



November 28, 2017

Ald. Michael J. Murphy
(414) 286-3763

Common Council approves Municipal Court legal representation for indigent residents

Today the Milwaukee Common Council unanimously passed **Alderman Michael J. Murphy's** initiative to provide Municipal Court representation to indigent residents in non-criminal cases. The proposed ordinance passed unanimously, allocating up to \$45,000 to the non-profit Legal Action of Wisconsin (LAW). In partnership with the city, LAW will offer free representation to residents who can't afford an attorney in Municipal Court cases, especially in cases where police officers are expected to testify against the defendant, or in cases where defendants face suspension of licenses or jail time.

Ald. Murphy says, "I'm happy to help people of all socioeconomic backgrounds gain fair representation. Before this initiative passed, indigent residents were walking into court at a disadvantage, I don't want to see people be incarcerated for their inability to pay a citation or fully understand their legal rights. This will help improve the justice system and enhance confidence in the judicial system."

LAW will work in partnership with the city. **David Pifer**, Executive Director of Legal Action of Wisconsin says they are eager to assist, "We are pleased that the city recognizes the need to provide free lawyers for low-income individuals in Milwaukee Municipal Court. We look forward to working with the city on this initiative."

Alderman Murphy collaborated not only with LAW, but also with **Alderman Nik Kovac** of District 3.

"I am glad to see that this goal is now being realized," said Ald. Kovac, who introduced the amendment in last year's budget, with Alderman Murphy, to create the funding for this program. "Too many of our neighbors in this city do not know their rights when they appear in Municipal Court, and some of them then end up in jail merely for their inability to pay. Now that Legal Action will be in court to advocate on their behalf, I expect that we will get results in our courtrooms that are more respectful of each other's dignity and more consistent with the law."

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Municipal court legal representation /ADD ONE

Gretchen Schuldt, executive director of the Wisconsin Justice Initiative, advocated for the funding.

Schuldt said, "This will simply balance the scales a little bit. The city has funded Municipal Court prosecutors for years. Now, for the first time, poor people who don't understand Municipal Court processes and don't have the ability to adequately represent themselves will have a defense lawyer to help them."

She went on to say the Municipal Court is a revenue generator for the city, and that now some of the revenue will go into ensuring effective representation for all of our residents.

Ald. Murphy credits his colleagues for their support and efforts as he propelled the initiative forward.

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