



**LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
Office of Program Performance**

FINAL REPORT

From the

Program Quality Visit

to

Mid-Missouri Legal Services

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INTRODUCTION

Background on the Program Quality Visit

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a Program Quality Visit to Mid-Missouri Legal Services, Inc. (MMLS) on August 24 – 27, 2010. The team members were OPP Program Counsel, Mytrang Nguyen (team leader) and OPP Program Counsel, Mike Genz.

Program Quality Visits are designed to evaluate whether LSC grantees are providing the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment, the team fully reviewed the documents LSC received from the program including: the 2009 and 2010 grant renewal application and 2011 competitive grant application to LSC, including budgets, technology and PAI plans, workforce analysis charts, case service reports, and other service reports. The team also reviewed the documents requested from the program which were submitted in advance of the visit including documents relating to the program's intake, legal work, and case management policies and systems, advocates' writing samples and the results of an online staff survey. On site, the team visited both the Columbia and Jefferson City offices. The team spoke with the entire MMLS staff and with several board members, judges, representatives from government agencies, members of the bar and community service providers.

In performing this evaluation of MMLS's delivery system, OPP relies on the LSC Act and Regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. The evaluation and this report are organized according to the four LSC performance areas that cover: 1) legal needs assessment and priority setting; 2) engagement with the low income community; 3) legal work management and the legal work produced; and 4) organizational leadership and management including board governance, administration, planning, resource development and coordination within the delivery system.

Program and Service Area Overview

Mid-Missouri Legal Services serves an 11 county area directly in the middle of the state. The program's service area is primarily rural, comprised of small farms and villages, with one university town, Columbia, and the state capital of Jefferson City. The program is one of four LSC-funded legal services providers in the state of Missouri and has a total of 12 staff with 8 attorneys including the executive director. Currently, MMLS operates with an annual budget of approximately \$1 million with an FY2010 basic field grant from LSC of \$449,967.

According to the program, one-third of the service area's approximately 400,000 residents live in either Columbia or Jefferson City. The remaining two-thirds of the population live in surrounding farms and villages which cover 6,500 square miles. The main industries in Columbia, with a population approaching 100,000 people, are the University of Missouri, area hospitals, and several large insurance companies. Jefferson City, the state capital with a total population of approximately 30,000 people, is a much

smaller community and the center of government, state agencies, the Missouri Bar Association, and other statewide activities. The program identified a large network and concentration of social service agencies in mid-Missouri as an important community asset upon which it relies and which brings in people who need support. Based on a fall 2009 report commissioned by the Missouri Legal Aid Network, there are 415,000 low-income Missouri households and, based on the 2000 Census a poverty population in the MMLS services area of approximately 43,000 people.

In 2009, MMLS closed 1,364 cases. Seventy percent of their cases were in family law, 12% were in housing law issues, and approximately 5% in consumer/finance matters. Their limited services cases make up 62% of their total cases with extended representation cases constituting the remaining 38% of their cases. According to LSC's 2009 CMS data from the program, family law matters make up approximately 93% of their total extended service casework.

Each of MMLS' two offices conducts intake for two hours each day from Monday through Friday. The majority of applicants contact the program by telephone at the local numbers or a toll free number. Two screeners handle the calls in the Columbia office and one screener handles calls in Jefferson City. The program's two most veteran attorneys are currently assigned as "advice and brief services" attorneys. The advice and brief services attorneys divide their substantive areas of responsibility for limited services work. Each advice attorney also oversees a substantive project for MMLS with one overseeing MMLS' pro se divorce clinic and another responsible for the Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman program. The litigation director and "extended representation" attorneys are assigned to cover primarily family law cases in two or three of MMLS' 11 counties.

In order to reach clients in outlying areas, the staff also conducts monthly outreach in each county seven months out of the year (from April through October). They have developed this outreach strategy to ensure that they provide legal representation and services proportionate to the percentage of low-income people in each county, a point of pride noted several times during the visit by MMLS board members and staff, given the rural and hard-to-reach nature of many of their counties.

