

The Role of Medan City Legal Aid Institutions in Providing Legal Aid to the Community on a Pro Bono Basis

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Abstract. *This study examines the role of the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) in Medan in providing free legal services to low-income communities. This service aligns with Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, which emphasizes the importance of access to justice for those who utilize these services. However, the lack of public understanding and information about LBH is a major obstacle. The approach used in this study is a normative juridical approach coupled with an empirical approach, which includes regulatory analysis and interviews with various stakeholders. The results of this study indicate that LBH in Medan plays a crucial role in supporting the community through both litigation and non-litigation processes. Some challenges faced include limited workforce, low public awareness, and inadequate government support. Therefore, collaboration between the government, the community, and LBH is crucial to improve the effectiveness of free services for communities in need.*

Keywords: *Communities; Institute; Legal; Underprivileged.*

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country that adheres to the principle of the rule of law, placing the law as the highest authority. Once a legal regulation is created and approved, every individual is automatically bound to obey and respect it, as the law serves to guarantee and protect everyone's rights. Essentially, the concept of a state based on the rule of law aims to prevent arbitrary actions by the state or government. Even in this modern era, a state will be considered increasingly relevant and ideal if all aspects of state governance refer to appropriate and clear legal mechanisms¹.

In a state based on the rule of law, all citizens are equal before the law without exception. Indonesia adheres not only to the principle of the rule of law but also to the concept of *rechtsstaat*. The foundation that Indonesia is a state based on the rule of law is affirmed in the 1945 Constitution, which states that "Indonesia

¹ Janpatar Simamora, "Tafsir Makna Negara Hukum dalam Perspektif Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945", *Jurnal Dinamika Hukum*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2014

is a state based on the rule of law."² Every citizen is fundamentally entitled to equal legal protection, as it is a fundamental, global right. This principle is crucial given that, in reality, the state often faces challenges facing economically disadvantaged groups, who frequently struggle to exercise their right to justice, as guaranteed under the rule of law.²

The constitution occupies a fundamental position as a basic rule in state life. It is called a basic rule because it only contains basic and fundamental provisions, is broad in nature, and stands as a primary norm without any additional, detailed norms. The constitution can also be understood as a crystallization of norms concerning the state's obligation to carry out its function of protecting human rights while simultaneously organizing government based on the principle of popular sovereignty with legal limitations on power for the benefit and welfare of the people, nation and state³. Therefore, considering the fundamental nature of its material, every legal norm in the constitution should reflect and accommodate the interests of the nation and state as a whole by prioritizing the fulfillment of the interests of the people as holders of sovereignty.

Article 27 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution states that every citizen in this country has equal standing before the law and government, and must respect the law and government without exception. In addition, Article 28 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes the state's strong commitment to guaranteeing equality for every individual before the law. This provision emphasizes the right of every person to receive fair treatment from a legal perspective and guarantees the right for everyone to gain access to justice⁴.

Every individual in society has the right to receive equal treatment before the law, which reflects the principle of equality before the law, including for people with less economic means who face legal problems. Article 34 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution emphasizes that the state is responsible for caring for poor people and neglected children. The meaning of the term "cared for" is not only limited to fulfilling basic needs such as food, but must also include providing access to legal protection and justice. Therefore, the principle of equality before the law is not only understood as formal equality before the law, but also as equality in gaining access to the legal and justice system thus, a concept and goal emerged known as access to law and justice.⁵

In social interactions, disputes frequently arise between individuals, often resulting in harm to one party. Various conflicts within society often escalate to

² Janpatar Simamora, "Perlindungan Hak Memilih Sebagai Hak Konstitusional Warga Negara (Kajian Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor 85/PUU-X/2012)", *Jurnal Yudisial*, Vol. 6, No. 2, August 2013.

³ Janpatar Simamora dan Bintang ME Naibaho, "Penguatan Landasan Konstitusional Kejaksaan dalam Sistem Ketatanegaraan Republik Indonesia", *Jurnal Konstitusi*, Vol. 22, No. 2, June 2025

⁴ Muhamad Husein Haekal, "Perlindungan Hukum Bagi Masyarakat Kurang Mampu Dan Peranan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum di Indonesia", *Skripsi UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*, 2023, p, 3-4.

