



# Article Side

Options for People Looking for Affordable Legal Aid by [Terry Bergin](#)

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Legal aid in the United States is painfully expensive. In fact, an article that appeared on the American Judges Association official website claimed that a sizeable number of family law and other smaller civil law cases are self-represented. A major reason for this can be attributed to the "relative scarcity of affordable legal services". People often choose to proceed without the help of a lawyer because their income does not allow them to afford one. A study conducted in 1994 found that 47 per cent of low income households experienced a new or existing need for legal help, but only 29 per cent of these were addressed by the judicial system; the rest remained unaddressed. Here are some options for people looking for affordable legal aid.

- Legal Aid Officers: Legal aid offices are established all over the country. These lawyers offer their services to low income people. Their services aren't for free, but at a subsidized cost. You would need to first ascertain if you qualify for legal aid.

- Paralegal Services: Paralegals are employed by lawyers to perform substantive work including recognition, evaluation, analysis and communication of relevant facts and concepts. People who choose to represent themselves can hire services of paralegals to help them draft correspondence and pleadings, write and file petitions, manage trial documents and court correspondence, attend and summarize depositions, and even attend execution of wills, real estate closings, and court hearings. They can also be hired to investigate the facts of a case. Needless to say, paralegals offer affordable legal aid when compared to the full cost of engaging a lawyer.

- Pro-Bono Lawyers: There are many professionals in the legal business for whom money isn't always the sole motive. These professionals often get a high when they use their knowledge and skill for the "public-good" or pro-bono. Pro-bono programs are organized by local bar associations. Services in these programs range from offering free legal advice, to dealing with clients, to even training organizations on legal aspects. Sometimes it even includes advising such organizations on their employment and charity law. Some pro-bono lawyers offer virtual advice through websites.

- Public Defenders: Public Defenders are lawyers appointed by the court to people who cannot afford to defend themselves in criminal cases. They are compensated for their services by the government as salaried employees. In fact, a majority of criminals coming from a poor economic background depend on this system.

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[Terry Bergin](#) - About Author:

The Author of this article is a [paralegal in Sacramento](#) and writes about legal issues including advising people on a [affordable legal](#) services.

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