Summary of Findings

Period of organizational change and transformation: Relatively recently, Mid-Missouri Legal Services has experienced considerable changes and improvements as an organization. Four years ago, the program faced a significant staff transition when a veteran administrative staff person unexpectedly passed away and their longtime executive director, Edward Berg, went on emergency medical leave and transitioned into retirement. The MMLS board of directors conducted an executive search and hired their current executive director, Susan Lutton, in August of 2007. This executive transition was led by an engaged and committed board of directors and began a series of important changes to the program, which have been approached and implemented carefully and methodically by MMLS' leadership.

These changes included important investments in their administrative operations including cleaning and renovating their Columbia office to transform and professionalize the space, creating stronger and well-documented fiscal and administrative systems, and investing in technology infrastructure. MMLS also sought to improve their services by delineating a litigation director position to strengthen management and legal work; continuing to invest in quality and effective limited services; and strengthening and expanding relationships with service providers, law schools, judges, bar associations, funders, and the state and national legal aid network. MMLS' executive director and board of directors have also sought to increase and diversify funding, while taking a conservative view towards spending. This has allowed the program to build and carry a reserve when new funds came into the program and to effectively weather the current economic recession.

At each turn where the program has faced change, MMLS' board and staff leadership found opportunities to improve and strengthen their organization and services. During the visit, nearly every person interviewed noted the program's positive transformation over the past few years. Under Susan Lutton's dedicated leadership, the board of directors and staff members all displayed a sense of pride and accomplishment over the organization's progress and positive reputation in the community.

Strategy moving forward: During the visit, the MMLS staff and the board chair expressed interest in diversifying services outside of family law, and over the last two years the program has begun to develop ways to meet other legal needs including consumer/zombie debt cases, the Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman project, and developing a new housing law clinic with the University of Missouri School of Law.

As the program continues to evolve, diversify the substantive areas in which they provide services, and enjoy positive support from the community, MMLS will feel pressure from funders and other stakeholders to expand their scope and services and implement changes to their delivery systems to correspond to these changes.

During the visit, the team heard many different stakeholders express a strong interest in MMLS' potential to expand into nearly a dozen important and "new" areas. The LSC team also observed that the program commits significant time and resources towards extended representation in family law matters and strongly encouraged MMLS to allocate more resources towards extended representation on non-family law matters to meaningfully address other critical legal need in client communities.

MMLS is poised to effectively make strategic choices about their future direction as an organization. It has been measured about expanding staff and services, and this conservative approach towards growth, particularly in the midst of the leadership and organizational transition, has served MMLS well. At the time of the visit, MMLS had not engaged in comprehensive and formal long range planning to map its current and future strategic direction but it was developing plans to do so with the assistance of faculty and students from the University of Missouri's Public Policy School. As

mentioned, MMLS has an engaged board and staff and it is encouraged to fully take advantage of the strategic planning process to resolve key issues and create clarity on their overall strategy and allocation of resources moving forward.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PERFORMANCE AREA ONE. EFFECTIVENESS IN IDENTIFYING THE MOST PRESSING CIVIL LEGAL NEEDS OF LOW- INCOME PEOPLE IN THE SERVICE AREA AND TARGETING RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THOSE NEEDS

Finding 1. MMLS conducts an annual, formal needs assessment and priority setting process which has been reinforcing their continued emphasis on family law practice.

MMLS is very well known in the legal and client community for its quality family law work and the program's extended representation consists primarily of family law. The program regularly conducts an annual needs assessment survey to stakeholders including clients, community service providers, bar members and judges in their service area. The program also reviews and assess their case management system data as part of this process. This needs assessment process, while current and conducted annually, appears to seek specific input, largely about current services from stakeholders who know program for its strong family law practice. As a result, the conclusion of the external needs assessment process indicates that the five highest priorities are within the family law realm.

Finding 2. MMLS staff has begun to address different civil legal needs based on issues identified by various stakeholders and as additional resources become available.