⁵ M. Iqbal Al Hayaza, "Peran Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Dalam Memberikan Akses Bantuan Hukum Bagi Masyarakat Miskin di Banyuwangi", *Skripsi UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember*, 2024, p, 7-8

legal proceedings. In such situations, people often feel confused about how to resolve existing problems related to the Indonesian legal system, thus requiring legal assistance. Furthermore, legal aid plays a significant role in realizing justice and ensuring equality before the law for all citizens, especially those in disadvantaged economic circumstances⁶.

In an effort to achieve the principles and goals of access to law and justice, the government passed Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid. Fundamentally, this provision obliges law enforcement officials, particularly advocates, to provide free legal aid to individuals from low-income backgrounds. One institution specifically responsible for providing legal aid to people from low-income groups is the Medan Legal Aid Institute (LBH Medan), which holds the status of a Legal Aid Organization (OBH). Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid serves as the legal basis for the implementation of legal aid to the community, both through advocates and through Legal Aid Organizations (OBH) (Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2011 Number 104).

Providing legal aid by LBH to the community is one way to achieve the objectives of Law Number 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid. This objective is clearly stated in Article 3 of the Law, which guarantees and fulfills the rights of Legal Aid Recipients to access justice. To achieve the objectives of the Legal Aid Law, it is crucial that legal aid services are distributed equitably, including to those with low economic status. In this context, LBH Medan, through its professional staff, such as advocates and legal aid assistants, provides free legal services to those in need.⁷

Normatively, Indonesian laws and regulations already accommodate the rights of low-income citizens to obtain justice through pro bono legal aid. However, in practice, many low-income citizens who seek justice still lack access to legal assistance from lawyers. This situation is ironic, considering that the number of lawyers continues to increase each year, but this increase does not fully guarantee access to legal assistance for low-income citizens.⁸

Legal Aid Institutions (LBH) play a vital role in communities because they reflect the principle of equality before the law. This is all the more crucial because many people in society still live in poverty, and a lack of understanding of the application of the law also poses a barrier. Furthermore, the low level of legal awareness and concern among Indonesians makes LBH even more crucial. In addition to

⁶ Maysarah, Andi dan Rina Melati Sitompul, "Peran Dan Kedudukan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH) Medan Sebagai Access To Justice Bagi Masyarakat Miskin Di Sumatera Utara," *De Lata: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2023), p. 176.

⁷ Silitonga, R., Simanjuntak, B., Marpaung, R., & Sitanggang, T., "Peran Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Dalam Memberi Bantuan Hukum Terhadap Masyarakat Tidak Mampu Berdasarkan Undang-Undang No 16 Tahun 2011 Tentang Bantuan Hukum," *Jurnal Mutira Hukum*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2022), p. 14

⁸ Ariansyah Ginting, "Peranan lembaga bantuan hukum (LBH) dalam memberikan bantuan hukum kepada masyarakat pencari keadilan (studi di lembaga bantuan hukum Medan)," *Skripsi, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi*, 2023, p 10-13

introducing a new approach to implementing legal aid programs in our country, the Medan Legal Aid Institute is also considered a pioneer in well-organized and successful legal aid.⁹

Poverty is a multidimensional issue, as it is not solely related to economic aspects but also to a variety of other areas. Therefore, government policies are essential to address poverty across various sectors, including the legal sector. Generally, poverty is often interpreted as material weakness. However, when linked to the legal realm, poverty also reflects society's limited access to justice, which is a fundamental right of every person.¹⁰

In an effort to build public legal awareness, steps are needed to disseminate legal understanding through legal counseling or briefing activities. These activities aim to increase public knowledge of the law, deepen understanding of relevant norms and regulations, and optimize the effectiveness of legal counseling programs. Through these efforts, it is hoped that a legal culture will be formed, reflected in an orderly and compliant attitude towards the law, in order to uphold the rule of law. Thus, a society that understands the law will develop into a society with a legal culture and a high level of compliance with applicable regulations.¹¹

Based on Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, Article 1 number 2 explains that individuals or groups living in poverty are any person or group who has a weak economic condition and is unable to fulfill their basic rights independently and properly. Furthermore, Article 5 paragraph (1) explains that the basic rights in question include the right to obtain food, clothing, health services, education, work and/or business, and housing. This regulation states that the requirements for obtaining legal aid do not only look at economic conditions, but also look at the inability to fulfill basic needs¹².

