



**Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide
Governmental Relations Services for
Maryland Legal Aid**

RFP Timeline	
RFP Issue Date:	August 9, 2024
Deadline for Respondent Questions to MLA:	August 20, 2024
MLA Response(s) to Questions:	August 22, 2024
RFP Response Due Date:	August 29, 2024
Estimated Date for Contract Award:	September 27, 2024
Commencement of Work:	October 1, 2024

RFP Contact	
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DESCRIPTION: Maryland Legal Aid (“MLA”) seeks proposals from qualified agencies or individuals to provide government relations and legislative advocacy services. MLA seeks to enhance its advocacy and policy efforts on behalf of the low-income and vulnerable Marylanders we serve.

This RFP aims to identify a partner that will assist MLA in educating and connecting with key decisionmakers and navigating government and legislative processes, all while understanding restrictions on lobbying activities that govern MLA as a nonprofit and a recipient of federal Legal Services Corporation funding. The requested services are more thoroughly described in the Scope of Work section of this RFP.

An organization or entity intending to respond to this RFP is considered a “Respondent.”

Proposal Instructions

- 1. Proposal Preparation:** MLA recommends reading all RFP materials prior to preparing a proposal, particularly these proposal instructions. Respondents must follow these Proposal Instructions and provide a complete response to the items indicated in the table below. References and links to websites or external sources may not be used in lieu of providing the information requested in the RFP within the proposal.
- 2. Expected Timeline**

RFP Timeline	
RFP Issue Date:	August 8, 2024
Deadline for Respondent Questions to MLA	August 19, 2024
Responses to Questions	August 22, 2024
RFP Response Due Date:	August 29, 2024
Estimated Contract Award:	September 27, 2024

- 3. Maryland Legal Aid Contact Information:** The sole point of contact for the MLA concerning this RFP is listed on the Cover Page. Contacting any other MLA personnel, agent, consultant, or representative about this RFP may result in Respondent disqualification.
- 4. Questions:** Respondent questions about this RFP must be submitted electronically by email to the contact listed on the cover page of this RFP. In the interest of transparency, only written questions are accepted. Answers to all questions will be sent to Respondents via email. Please refer to Section 2 above for the deadline to submit questions.
- 5. Modifications:** MLA may modify this RFP at any time. Modifications will be sent via email. This is the only method by which the RFP may be modified.
- 6. Delivery of Proposal:** The Respondent must submit its proposal, all attachments, and any modifications or withdrawals electronically via email to the contact listed on the cover page of this RFP. The price proposal should be saved separately from all other proposal documents. The Respondent should submit all documents in a modifiable (native) format (examples include Microsoft Word or Excel and Google Docs or Sheets). In addition to submitting documents in a modifiable format, the Respondent may also submit copies of documents in PDF. Respondent's failure to submit a proposal as required may result in disqualification. The proposal and attachments must be fully uploaded and submitted prior to the proposal deadline. **MLA may not allow a proposal to be submitted after the proposal deadline identified in the Cover Page, even if a portion of the proposal was already submitted.**

7. Evaluation Process: MLA will convene a team of individuals to evaluate each proposal based on each Respondent’s ability to provide the required services and consider the overall cost to MLA. MLA may require an oral presentation of the Respondent's proposal; conduct interviews, research, reference checks, and background checks; and request additional price concessions at any point during the evaluation process. The following criteria will be used to evaluate each proposal:

Evaluation
Proposer’s qualifications and experience.
Demonstration of successful lobbying and government relations efforts.
Proposer’s approach to the services requested in the scope of work.
Fees and/or compensation Respondent is seeking.

- 8. Reservations:** MLA reserves the right to:
- a. Disqualify a Respondent for failure to follow these instructions.
 - b. Discontinue the RFP process at any time for any or no reason. The issuance of an RFP, your preparation and submission of a proposal, and MLA’s subsequent receipt and evaluation of your proposal does not commit MLA to award a contract to you or anyone, even if all the requirements in the RFP are met.
 - c. Consider late proposals if: (i) no other proposals are received; (ii) no complete proposals are received; (iii) MLA received complete proposals, but the proposals did not meet mandatory minimum requirements or technical criteria; or (iv) the award process fails to result in an award.
 - d. Consider an otherwise disqualified proposal, if no other proposals are received.
 - e. Disqualify a proposal based on: (i) information provided by the Respondent in response to this RFP; or (ii) if it is determined that a Respondent purposely or willfully submitted false or misleading information in response to the RFP.
 - f. Consider prior performance with MLA in making its award decision.
 - g. Consider total-cost-of-ownership factors (e.g., transition and training costs) when evaluating proposal pricing and in the final award.
 - h. Refuse to award a contract to any Respondent that has outstanding debt with MLA or has a legal dispute with MLA or associated entities.
 - i. Require all Respondents to participate in a Best and Final Offer round of the RFP.
 - j. Enter into negotiations with one or more Respondents on price, terms, technical requirements, or other deliverables.
 - k. Award multiple, optional-use contracts, or award by type of service or good.
 - l. Evaluate the proposal outside the scope identified in Section 7, Evaluation Process, if MLA receives only one proposal.