In 2009 and during the current economic recession, MMLS effectively met a 32% overall increase in demand for services and with their existing staff. At the same time, MMLS has also sought to diversify the type of legal needs that it addresses. The program has launched its collaborative Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman project which is beginning to yield more extended and complex matters around Medicaid. In the course of implementing this project, MMLS is also exploring the possibility of a beginning a small scale medical-legal partnership.

When the program saw a spike in the number of applicants and clients with consumer debt cases involving very old or unsubstantiated debt ("zombie debt"), it focused an experienced advice and brief services attorney to begin challenging the cases, with a high rate of success and dismissal. The attorney also worked with law students to draft a manual and forms on litigating these cases for future use by law students and pro bono attorneys.

The program also recognized that their advice and brief services attorneys were handling a significant volume of housing matters with both private landlords and the public housing authority. In response, the program developed, and soon after the visit launched, a housing law clinic with the University of Missouri School of Law. They hired a new

attorney to develop and manage the effort and work with law students during the 2010 – 2011 winter semester.

During the course of the week, the team heard a number of possible areas for extended representation, additional services, collaboration, or future funding. This included: medical-legal partnerships, zombie debt work with law students and pro bono attorneys, domestic violence and immigration matters, bankruptcy, predatory lending, elder law, education, foreclosure, unemployment, and working with formerly incarcerated people.

With six of seven attorneys focusing on family law matters on an almost full-time basis, and with approximately 93% of MMLS extended services in family law, there is a concern that other important areas of need, which could significantly benefit from extended representation, are not being met. MMLS is faced with challenging choices about its limited resources as it continues its family law practice and expands more fully into new areas. The program is encouraged to continue planning to provide extended representation in other priority areas using current and new staff, re-allocating resources in an effective and thoughtful manner. This could include narrowing case acceptance criteria for family law cases and, as MMLS brings in additional capacity with new staff, law students and pro bono attorneys, allowing their “extended representation” attorneys to take on more complex work outside of family law in areas of critical need.

The executive director has indicated she and the board is committed to and engaged in strategic planning to resolve key issues for the organization moving forward with assistance from University of Missouri’s Public Policy School.

Recommendation I.1-2.1.¹ MMLS is strongly encouraged to engage in formal strategic or long range planning which crystallizes key areas for additional services and the resources needed to support it.

Recommendation I.1-2.2. Related to its strategic planning process, MMLS should expand its efforts to increase its extended representation in non-family law civil matters by continuing to build staff capacity and expertise in other areas of poverty law.

PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. EFFECTIVENESS IN ENGAGING AND SERVING THE LOW-INCOME POPULATION THROUGHOUT THE SERVICE AREA.

Intake, Advice and Case Acceptance

Finding 3. MMLS’ intake and case acceptance system appears to be currently designed around a high volume of family law matters.

Hours, staffing, emergency matters: Intake at MMLS is handled by each office and is open for 2 hours a day, from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. The majority of the intake is by telephone to the local numbers or to the toll free number. There are six phone lines, including the

¹ The Recommendations in this report correspond numerically to the Performance Area and each Finding. The first two Recommendations in this report correspond to both Findings in Performance Area One.

toll-free line, for both offices. If callers are unable to get through, they can leave a voice message. During the week of the visit, phone lines in Columbia were being used at full capacity during the hours of intake.

Two screeners handle the calls in the Columbia office and one screener handles calls in Jefferson City and they are responsible for obtaining conflict, case type and other eligibility information from applicants. The screening process takes approximately 15 minutes per caller. The screeners and intake process is supervised by the intake coordinator who works out of the Columbia office and is one of the most veteran and knowledgeable staff members at MMLS. She has responsibility for reviewing all intakes and training screeners who all use the Kemps system to conduct their screening and intake. At the time of the visit, MMLS was in the process of hiring a receptionist for the Columbia office in order to share intake responsibilities and alleviate the workload of the current screeners.