The Legal Aid Institute (LBH) is an organization providing legal aid. Its initial idea was to actualize and conceptualize the role of advocates, sharing their time and expertise in providing legal advice and advocating for low-income communities. This practice is known within the legal profession as *pro bono publico*. Legal aid is provided to low-income communities so they can obtain justice on an equal footing with those of more capable economic means. This aligns with the principle of access to legal counsel, a fundamental human right, where every citizen facing legal proceedings has the right to receive assistance from one or

⁹ Frans Hendra Winarta, *Bantuan Hukum: Suatu Hak Asasi Manusia Bukan Belas Kasihan*, Ed. ke-2 (Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2000), p. 72

¹⁰ Komnas HAM, *Menegakkan Hak Asasi Manusia di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Komnas HAM, 2018)

¹¹ Canryfay Lumban Gaol dan Janpatar Simamora, "Peran Penyuluhan Hukum Dalam Membangun Budaya Hukum Di Masyarakat Desa: Tinjauan Terhadap Program Desa Sadar Hukum Di Kementerian Hukum dan HAM Sumatra Utara", *Jurnal Media Informatika (JUMIN)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, January-April 2025.

¹² Winarta, Frans Hendra. *Bantuan Hukum: Suatu Hak Asasi Manusia, Bukan Belas Kasihan*. Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2000

more advocates.¹³

Legal aid is a legal service provided specifically to individuals who are unable to afford legal assistance and require protection free of charge, both outside and within the courts. This assistance covers a wide range of cases, including criminal and civil lawsuits, as well as government administrative matters. These services are provided by individuals who understand legal defense, legal principles and principles, and basic human rights. These legal services handle a wide range of cases, including civil, criminal, and government matters. These cases are handled through litigation or non-litigation. Activities include exercising power of attorney, assisting, representing, advocating, and taking other legal actions on behalf of those in need of legal assistance. In this way, legal aid plays a vital role in helping underprivileged communities gain access to justice in Indonesia.¹⁴

However, the low level of legal understanding and awareness in society remains an obstacle. This can be seen from the lack of Lack of knowledge about existing laws and minimal information about the existence of legal aid institutions that offer free legal services (*pro bono publico*) to the less fortunate, so that every individual can obtain their right to legal services. Meanwhile, the legal profession is actually recognized as an honorable profession (*officium nobile*) that has the responsibility to provide defense to everyone without distinction of background, ethnicity, skin color, religion, culture, or socioeconomic status.¹⁵

People experiencing economic limitations are in dire need of legal assistance to obtain protection and justice. To obtain these services, they can submit an application to the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) by meeting the specified requirements. In this context, the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) plays a crucial role. LBH provides free legal services to assist economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in fighting for their rights before the law. Some of LBH's important contributions to improving access to justice for the underprivileged include the following¹⁶:

- 1) Legal Aid Institutions provide legal assistance to individuals who cannot afford legal costs. This is beneficial because the poor often face high legal fees. LBH provides access to fair legal assistance for those in need.
- 2) Legal Aid Institutions assist economically disadvantaged communities in accessing the courts by assisting them in preparing the necessary documents and assisting them in the legal process. Without LBH's assistance, many economically disadvantaged communities would struggle to access the courts.

¹³ Canryfay Lumban Gaol dan Janpatar Simamora, "Peran Penyuluhan Hukum Dalam Membangun Budaya Hukum Di Masyarakat Desa: Tinjauan Terhadap Program Desa Sadar Hukum Di Kementerian Hukum dan HAM Sumatra Utara", *Jurnal Media Informatika (JUMIN)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, January-April 2025

¹⁴ Elisa dan Febri Handayani, "Efektifitas bantuan hukum dalam menjamin akses keadilan bagi masyarakat miskin", *Jurnal Cahaya Hukum Nusantara*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2025

¹⁵ T. Mulya Lubis, *Bantuan Hukum dan Kemiskinan Struktural*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986),

¹⁶ Zulkifli Hasan, *Bantuan Hukum: Dimensi Konseptual dan Praktik Struktural*, (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2025), p. 40

- 3) Protecting human rights, especially for groups that are often Marginalized. Legal Aid Institutions have the capacity to represent economically disadvantaged citizens in cases of human rights violations such as abuse of power or injustice in the legal system.
- 4) Inequality in access to justice is one of the greatest challenges facing low-income communities. Legal Aid Institutions contribute to reducing this inequality by providing more equal opportunities for those with low incomes to access justice without being hindered by a system or costs that disproportionately favor them.¹⁷

