



IMPACT REPORT 2024

LIFT WISCONSIN
Legal Interventions for Transforming Wisconsin

Elevating People. Expanding Justice.

OUR MISSION

LIFT's mission is to dismantle legal barriers preventing Wisconsinites from achieving economic stability. Through our commitment to improving access to justice for everyone, we strive to reform legal systems, increase personal agency, and democratize data.

OUR WORK

Each year, in Wisconsin, over half a million individuals face a civil legal issue that they either do not know how to solve or cannot afford legal representation to resolve. As a consequence, many get trapped in a revolving door of unpaid fines and fees, forms, and hard-to-navigate processes that prevent them from accessing employment, a driver's license, and housing. Unmet civil legal needs have an outsized impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities, exacerbating poor economic and health outcomes.

LIFT works to disrupt and mitigate the compounding economic harm that comes to those who cannot afford to seek legal advice to address a problem that is threatening their livelihood. We ensure that equity, advocacy, compassion, integrity, and our community is at the center of our work by:

- Supporting those facing legal barriers to economic stability as we believe everyone deserves access to justice.
- Committing to understanding the inequities in our legal systems, elevating historically marginalized voices, and vigilantly advocating for reform.
- Accounting for our impact and striving to innovatively serve those who are under-served and under-resourced while upholding honesty, and transparency in all our actions.
- Engaging with and learning from community members and community organizations to establish supportive alliances and achieve common goals.

Our long-term aim is to dismantle structural inequities that lead to economic instability. We do this by elevating individuals, democratizing and catalyzing the transformation of archaic administrative and court systems to ensure access to justice and economic stability for all.



“LIFT Wisconsin is committed to advancing people-centered justice and leveling the playing field with its Legal Tune Up tool, one Wisconsinite at a time.”

-Erica Nelson, Executive Director

OUR MODEL

Low-income families receive adequate legal help only 14% of the time. We're here to change that. Here's how:

PARTNERSHIP



EMBED COMMUNITY NAVIGATORS

LIFT trains community partners to act as navigators for families inadequately supported by the legal system. Navigators help identify legal issues, surface unmet legal needs, and access legal protections.

IMPACT



SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Resilient communities that can equitably access legal protections are better equipped to build healthy families and vibrant futures.

ACCESS



EXPAND THE LEGAL ECOSYSTEM

LIFT increases access and capacity within the legal ecosystem to address systemic barriers that prolong poverty through our Legal Tune Up tool and legal clinics.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

In 2021 LIFT developed the Legal Tune Up tool (LegalTuneUp.org) that combines the power of technology and grassroots advocacy to address the legal causes of economic instability.



The Legal Tune Up tool uses innovative technology to create a simple, free, and web-based single-entry point to solve economically harmful civil legal problems. The tool gathers publicly available data from multiple sources to let the user know whether they have a criminal record, an eviction record, a consumer debt case, an outstanding child support order, or a driver's license suspension. The tool then supports the user in issue resolution. The tool also connects individuals who may need further legal assistance with legal clinics and directs referrals to other needed resources.

The Legal Tune Up tool makes it possible for thousands of Wisconsinites to address an issue without outside assistance, increasing individual agency by putting information and resources directly in the hands of those impacted.

OFFERING DIRECT SUPPORT

LIFT hosts many free legal clinics throughout Wisconsin and collaborates with various partner organizations to support their events and the legal needs of their members. Current partners include the Urban League of Greater Madison, The Road Home, Legal Action Wisconsin, and the Milwaukee Justice Center. Our clinics foster hope, make solving a legal problem seem possible, have impact beyond those who attend them, and result in legal resolution.





EXPANDING THE LEGAL ECOSYSTEM

At LIFT, we are committed to expanding the legal ecosystem by building a new frontline of legal advocates. We are working on training a cadre of non-lawyer legal navigators across the state of Wisconsin to expand the use of our Legal Tune-Up tool. LIFT has introduced the tool to over 500 social workers, case workers, librarians, and community based service providers. Legal navigators understand how to leverage the Legal Tune Up tool to assist their clients and address challenges with housing, employment or economic instability. People do not always need a lawyer but a trusted person with the ability to help them navigate legal procedures and rules. These trusted community members already exist, and with the right training and support, they can act as legal navigators who can identify legal issues, access legal resources, and remove barriers to alleviate poverty. They are a critical bridge to increasing access to justice and a key component to addressing our justice crisis.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

LIFT is working to transform the civil legal system for those who cannot afford to address legal issues that are exacerbating their economic insecurity. We are working to expand justice by making the system more accessible, by advocating for increased investment in civil legal aid services, and educating individuals and communities on the importance of addressing civil legal issues to mitigate poverty. Without ongoing and comprehensive change to our justice system we will continue to trap people in a maze of overwhelming, intimidating and expensive circumstances far afield from our collective vision of justice.