If a matter is considered an emergency, applicants are screened and interviewed any time that the office is open and are afforded expedited treatment. On most days, the intake coordinator spends a majority of her time conducting more in depth interviews with emergency applicants. All applicants who speak Spanish as their primary language are forwarded directly to the Columbia screener who is multilingual and who also serves as MMLS' language access officer.

Family law matters: Once it is clear that the applicant is eligible and has a non-emergency family law matter that the program is likely to accept for full representation, the intake coordinator or screener interviews the applicant further and sends the applicant a "notice of non-representation," a letter describing the applicant's status and requesting the documents needed for review, signature and/or return. These applicants are then placed on a 30 day wait list before their matter is brought to MMLS' weekly case acceptance meeting. The wait list allows the intake coordinator to manage the workload and volume of family law matters which the program brings in.

Each week, the intake coordinator and Jefferson City screener bring 25 emergency and non-emergency cases to the case acceptance meeting at which time the cases are assigned to a staff attorney or reduced fee attorney. At the time of case acceptance, the cases are largely assigned based on workloads, complexity of the case and staff attorney's assigned counties.

Advice and brief service matters: For matters that are not family law, the hours and screening process are the same as described above. When the applicant meets the program's basic eligibility criteria, however, the cases are forwarded directly to the appropriate advice and brief services attorney (based on their assigned substantive areas). The advice and brief services attorneys then speak with the applicants, ask them to send additional documents if necessary, and conduct a further interviews or provide advice and limited assistance after reviewing the documents and information. Whether these cases are accepted for more extended representation is based on the advice and brief services

attorney's assessment of the strength of the case and is not part of MMLS' weekly case acceptance meeting and process.

Recommendation II.3.1. MMLS should explore roll over phone capability between their two offices to allow more access for clients who may otherwise have trouble getting their call through and for MMLS' three screeners to more evenly share intake responsibilities.

Recommendation II.3.2. MMLS should examine ways to expand their hours of intake and the use of the case acceptance meetings particularly as they increase their receptionist and screening capacity and plan for new projects such as housing law and extended representation in other areas.

Dignity and sensitivity

Finding 4. MMLS strives to treat clients with respect and dignity and seeks the necessary resources to continually do so.

Communication and language access: The community service providers and judges interviewed observed that MMLS staff communicate well with their clients, are sensitive to barriers which their clients face, and treat their clients with dignity. As mentioned above, MMLS has a Spanish, Portuguese and Russian speaking screener in Columbia who does intakes for Spanish speaking clients in Columbia and Jefferson City and serves as the program's language access officer. MMLS uses Language Line for other languages and their language access officer is currently working with other service providers to develop resources for clients who need other language assistance in the service area.

Offices: MMLS' two offices are strategically placed in the service center's two population centers. The offices are clean and client waiting areas have appropriate materials and are handicap accessible. The program is currently considering how to expand or move their offices in order to accommodate more staff, volunteers and law students. It is also considering more secure neighborhoods and space with reception areas and internal offices that allow for confidential and private conversations during screening and intake.

Engagement with and Utilization by the Community

Finding 5. MMLS is committed to outreach and providing access to services and information in their most rural counties.

MMLS' service area is significantly rural and the program engages in monthly outreach activities and remote intake in nine of the program's eleven counties each month, seven months a year to address this barrier. These outreach visits, conducted by the intake coordinator for the counties served by the Columbia office and the Jefferson City screener for the programs served by that office, are conducted in local courthouses and at

the rural community action agencies. In connection with the program's Missouri Health Net Ombudsman grant, the program has engaged in many additional outreach activities and meetings in the last year with social service agencies, HMO providers, and at myriad community events.

With the program well-established in the legal and client community as an expert on family law matters, it could benefit from an expanded outreach strategy to publicize its services generally and as it moves to expand services in new areas.

Recommendation II.5.1: MMLS should continue to engage in outreach and education efforts (with community organizations, bar and courts) about available services and to emphasize areas of poverty law outside of the family area.