The Medan Legal Aid Institute (LBH Medan) was established through the initiative of various community leaders, traditional leaders, students, and intellectuals. The idea for this institution emerged at the 5th PERADIN National Congress in 1976 at the Ambarukmo Hotel in Yogyakarta, where emphasis was placed on the importance of law enforcement, justice, and human rights. Adnan Buyung Nasution, SH—who at the time served as Chairman of the DPP PERADIN and Director of LBH Jakarta—challenged representatives from Medan to initiate the establishment of an LBH in the region. Responding to this challenge, with the support of several advocates and lawyers, LBH Medan was officially established in January 28, 1978, led by Mahjoedanil, SH, and the inauguration was attended by the DPP PERADIN management and the Director of LBH Jakarta.¹⁸

This group took the initiative to establish a Legal Aid Institute, especially in Medan City, as a form of participation in the implementation of Law Number 16 of 2011¹⁹. In providing legal aid services to low-income citizens, LBH is guided by Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid. LBH's role is strategic because this institution is responsible for protecting and ensuring fulfillment of the rights of poor citizens in order to realize justice.²⁰

Given that Medan, the capital of North Sumatra Province, has complex social and economic dynamics—such as high urbanization, land conflicts, and labor issues—the need for legal aid services is becoming increasingly important. According to data from the Medan City Central Statistics Agency, the population in 2020 was recorded at 2,435,252 people and is projected to increase to approximately 2,486,283 people in 2024. This data indicates an increase in population density over the past four years, with a density of approximately 8,945 people per square kilometer in 2024.

¹⁷ Susi Marlina, "Implementasi Pemberian Bantuan Hukum Pro Bono oleh LBH Medan bagi Masyarakat Kurang Mampu," Skripsi, Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2024, p. 67.

¹⁸ Kalo, S., Yunara, E., & Sutiarnoto, S., "Pemberian Bantuan Hukum Oleh Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Medan 14. Terhadap Masyarakat Kurang Mampu di Kota Medan," *Locus Journal of Academic Literature Review*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (2022), p. 286.

¹⁹ Mustika Prabaningrum Kusumawati, "Peranan dan Kedudukan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Sebagai Access to Justice Bagi Orang Miskin," *Arena Hukum*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), p. 190.

²⁰ <https://lbhmedan.org/tentang-lbh-medan/>. Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Medan, "Tentang LBH Medan," accessed on 16.40 WIB, on 20 November 2025,

In 2024, the percentage of poor people in Medan City was recorded at 7.94 percent (people with per capita expenditure per month below the poverty line), a decrease of 0.06 points compared to 8 percent in 2023. Meanwhile, the poverty line increased from IDR 651,901 per capita per month in 2023 to IDR 695,295 in 2024. On the other hand, the expenditure inequality among the poor (P2) actually increased from 0.19 in 2023 to 0.26 in 2024, indicating that the expenditure gap among the poor group is widening. However, the poverty rate in Medan City in 2024 (7.94 percent) is still slightly lower than that of North Sumatra Province which is 7.99 percent. The fact that there are still people living below the poverty line indicates that the need for pro bono legal assistance remains high, especially to anticipate various problems.²¹

The role of legal aid institutions in Medan City, such as LBH Medan and the Medan branch of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), is very active in providing pro bono services through legal consultations, litigation assistance, and legal awareness campaigns. This not only helps individuals in need, but also contributes to encouraging the realization of a more just and democratic society.²²

To address these issues, Legal Aid Institutions (LBH) in Indonesia, particularly in Medan, play a crucial role in providing free legal services to those in low-income communities. This free legal aid is not only a form of social responsibility but also an implementation of Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, which requires the government and relevant institutions to ensure that all vulnerable groups have access to justice. At the regional level, both LBH Medan and the Medan branch of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) serve as a liaison between the community and the legal system through consultation services, assistance with the judicial process, social advocacy, and education on legal awareness.

Based on this, the author aims to examine the role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute (LBH) in assisting economically disadvantaged communities by providing free legal services. This research will also analyze the various obstacles and challenges faced by LBH, as there remains a discrepancy between the number of requests for legal aid and the poverty rate in Medan.²³

Based on the explanation above, the author will conduct a study entitled "The Role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute in Providing Legal Aid to the Community on

²¹ <https://medankota.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MzEjMg==/jumlah-penduduk-kota-medan-menurut-kecamatan-dan-jenis-kelamin.html>. Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Medan, "Jumlah Penduduk Kota Medan Menurut Kecamatan dan Jenis Kelamin," (2023), accessed on 18.00 WIB, on 20 November 2025.