9. Award Recommendations: The contract will be awarded to the responsive and responsible Respondent who offers the best overall value to MLA, as determined by MLA. Best value will be determined by the Respondent meeting the minimum requirements and offering the best combination of the factors in Section 7, Evaluation Process, and price, as demonstrated by the proposal. MLA will email a Notice of Award to all Respondents. A Notice of Award does not constitute a contract, as the parties must reach final agreement on a signed contract before any services can be provided.

10. General Conditions: MLA will not be liable for any costs, expenses, or damages incurred by a Respondent participating in this solicitation. The Respondent agrees that its proposal will be considered an offer to do business with MLA in accordance with its proposal and that it will be irrevocable and binding for 180 calendar days from submission date. If a contract is awarded to the Respondent, MLA may, at its option, incorporate any part of the Respondent's proposal into the contract. This RFP is not an offer to enter into a contract. This RFP may not provide a complete statement of MLA's needs or contain all matters upon which agreement must be reached. Proposals submitted via email are MLA's property.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Please complete the following Information Sheet in the space provided:

Information Sought	Response
Contact Information	
1. Respondent's sole contact person during the RFP process. Include name, title, address, email, and phone.	
2. Person authorized to receive and sign a resulting contract. Include name, title, address, email, and phone.	
Respondent Background Information	
1. Legal business name and address. Include business entity designation, e.g., sole proprietor, Inc., LLC, or LLP.	
2. State in which the company was formed.	
3. Main phone number	
4. Website address	
5. Number of years in business and number of employees	
6. Has your firm or agency (or any affiliates) litigated against Maryland Legal Aid/Legal Aid Bureau? If the answer is yes, then state the date of initial filing, case name and court number, and jurisdiction.	

SCOPE OF WORK

Background

For more than 100 years, [Maryland Legal Aid](#) has provided free, high-quality, transformative civil legal services to low-income people and families in Maryland to address their most fundamental legal problems. From our 11 offices around the state and through our community-based clinics, we help our clients preserve and access safe and affordable housing, maintain custody of their children, and be safe from domestic violence. We increase our clients' economic security by defending against consumer debt, including foreclosures and tax sales, removing barriers to employment, and accessing critical income supports such as unemployment, food stamps, and other vital public benefits. Through special projects, we represent seniors, nursing home residents, children in the child welfare system, and migrant farm workers.

It is the mission of Maryland Legal Aid to advocate with and for Marylanders experiencing poverty to achieve equity and social justice through free civil legal services, community collaboration, and systems change.

Project Description

Maryland Legal Aid is requesting proposals that include qualifications, relevant experience and a fee proposal for professional government relations services that can address the breadth of anti-poverty policy issues that impact our clients and communities. As a private nonprofit law firm, Maryland Legal Aid seeks these services to help educate government officials, legislators and other decisionmakers about the impact of policies, laws and systems on vulnerable and low-income Marylanders and to vigorously advocate for a fairer, more equitable and just Maryland for us all.

Scope of Work:

1. Build Relationships with Elected and Appointed State and Local Officials

- a. Assist Maryland Legal Aid in strategizing and planning to reach its annual policy and advocacy goals in alignment with our [strategic plan](#) and help us adapt our approach as circumstances evolve. (See Attachment A for a list of last year's legislative priorities.)
- b. Develop Maryland Legal Aid's relationships with members of the General Assembly, elected and appointed officials in the Governor's office and state agencies, and local government officials.
- c. Help establish Maryland Legal Aid as a resource for lawmakers, and federal, state and local leaders who wish to understand the equity and impact of current or proposed actions or systems on people and communities who are struggling with poverty.
- d. Coordinate, facilitate, and track meetings with legislators and agency department leaders to provide MLA with critical opportunities for communication as needed.
- e. Monitor actions with State regulatory bodies and provide guidance regarding the rulemaking and regulatory process.
- f. Engage with federal policy makers and officials as needed.