PERFORMANCE AREA THREE. EFFECTIVENESS OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND OTHER PROGRAM ACTIVITIES INTENDED TO BENEFIT THE LOW-INCOME POPULATION IN THE SERVICE AREA.

Legal Representation

Finding 6. MMLS staff have a high level of dedication, professionalism and competence in their work and their most experienced attorneys bring significant expertise to the program.

MMLS has a hard working staff that works cohesively and competently. The team consistently heard judges and service providers praise the advocates. MMLS has five staff members with ten years or more of legal or legal aid experience. The executive director and the two advice and brief services attorneys have from more than 25 years of legal experience, and the litigation director has over ten years of legal experience. The program's experience profile is heightened by its hiring of three new staff members with considerable experience in the last few years.

The litigation director is part of the management team and has been with the program for ten years -- her entire legal career. She carries a family law caseload, and supervises the other four attorneys who focus primarily on extended representation in family law matters.

One advice and brief services attorney has been with the program for four years after 26 years in state government. As an advice and brief services attorney, he leverages his background to focus on matters before administrative agencies such as public benefits and public housing. He is also responsible for developing the program's collaborative Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman program, which will begin to generate more complex legal matters and cases for extended representation on Medicaid.

The second advice and brief services attorney was hired over a year ago after a career as an attorney in private practice. He focuses on domestic matters, private landlord tenant

situations, and consumer issues. He has also been responsible for developing and managing MMLS' successful pro se divorce clinic and their efforts with zombie debt.

Finding 7. MMLS has made staffing choices which reflect a strong interest in providing high-quality limited and extended services.

As mentioned, MMLS has assigned its two most experienced attorneys to advice and brief services and the litigation director and extended representation attorneys have focused most exclusively on the most challenging family law cases. Behind these staffing choices emerges a clear rationale which has been evolving over the last four years.

First, the program believes that experienced attorneys can provide the most effective limited services because they draw from a broad range of substantive knowledge and resources when spotting issues and supporting clients under stress. The MMLS staff and board chair described how the advice and brief services attorneys are working with two levels of challenge: legal matters and the "human" dimension. Said one advice attorney, "these are people who have a problem legal or otherwise and they have to be heard and helped." The decision to hire experienced attorneys to limited service work was also done to ensure MMLS is getting the best outcomes for clients by preventing further or future problems.

Second, with the advice and brief services attorneys responsible for all areas other than family law, the extended representation attorneys are allowed to specialize on their family law cases without "being spread thin" by having to learn and provide advice in a broad range of matters in addition to their demanding caseloads. The litigation attorneys now have more time to spend on their resource intensive family law cases, and have more flexibility to be in court frequently. Based on the writing samples provided, interviews with the staff attorneys and interviews with members of the bar and judges, the attorneys are providing quality representation and enjoy a positive reputation for professionalism and effective lawyering.

During the visit, MMLS was in the process of hiring their former law clerk and a newer attorney to oversee the development of a housing law clinic that engages law students from the University of Missouri School of Law.

Finding 8. MMLS is conscientious about legal work oversight and works to maintain the quantity and quality of their work.

MMLS has a written and standard process for extended representation case acceptance which involves the executive director and litigation director's input at weekly case review. There appears to be appropriate consideration of the complexity of the case and the experience level of the attorney as well as consideration of the availability of pro bono or judicare representation for each case. The litigation director assigns newer attorneys to assist or second chair complex cases and both the executive director and litigation director conduct a quarterly review of case status and progress.

The litigation director position is a new position which the executive director and litigation director are working to define. With a veteran staff attorney in the position, she has naturally been serving informally as a mentor to the newer attorneys over the years. The program plans to define the position in a way that allows more time to supervise attorneys and develop important legal work policies, protocols and resources for the organization. The executive director also conducts regular reviews of case files and activity in Kemps and the staff attorneys all use her as a resource on their legal work.

Almost all of the attorneys go to the annual statewide domestic relations training and have access to family law resources, listservs, and materials. Other training opportunities are available to advocates and several attorneys indicated that the weekly case review meetings are a valuable learning opportunity.