²² Kalo, S., Yunara, E., & Sutiarnoto, S., "Pemberian Bantuan Hukum Oleh Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Medan 14. Terhadap Masyarakat Kurang Mampu di Kota Medan," *Locus Journal of Academic Literature Review*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (2022), p. 286.

²³ <https://medankota.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MzEjMg==/jumlah-penduduk-kota-medan-menurut-kecamatan-dan-jenis-kelamin.html>. Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Medan, "Jumlah Penduduk Kota Medan Menurut Kecamatan dan Jenis Kelamin," (2023), accessed on 18.00 WIB, on 20 November 2025.

a Pro Bono Basis." The problems that will be discussed in this study include two things, namely: how is the role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute in providing legal aid to the community on a pro bono basis, as well as the types of obstacles faced by the Medan City Legal Aid Institute in providing legal aid to the community on a pro bono basis.²⁴

2. Research Methods

In this study, the author employed an empirical research method involving a study of legal aid legislation and direct data collection through interviews, observation, and document recording at the Medan City Legal Aid Institute, North Sumatra Province. The data used comprised three types of legal materials. First, primary data, namely applicable and binding legal sources such as the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, laws, and government regulations. Second, secondary data, namely supporting literature such as books, journals, official websites, and articles. Third, tertiary data, which serves as an explanation and support for the primary and secondary data, such as dictionaries and bibliographies.²⁵

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Role of Medan City Legal Aid Institutions in Providing Legal Aid to the Community on a Pro Bono Basis

Legal Aid Institutions are understood as a form of service provided by legal professionals to the community with the aim of ensuring that everyone can still obtain the legal advice they need, without being hindered by financial limitations. The results of the study show that the application of the principle of the rule of law in Indonesia, which demands equality before the law, still shows a gap between normative provisions and empirical reality. Legally, the 1945 Constitution, especially Article 1 paragraph (3), has emphasized that Indonesia is a state of law, namely a principle that requires the realization of justice, legal certainty, and non-discriminatory treatment in every law enforcement process.²⁶

Based on the provisions of Article 4 paragraph (1) of the Legal Aid Law, legal aid services are provided to individuals facing legal problems. Furthermore, paragraph (2) emphasizes that the legal aid provided covers various cases in the civil, criminal, and state government affairs fields, both in judicial processes and those that do not involve the courts. Meanwhile, paragraph (3) explains that the types of legal services include the exercise of power of attorney, assistance, representation, defense, and/or other legal actions taken to protect the legal

²⁴ Ariansyah Ginting, "Peranan lembaga bantuan hukum (LBH) dalam memberikan bantuan hukum kepada masyarakat pencari keadilan (studi di lembaga bantuan hukum Medan," *Skripsi, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi*, 2011, p 24

²⁵ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*, Cet. ke-27 (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2024),

²⁶ Mustika Prabaningrum Kusumawati, "Peranan dan Kedudukan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Sebagai Access to Justice Bagi Orang Miskin," *Arena Hukum*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), p. 190.

interests of the recipient of legal aid (Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, Article 1 number 1)

The primary role of the Legal Aid Institute in providing free legal assistance is to act as a liaison for marginalized communities to obtain their constitutional rights. Philosophically, free legal aid services are based on the principle of equality before the law, which emphasizes that differences in economic circumstances should not hinder individuals from obtaining adequate legal representation.²⁷

Legal Aid Institutions are not only useful as legal advisors in court, but also as companions, ensuring that every legal process is conducted fairly (due process of law). In this regard, Legal Aid Institutions play a role in balancing the position of the common people with the institutions or broader resources they have. Furthermore, Legal Aid Institutions contribute to increasing legal literacy among the public through the formation of paralegals, namely community members equipped with basic legal knowledge to assist their neighbors. This effort is a form of pro bono preventive action to prevent the community from being easily criminalized or exploited (Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights Number 3 of 2021 concerning Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid).

Legal Aid Institutions carry out their functions as an honorable profession by providing access to justice for economically disadvantaged communities. The scope of legal aid includes pro bono legal aid²⁸.

Legal Aid Institutions not only provide assistance in the context of litigation in court, but also activities that take place outside of court. Pro bono legal assistance provided by Legal Aid Institutions has two main channels:

- a. Litigation Path: Support from the police, prosecutors, and during court proceedings.
- b. Non-Litigation Path: Legal education, case investigation, mediation, and advocacy for public policy through campaign activities and peaceful demonstrations.

