for clients,
- Referrals to pro bono attorneys and other providers,
- Self-help clinics,
- Self-help materials, and
- Educational brochures, classes and workshops for Montana's low-income community.

To qualify for our services, applicants generally must have income of 125% or less of the federal poverty level and limited assets. You must also be a U.S. citizen or an eligible alien.

We never charge a fee for our services. However, you may have to pay court costs and filing fees.

## What areas of law can I find information on?

- Landlord/tenant law,
- Social Security Disability and other public benefits,
- Family law,
- Domestic violence,
- Bankruptcy,
- Indian law,
- Migrant workers' legal issues,
- Consumer matters, and
- Housing discrimination and other civil rights.

### What does MLSA not handle?

MLSA does not handle auto accidents, personal injury, business-related matters or any criminal cases (including traffic citations). MLSA usually does not accept ongoing cases for representation, such as changes to parenting plans or existing custody decrees. We cannot accept cases where an attorney's fee may be available.

### How can I get help?

Call one of the MLSA hotlines to talk with an intake worker: (800) 999-4941, (800) 666-6899, or (800) 926-3144. The intake worker will ask you questions about your financial situation and what possessions you own (cars, houses, land). You must complete an application to determine eligibility before you will be considered for services.

## What other organizations can help me?

If MLSA is unable to assist you, these other organizations may be able to help.

**Montana State Bar Association Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS)**  
LRIS refers people to Montana lawyers, who agree to charge a reasonable fee for the first consultation. There is no charge for the referral. (406) 449-6577

**State Law Library**  
Information about all areas of the law, including the Montana Code, legal forms, and the option to ask research questions of the librarians. (406) 444-3660  
<http://www.lawlibrary.state.mt.us>

**Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**  
Find a domestic violence program or shelter near you. (406) 443-7794 (888) 404-7794

**People's Law Center (PLC)**  
Handles Social Security Disability cases (SSI and SSDI), disability cessation, Social Security overpayments, and Medicaid cases, for Montana's low-income population.  
Bozeman/Billings (866) 650-9013  
Helena/Butte/Missoula (800) 406-5567  
Great Falls/Havre (800) 406-5560

**Consumer Credit Counseling Service**  
A non-profit agency that can help create a plan for managing your debts.  
(877) ASK-CCCS <http://www.cccsmt.org>

### Student Legal Resources

Provide legal services for students.

Montana State University - Billings: (406) 657-2365  
Montana State University - Bozeman: (406) 994-2935  
University of Montana - Missoula: (406) 243-6213

### University of Montana Law School Library

Provides limited legal reference help to the public.

[www.umt.edu/law/library](http://www.umt.edu/law/library)

### Victim Services and Crime Victim Compensation Program

Serves as a central reference point for victims of crime, offering information and referrals; provides financial assistance to help crime victims with crime related expenses, including lost wages and medical expenses.

(406) 444-3653  
Outside Helena: (800) 498-6455  
[dojovs@mt.gov](mailto:dojovs@mt.gov)  
[www.doj.state.mt.us/victims](http://www.doj.state.mt.us/victims)

### MontanaLawHelp.org

Providing legal information, legal and community resources, and court information in the following topic areas:

- Families and Kids
- Consumer
- Housing
- Employment
- Seniors
- Public Benefits
- Taxes
- Disabilities
- Health
- American Indian Issues

Additional resources available on [MontanaLawHelp.org](http://MontanaLawHelp.org) include:

- **Self-Help Materials:** Documents and forms that can help you with your legal problem.
- **Referral Service:** Information on how to contact a local legal aid attorney.
- **Online Assistance:** Trained staff and volunteers can help you find the information you need.

To download an electronic version of this brochure or order additional brochures please go to [www.mtlsa.org](http://www.mtlsa.org).

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## Montana Legal Resources

Provided by  
Montana Legal Services Association

### American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Defends civil liberties and civil rights (e.g., freedom of speech, freedom of religion, privacy) in Montana. This office does not typically assist individuals, but focuses resources on cases affecting large groups.

(406) 443-8590  
[aclu@aclumontana.org](mailto:aclu@aclumontana.org)  
[www.aclumontana.org](http://www.aclumontana.org)

### Cascade County Law Clinic

Provides legal assistance in civil matters to low-income people in Cascade County, including family law, guardianships for the elderly, and orders of protection. Also provides information for parents involved with Child and Family Services.

