

Columbia Legal Services is a non-profit civil legal aid organization that advocates for laws that advance social, economic, and racial equity for people living in poverty in Washington. Using a systemic approach, CLS supports communities and movements through impact litigation and policy advocacy. In 2023, we are asking legislators in Olympia to:

Ensure health coverage for Washingtonians regardless of their immigration status. The federal government denies Medicaid coverage to many low-income Washingtonians due to their immigration status. More than 100,000 of our residents are therefore left uninsured, leading to worse health outcomes, mounting medical debt, and lingering chronic conditions. Washington should join states like Oregon, Colorado, Illinois, and California in providing equitable health coverage to low-income immigrants.

Create a wage replacement program for workers unable to access unemployment insurance due to their immigration status. The federal government also denies unemployment protections to Washington workers who do not have lawful federal immigration status. Washington should acknowledge the labor and dignity of immigrant workers in the state by creating a permanent wage replacement program—a necessary step towards equity and immigrant justice in the state.

Continue to reduce the number and scope of legal financial obligations. LFOs, the monetary sanctions imposed following a criminal conviction, create significant barriers to successful reentry for individuals who lack the ability to pay them. Washington should disconnect the funding of important court functions through the collection of LFOs. Judicial officers and local governments should not be forced to defend the collection of LFOs as a result of this insidious funding connection.

Protect low-income tenants burdened by unfair damage claims by landlords. Weaknesses in current law make it easy for landlords to overcharge tenants when they move out, and nearly impossible for tenants to contest unfair damage claims. Washington should more clearly define “wear and tear”, require better documentation for repairs, and protect tenants from being denied rental opportunities due to unsubstantiated damage claims.

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