Recommendation III.8.1. As it expands its work outside of family law, the program should ensure that it defines clear supervisory lines and standards and allows the litigation director position to develop important legal work policies, protocols, training opportunities and resources for the organization and in the different areas of law.

Private attorney involvement

Finding 9. MMLS faces practical challenges to engaging pro bono resources in their service area, but is exploring the best ways to expand.

MMLS is in the process of strengthening their PAI program with the involvement and interest of their board. They recently increased their judicare attorneys by 25% and now have a total of 28 judicare attorneys and a panel of 8 pro bono attorneys, reflective of their rural area with a very small bar. Their judicare attorneys described a well-functioning system for placing cases with organized, carefully screened, and properly developed cases.

Using pro bono attorneys in their divorce clinic, MMLS also realized they can explore and create new ways to engage attorneys in time-limited pro bono service. This can potentially tap into the large number of government attorneys in Cole county. A judge the team interviewed indicated that MMLS could reach out to the attorney general, state commissioners, and other top officials in key state offices to help communicate to their lawyers that pro bono volunteering is permitted.

The program makes continued and good use of the nearby law students at the University of Missouri's School of Law, and as discussed above, MMLS recently asked law students to researching and compiling the manuals and forms for pro bono volunteers to take on zombie debt cases.

Recommendation III.9.1. As resources allow, the program should continue to explore how to develop time-limited pro bono opportunities and should also consider engaging

influential judges, state officials, and/or current or retired bar leaders in discussions to support pro bono in their service area.

Other services and activities

Finding 10. MMLS has been actively developing ways to provide additional, high-quality services to clients.

MMLS is interested in the thoughtful development of program services to help low income clients. Recent examples of this include the pro se divorce clinic, the Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman program and the new housing law clinic. In addition, the executive director has been supportive of and learning from the 13th Judicial Circuit's Access to Justice effort.

Pro se divorce clinic: The goal of the divorce clinic is to assist pro se clients with their uncontested divorce. Launched a year ago, the clinic has been expanded to a weekly clinic. MMLS' advice and brief services attorney screens and vets applicants for eligibility. At the weekly clinic, the attorney and volunteers provide detailed explanations of the divorce process, and take the time to type information into the forms so they are legible and thoroughly completed. The clinic also provides clients with ongoing support and access to the MMLS attorney during the pendency of their case and extensive coaching on courtroom procedure, how to dress and act in the courtroom, etc. The degree to which the MMLS and volunteers provide clients with information has led to a remarkable success rate for a pro se effort with nearly 100% follow-through and completion on these divorces, as tracked for an entire year and through court dockets once a client participates in the clinic.

Missouri HealthNet Ombudsman program: The MO HealthNet program is a grant which MMLS receives to provide ombudsman services for families who participate in the state Medicaid program and which can include services from private HMOs. To date, the program has assisted with eligibility determinations, locating providers, and arranging for services. Increasingly, MMLS expects to become involved in more complex legal advocacy as part of this Medicaid ombudsman work. The program involves a significant amount of outreach and education, as mentioned above, and MMLS is also using the program to begin meeting with pediatric and family practice residents at Children's Hospital, building the foundation for a possible small-scale medical-legal partnership.

PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION.

Board governance and executive leadership

Finding 11. The MMLS board of directors and executive director are very hard working and provide balanced, thoughtful and strategic leadership to the program.

MMLS has an engaged and inquisitive board of directors, who bring a passion for the program's mission and diversity of experience to the program's leadership. In 2007-2008, the board of directors showed sound judgment and focus, managing an important leadership change and transition. They conducted a national search to find and hire a new executive director and they managed the retirement of the longtime executive director who had been with the program since 1978. During the executive transition and since bringing on the new executive director, the board has remained fully engaged, assisting with strengthening MMLS' finance systems, supporting MMLS' funding requests, engaging in a thoughtful and extensive technology planning process, and assisting with the development of the new housing clinic with the law school. A number of interviewees noted how MMLS' outgoing board chair, Truman Allen, has been a true anchor and positive voice for the organization over the past several years.