One of the responsibilities and authorities of the Legal Aid Institute is to manage legal aid in a proper, efficient, transparent, and accountable manner. Furthermore, in accordance with Article 7 of Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, the Legal Aid Institute is also authorized to supervise and ensure that the implementation of legal aid and its provision are carried out in accordance with the principles and objectives stipulated in the law. The Legal Aid Institute is responsible not only for providing legal advice or assistance in court, but also for taking steps through legal education and increasing legal awareness. The Legal Aid

²⁷ Frans Hendra Winarta, *Bantuan Hukum: Suatu Hak Asasi Manusia, Bukan Belas Kasihan*, (Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2000), p. 12

²⁸ Susi Marlina, "Implementasi Pemberian Bantuan Hukum Pro Bono oleh LBH Medan bagi Masyarakat Kurang Mampu," Skripsi, Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2024, p. 67

Institute in Medan City has a very important role (Susi Marlina, 2024).

To explain the role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute, North Sumatra Province, in providing pro bono legal assistance to the community, researchers conducted a direct interview with Muhamad Alinafiah Matondang, Deputy Director of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute. The name "Medan City Legal Aid Institute" is derived from the name of the capital of North Sumatra Province, Medan City. The Medan City Legal Aid Institute's operational area covers regencies, sub-districts, cities, and villages within North Sumatra Province.

The role of the Medan City legal aid institution in providing legal assistance is important in providing assistance to the community in the Province of North Sumatra, especially Medan City, including:

It can be handled through both litigation and non-litigation channels. Regarding non-litigation legal counseling, education for economically disadvantaged communities is regulated by law, specifically Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid. Mediation is available for those in need. In litigation, advocates provide legal assistance and support, from filing a lawsuit through trial to a verdict.

Several indicators of the role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute in providing legal aid to the people of Medan City are as follows:

a. Role of Facilitator

The role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute facilitator when providing pro bono legal assistance to the community in Medan City. Facilitators act as intermediaries between those in need and legal aid agencies. As advocates and legal assistance, LBH promises to help the community anticipate legal issues, including criminal, civil, employment, and other socioeconomic rights issues.

The total number of complaints reported to the Legal Aid Institute in Medan City in the last 3 years can be seen in the table below:

Table Complaints at LBH Medan City from 2023 to 2025

No	Year	Total Complaints
1	2023	113
2	2024	115
3	2025	120

Source: Medan City Legal Aid Institute 2025

Based on the complaint table, there is a trend of increasing complaints from 2023 to 2025. This condition indicates that each year, more and more Medan residents are aware of their legal rights and are willing to seek legal assistance. In this context, the role of facilitators is crucial in creating an environment that encourages active community participation and fosters Improved legal understanding. As a facilitator, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute provides consultation and assistance through litigation (in court) and non-litigation (outside

court) channels. LBH assists community legal aid recipients pro bono from the initial stage, from problem identification to the point of finding an appropriate advocate. Through this function, LBH is able to increase public trust in accessing fair and accessible legal aid.

b. The Role of Education

Education plays a crucial role in the implementation of pro bono legal aid for the community. As part of a social empowerment program, education aims to improve the community's critical thinking skills and encourage active participation in community life. Research shows that the Medan City Legal Aid Institute consistently provides credible legal information and builds a commitment to reliable service for the Medan community. The forms of complaints and assistance provided by the institution include:

Table Types of complaints at the Medan City Legal Aid Institute

Year	Crime	Regional Regulation	Land	Environment	Manpower	Others
2023	23	30	8	34	14	4
2024	46	30	29	6	10	13
2025	63	20	12	4	7	14

Source: Medan City Legal Aid Institute 2025

The table contains data on the number and types of complaints received by the Medan City Legal Aid Institute over the past three years. These statistics are important for understanding complaint patterns and the most common legal issues in Medan. There are indications of a surge in complaints in the number of cases covered a wide range of categories, from criminal and civil cases to environmental and employment issues. This increase demonstrates the growing public awareness of the law and the need for assistance in resolving legal issues. Furthermore, this situation reflects growing public trust in LBH Kota Medan as an advocacy institution capable of providing solutions, while emphasizing the institution's strategic role in providing legal education to the public.

c. The Role of Staff and Assistants of Legal Aid Institutions

Many people in Medan, both those with low incomes and those with relatively good incomes, lack the knowledge and resources to defend their rights before the law. In this context, the role of staff and advocates at the Medan City Legal Aid Institute (LBH) is crucial, particularly through the involvement of advocates who represent the community's legal interests. LBH advocates not only represent them in court but also serve as legal advisors who help communities choose the right, strategic, and accurate steps in resolving cases pro bono. Therefore, LBH Medan City plays a vital role in ensuring that justice-seeking communities continue to have access and a voice in the legal process, both through litigation and non-litigation channels, thereby protecting their rights from unfair practices and abuse of power.