The Racine driver's license clinic is a partnership between LIFT, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Racine County Libraries, and the city of Racine.

OUR IMPACT

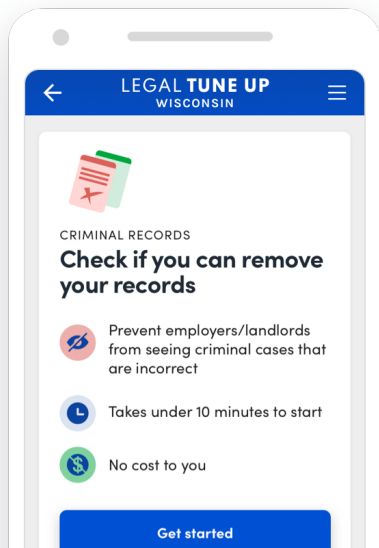
We are proud of the work that our small but mighty team accomplished over the past year. In 2023 we were able to directly serve over 200 individuals in our in-person clinics spanning four WI counties: Dane, Jefferson, Racine and Milwaukee. Additionally, nearly 8,500 individuals utilized our Legal Tune Up tool. Of those Legal Tune Up users 58% identified as BIPOC, 70% received a public benefit, and nearly 90% were considered low-income. Thousands have done a legal check up, hundreds have utilized the child support modification tool, filed for eviction record removal, addressed driver's license suspensions and sought to remove a criminal record or request their criminal background. We are bridging the gap in justice.

LEGAL TUNE UP TOOL

Each year in Wisconsin, over half a million individuals face a civil legal issue that they either do not know how to solve or cannot afford legal representation to resolve.

LIFT offers a solution.

The Legal Tune Up tool provides free help for Wisconsinites with common legal needs.



Our efficient, technology-driven legal assistance addresses civil legal barriers to economic prosperity for Wisconsin families by:

Removing eligible records from background checks.

The LegalTuneUp tool helps remove eligible records from the Wisconsin Department of Justice's Wisconsin Online Record Check System (WORCS), ensuring Wisconsinites can eliminate one of the biggest hurdles to wellbeing.

Economists estimate that the cost of barring people with a criminal record from the workforce is roughly \$78 to \$87 billion in lost gross domestic product annually.

Clearing Criminal records

Clearing criminal records allows individuals to apply for apartments, jobs, and live a better life - breaking the cycle of poverty. Wisconsin's future rests on the ability of everyone - and everyone *means everyone* - to have the chance to earn a good living and have a good life.

Clearing eviction records

No matter what you look like or where you come from, most of us believe in second chances. In Wisconsin, falling behind on rent, even once, can lead to housing discrimination. This, in turn, can impact employment and family stability. Removing eviction records can be costly, only available to those who can afford an attorney and take time off from work to attend court. We believe that justice shouldn't be accessible to only those who can pay for it.



Having a driver's license is more important for finding steady work than a high school diploma.

Reinstating driver's licenses

Having a driver's license can be the difference between getting a job and earning a living. Almost half of driver's license suspensions and revocations in Wisconsin in 2023 were for failure to pay a forfeiture - not for a moving violation. Through in-person clinics in Jefferson, Racine, Dane, and Milwaukee Counties, as well as the always-available online DIY LegalTuneUpTool, we're restoring the freedom to drive for everyone - not just those who can afford to pay a ticket.

Changing child support orders

LIFT is ensuring children get the support they need by making it easy to modify child support orders. The amount of child support that a parent owes is originally determined using the parent's income and financial assets and obligations based on reports at the time, but circumstances change. That's why, through in-person clinics and online at LegalTuneUp.org, we can help walk the user through the process of filing a motion to change the order; thus helping kids and families live a better life. Burdensome child support arrears can degrade the physical, mental, and economic wellbeing of parents; and we believe that every child should have the opportunity to live a full and happy life.