MMLS' successful leadership through a number of subsequent organizational changes described in this report can be largely attributable to the executive director and her leadership and management experience. She has a thoughtful leadership style which combines vision, good instincts and judgment, and practical management experience. Interviewees described Susan Lutton as, "wonderful," "an open communicator," "methodical," and "setting the right tone at the top." The board and executive director together exhibit a strong interest in continual refinements and improvements to the program and are very open to feedback and suggestions on how to improve and best collaborate in the region, statewide, and nationally.

Management and administration

Finding 12. MMLS significantly updated its technology and has plans to improve its use of technology It has improved its finance and human resource systems.

Technology: In 2009, the board and executive leadership underwent a significant evaluation of its technology infrastructure which resulted in replacing its servers and computers. The program maintains its Kemps system stored and managed offsite and has installed new hardware and software. It now has a stable, robust system which is able to expand in the next several years to significantly increase their capacity and efficiency. This includes a five year plan, beginning in 2010, to have a paperless office which is consistent with the one being rolled out in the Missouri courts. The Kemps system is being used well to support the legal work oversight, timekeeping and calendaring. The program recently adopted FastCase Missouri which the attorneys are using for their legal research.

Finance systems: MMLS' executive director and part time accountant have been responsible for strengthening and documenting MMLS' administrative systems over the past three years. MMLS' part time accountant is a CPA who used to work at MMLS' former auditing firm and who is very familiar with MMLS' funding sources and funder requirements. When the accountant first began working with MMLS, the program was not using accounting software and was doing a lot of their accounting manually and by hand. The program now uses QuickBooks and Excel to maintain their financial

information and has systems for managing their revenue and expenses on a weekly, quarterly and annual basis. The accountant also noted that MMLS has moved away from operating from month-to-month with cash flow concerns, to building and carrying a reserve with conservative budgeting and disciplined savings.

The board treasurer noted that he worked with the executive director to refinance the mortgage on the Columbia property to secure a lower interest rate. He and other board members also commented on how pleased they are with the quality of the financial reports that they have been receiving with the arrival of the new executive director and accountant.

Human resources: The executive director is primarily responsible for MMLS' human resource function and benefits administration with some support from administrative staff. She has updated office and personnel manuals, developing policies and systems where there were none in the past. She addresses personnel issues directly and promptly. The program has experienced some attrition of staff in the last two years and will soon be fully staffed with additional new positions.

A review of MMLS' salary structure shows that the program is on the lower compensation range for legal aid programs and nonprofits nationally, particularly with regard to support staff. The executive director has been assessing salaries and is encouraged to continue doing so to improve retention. The program should also assess how to thoughtfully support the leadership and professional development of all staff as it builds the litigation director position, diversifies areas for extended representation, and has additional opportunities to develop projects.

Recommendation IV.12.1. As resources allow, MMLS should periodically review salaries and create thoughtful leadership and professional development opportunities for its staff.

Resource development and state/regional collaboration

Finding 13. MMLS' executive director has been effectively building relationships in the region and state, leveraging new resources to the program.

The executive director has been fully engaged with the other legal aid providers in Missouri on statewide efforts to increase funding for the legal services. At the same time, she has been active in the Access to Justice effort in the 13th Judicial District and understanding how to effectively engage pro bono resources and additional resources from the law school. She has reached out to bar associations and leaders and takes an interest in issues facing the courts.

CONCLUSION

MMLS has undergone significant and positive transformation in the past few years. While they have not engaged in formal strategic planning, MMLS has clearly been operating from a focused and disciplined strategy to strengthen the organization's internal operations and external relationships. MMLS should continue to leverage its strong leadership and staff and approach new opportunities thoughtfully and with a concern for quality and continuous improvement. Looking forward, MMLS is well-positioned to building its long-term capacity to further expand its reach and impact in low-income communities.