(406) 452-6269  
[casco-youthproject.org](http://casco-youthproject.org)

### Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED)

Establishes and enforces child support payments.

(406) 444-9855  
(800) 346-5437

[www.dphhs.mt.gov/aboutus/divisions/childsupportenforcement](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/aboutus/divisions/childsupportenforcement)

### Citizen Advocate Office

Helps with problems or complaints related to state agencies.

(406) 444-3486  
(800) 332-2272

### Community Dispute Resolution Center of Missoula County

Provides mediation services to low-income members of Missoula County.

(406) 543-1157

### Community Mediation Center

Provides mediation services to low-income residents of Gallatin County.

(406) 522-8442  
[www.cmcmontana.org](http://www.cmcmontana.org)

### Consumer Protection Office

Investigates consumer complaints against businesses and enforces Montana consumer protection laws.

(406) 444-4500  
[www.mt.gov/doa/consumerprotection](http://www.mt.gov/doa/consumerprotection)

**Montana Legal Services and Social Assault Program**  
Operates self-help consultations in eastern Montana, providing the public with legal information, assistance, and referrals to help them make their own legal decisions and, in some cases, represent themselves in court.

Helena: (406) 377-6477  
Missoula: (406) 234-0542  
Butte: (406) 433-7421

**Low Income Taxpayer Clinic**  
Provides low income taxpayers free legal assistance on federal tax matters year round. Can not provide help with tax preparation.

Great Falls: (406) 228-9446  
Sidney: (406) 489-1477  
Admin: (406) 442-9830 x13  
www.mtsclhelpaw.org

**Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors**  
Monitors state and community institutions for the mentally ill and disabled. Provides legal representation at Montana State Hospital. Provides information about rights in mental health facilities.

Helena: (406) 449-2344 voice/TDD  
Missoula: (406) 541-4357 voice/TDD  
(800) 245-4743  
advocate@mtadv.org  
www.mtadv.org

**Montana Legal Services Association**  
Provides legal advice and representation to low-income Montanans in civil matters.

Legal Hotlines: (800) 999-4941  
(800) 666-6899  
(800) 926-3144  
www.mtlsa.org

**Montana Fair Housing**  
Provides legal assistance to victims of housing discrimination and provides education about fair housing law.

Helena: (406) 542-2611  
(800) 929-2611  
www.fairhousing.montana.gov

**Montana Human Rights Bureau**  
Investigates complaints of discrimination, including housing and employment discrimination.

Helena: (406) 444-2884  
(800) 542-0807  
erd.dli.mt.gov/humanright/home.asp

**Montana Legal Services and Social Assault Program**  
Great Falls: (888) 345-7474  
mthonline@pitr.org  
www.mtsclhelpaw.org/hotline/index.html

**Office of Consumer Counsel**  
Investigates and enforces official violations by lawyers.

(406) 841-2980

**People's Law Center**  
Represents people in Social Security disability cases (SSI and SSDI), disability cessation, Social Security overpayments, and Medicaid cases.

Bozeman/Billings: (866) 659-9013  
(406) 585-0286  
Helena/Butte/Missoula: (800) 406-5567  
(406) 443-3896  
Great Falls/Havre/Kalispell: (800) 406-5560  
(406) 761-7720

**Public Service Commission**  
Assists with complaints regarding utility companies.

(406) 444-6199  
(800) 646-6150  
www.psc.mt.gov

**Sanders County Coalition for Families**  
Provides information and assistance for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

(800) 265-0415  
www.sccff.org

**Senior and Long Term Care Division**  
Provides information and assistance for seniors, operates an elder abuse hotline, and provides emergency intervention.

Agging Hotline: (800) 332-2272  
Elder Abuse Hotline: (800) 551-3191  
www.dphhs.mt.gov/alic

**State Bar Lawyer Referral & Information Service**  
Provides referrals to Montana attorneys and information regarding other resources in the State.

(406) 449-6577

**State Law Library of Montana**  
Provides legal information to judges, attorneys, and the general public by providing reference and research assistance.

(406) 444-3660  
mtlawlibrary@mt.gov  
www.lawlibrary.mt.gov