"We believe that justice shouldn't be accessible to only those who can pay for it,"

Reducing consumer debt

A major cause of the punishing debt cycle is the failure to show up for a hearing when a creditor files a lawsuit, even when the accused debtor has a defense to the lawsuit. LegalTuneUp.org empowers people to show up in court by easily pulling court data to identify debt proceedings or judgements and fight the debt and/or negotiate payment plans by explaining the legal process and how to contest the judgment, enhancing economic security. It also provides text reminders for court appearances because we believe everyone should have the opportunity to be heard.

In January 2024 - one of the coldest months of the year - Wisconsin had 118% more evictions than the national average.



OUR VISION

Our work is just beginning in Wisconsin, and we will continue to work toward our vision: to dismantle institutional, systemic, and structural inequalities in our legal systems. We aim to secure a society where every individual, regardless of their circumstance, is treated with dignity and respect under the law while fostering a community that values justice, equality, and the protection of fundamental rights to ensure individual and statewide prosperity.

Our 2024 ambitions include continuous improvement to our Legal Tune Up tool, growing our network of legal navigators, expanding our legal clinic offerings and increasing our advocacy efforts.



LIFT team with 2023-2024 billboard campaign promoting the Legal Tune Up tool

OUR INVITATION

We are in a strong position to build upon our momentum. We invite you to invest in us and get involved in our very important work. We are now actively seeking sponsors, collaborators, and partners to help us expand our reach and advance our cause across the state of Wisconsin. Please reach out to Erica Nelson at erica@liftwisconsin.org to learn more.

We hope you join us.



You can donate here!



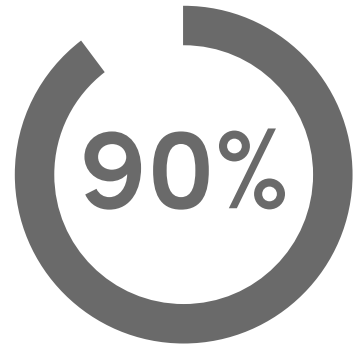
WHO LIFT SERVES



70% of Legal Tune Up users reported receiving public benefits



58% of Legal Tune Up users self-identify as BIPOC



90% of Legal Tune Up users are low-income



In 2023, our Driver's License Reinstatement Clinics served over 100 people.



Over 1,000 people used the LegalTuneUp tool to check on their legal health



7,000 people logged into the Legal Tune Up tool in 2023.



Our billboards have been displayed in Dane, Kenosha, and Racine counties

IN THE NEWS

New online tool helps individuals clean up criminal and eviction records

6/8/21



New Phone App Makes It Easier To Clear Past Offenses From Criminal Records

5/28/21



New Tech Tool Aims To Remove Legal Barriers; Expansion To Racine Planned

6/11/21

LIFT Wisconsin launches new consumer debt resource to empower residents

6/12/24



New program seeks to clear past court records to reduce stigma

5/25/21



Online Tool Helps Wisconsinites Find And Remove Issues On Their Legal Records

6/24/21



LIFT Dane legal clinic helps Wisconsin residents reinstate driver's licenses

4/8/22

This Website Can Help Clean Up Your Legal Record

5/31/23



'Legal Tune Up' tool helps Wisconsinites clear eligible criminal records

5/27/21

THE CAP TIMES

LIFT Dane's Legal Tune-up Tool can help you remove eligible criminal and eviction records

7/16/21

milwaukee journal sentinel

OUR PARTNERS

LIFT is committed to gaining the trust of all community members. We build that trust by partnering with and working alongside organizations embedded in BIPOC communities as well as offering free clinics across the state to meet our most underserved populations where they are. LegalTuneUp.org is available in both English and Spanish.



LAWYERS FOR LEARNERS™



Urban League of Greater Madison



Center for Patient Partnerships
Research, Education, Advocacy, Justice.



LAW SCHOOL
University of Wisconsin-Madison

LEGAL ACTION OF WISCONSIN



OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS



➤ Two silver medals from the 2022 Anthem Awards for Innovation and Responsible Technology - Partnership or Collaboration



➤ Wisconsin Startups to watch in 2020



➤ 2019 Alliance for the American Dream Winner



➤ 2023 InnovAction National Award Finalist

We're disrupting and mitigating the compounding economic harm that comes to those who cannot afford to seek legal advice to address a problem that threatens their livelihood. A suspended license can prevent having transportation to go to work, an eviction record can prevent a family from securing safe and stable housing, an arrest record can prevent landing employment, and child support orders can become difficult to pay. We have the tools to democratize data, transform archaic administrative and court systems, and prevent the structural discrimination that leads to economic instability.

We need your help to do it.



GET IN TOUCH

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