2. Advance Policy Priorities

- a. Pursue legislative and/or policy directives, including funding opportunities, to help address and achieve MLA's priority advocacy goals.
- b. Identify bills that advance MLA's priorities or, conversely, that may negatively impact our clients' interests. Identify information about the bill including its sponsor(s), any background information on the purpose of the bill, entities in support and opposition, and provide a recommendation about a position on the bill.
- c. Understand and assist us in meeting the regulatory restrictions on lobbying imposed by the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, one of MLA's key funders, and Maryland's lobbying registration requirements.
- e. Actively lobby and help with the process of testifying on bills of interest.
- f. Track state and federal rulemaking efforts as needed.

3. Provide Communication and Coalition Support

- a. Ensure decision makers hear and account for the voices, needs and perspectives of low-income Marylanders as they shape policies and systems.
- b. Coordinate and attend meetings or events related to MLA's government relations work.
- c. Advise MLA in development and implementation of communication, messaging, community relations, and coalition development as it relates to achieving and/or promoting various policy objectives.

Consultant agrees to spend the time needed to adequately service this agreement and complete agreed upon activities.

Proposal Submission

Proposals shall include the following components:

- Respondent Information Sheet
- A letter of interest that provides the following:
 - Respondent's qualifications including an overview of the firm and qualifications to perform the work including biographies of the anticipated team.
 - Three references for work done in the last five years demonstrating Respondent's experience and skill in providing similar services to those described in this RFP. Please include: 1) name of entity/organization; 2) name, title, email and phone for key contact; 3) description and dates of work undertaken; and 4) outcome of work performed.
 - Respondent's proposal including a general description of the proposed approach to providing these services and to handling conflicts, competing interests and/or confidentiality among clients with divergent interests.
- A financial proposal that includes all proposed costs and fees is to be included in full. Clearly detail, explain, and identify all costs. All costs proposed shall include a "not to exceed" amount.



2024 List of Key Issues Impacting MLA Clients

Tenants' Rights

- Renters in the same building cannot currently band together and sue for common, dangerous problems like mold and bedbugs, making it harder to address those issues and keep families safe.
- Allowing jurisdictions to provide for “just cause” evictions would give tenants increased protection and time before being evicted, creating greater housing security.
- Giving tenants notice of eviction and a 7-day window to reclaim personal property, including medications, sensitive personal records, and clothes for their kids when evicted, would make the eviction process more humane.

The Poverty to Prison Pipeline

- As a result of the recent *Abhishek* decision, there is a categorical expungement exclusion for people who violate probation, parole, or supervision. Narrowing the exclusion and/or starting the waiting period after completion of the sentence for violation would broaden who can benefit from expungement and increase equity.
- Distribution of a Controlled Substance is not on the list of expungable offenses despite it being effectively identical to Possession With Intent to Distribute, which is already listed.
- Providing the chance for a clean slate and making expungement the default rule with only a list of exclusions would be more efficient and less labor intensive than the current system.

Consumer Law

- People caring for their elderly and disabled family members could benefit from a caregiver’s tax credit, akin to a childcare tax credit.

- Raising the Homestead Exemption in bankruptcy above the extremely low federal minimum would ensure that low- and moderate-income homeowners keep more equity when they fall on hard times, thereby keeping and building generational wealth.

Unemployment/Income Supports

- Attorneys do not currently have access to electronic portals including BEACON, MDCash, and MDThink, so they cannot ensure that their clients actually receive the benefits they have earned.
- The MDOL Board of Review does not have authority to excuse late-filed appeals for good cause, which is particularly necessary given all the problems with the state's unemployment portal, BEACON.

Public Health and Aging

- Seniors could better receive vital healthcare by requiring the State to timely process Medicaid applications and establish care plans, reducing the sometimes years-long delays.
- Nursing home discharge notices do not contain a designated safe discharge location address, leaving our clients alone and in danger.
- To better ensure that clients are only placed in guardianships when absolutely necessary, courts could make an affirmative finding that less restrictive alternatives are not available.
- A regularly scheduled court review would benefit people with disabilities in private guardianship, as this population has specific, acute needs.

Domestic Violence and Family Law

- Parents could provide more support for their children if they were not subject to the current arbitrary and economically counterproductive driver's license suspension lottery for child support arrears.

- DV survivors who secure a civil protective order deserve help with their urgent needs like medical bills and housing, which could be achieved by providing cash support without requiring them to file a separate criminal case.

Children's Rights

- Teenagers who are aging out of the child welfare system would be set up for success by requiring DHS and DSS to make greater, more tailored efforts on their behalf, so they do not fall back into poverty and/or end up involved in the criminal legal system.
- DHS and DSS do not currently apply for public benefits on behalf of children immediately upon eligibility, even though these children are in their exclusive care.
- The child welfare system would benefit from increased transparency and accountability by ensuring that the “818 Form”—which the state fills out and which determines where children get placed following removal from parents—be made available to counsel for children, so they can track and monitor children's placements and care.