Meanwhile, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute has an institutional structure which has its respective duties, including:

- 1) The division head is a leader who plans and organizes the work area at the Medan City legal aid institute, which includes the director, deputy director, office head and office secretary, each of whom changes positions every 4 years.
- 2) Field Staff are members of the specialist team who work under a division at the Medan City legal aid institution.
- 3) Campaign Field, the task of this field is to promote Medan City's legal aid institutions to the public namely by providing legal counseling in North Sumatra Province, especially Medan City.
- 4) The vulnerable group sector is a sector whose duties and functions are to help people who are categorized as poor or who do not have access to justice, so this sector provides legal aid services.
- 5) The political field is a field that provides efforts for social change through a legal approach and addresses the roots of injustice.
- 6) The Social Sector is a sector that operates in social assistance and community empowerment.
- 7) The Security Sector is a sector that provides protection to people who need legal assistance and access to justice, especially to staff, paralegals and advocates who are on duty helping the community.

The Medan City Legal Aid Institute operates based on human rights regulations and Law No. 11 of 2016 concerning Legal Aid Institutions. The Medan City Legal Aid Institute does not discriminate against Medan residents based on their social status. If they request legal assistance, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute continues to provide policy advocacy, mediation, and assistance to those in need, particularly in Medan.²⁹

3.2. Obstacles or Obstacles Faced by Medan City Legal Aid in Providing Legal Aid to the Community on a Pro Bono Basis

In practice, the provision of legal aid by Legal Aid Institutions (LBH) does not always run smoothly. Various challenges often arise, some easily resolved, others quite complex. Generally, LBH often faces obstacles related to skepticism from some members of the public against institutions deemed to have close ties to the government. In principle, authorities are not permitted to limit, let alone eliminate, the essential right to legal aid for every justice seeker (Ayub Jose Luhut

²⁹ Alinafiah Matondang Wakil Direktur Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Kota Medan, wawancara on 08 Desember 2025 di kantor Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Kota Medan beralamat di Jl. Hindu no 12, Kesawan, kec, Medan Bar, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20111

Parulian Simanjuntak, 2025). Providing pro bono legal aid is both a legal mandate and a form of professional service for the legal profession. However, in practice, Legal Aid Institutions often face complex challenges, both internal and external (Article 19 of Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid explains that funding for legal aid is borne by the APBN, 2021).

Although Indonesia's legal aid policy is enshrined in Law Number 16 of 2011, its implementation still faces various obstacles that reduce its effectiveness in ensuring access to justice for economically disadvantaged communities³⁰. These obstacles include limited resources, lack of legal literacy, complex bureaucracy, inadequate outreach, and weak digital infrastructure. The obstacles faced by Legal Aid Institutions are generally the public's distrust and indifference towards government institutions, even the government itself manages and eliminates the essence of legal aid for those seeking justice (Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), 2024).³¹

According to interviews conducted by Muhamad Alnafiah Matondang, Deputy Director of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute, the distribution of pro bono legal aid from the Medan Legal Aid Institute (LBH) often faces significant obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of services for justice seekers in Medan. The Medan City Legal Aid Institute faces several key obstacles, which can be categorized as follows:

- 1) The limitation of financial resources and budget, which is Rp. 1 billion per year, has experienced financial and budget cuts to Rp. 128 million, for one case the funds needed by the Legal Aid Institute, which is Rp. 12 million, have become an obstacle so that the Medan City Legal Aid Institute is not carrying out its role properly.
- 2) Facilities at the Medan City Legal Aid Institute are inadequate. Workspaces are cramped and limited, and equipment like printers, computers, and other equipment is damaged.
- 3) Lack of Human Resources (HR) within the Medan City Legal Aid Institute. The Medan City Legal Aid Institute has approximately 25 human resources, but only about 10 are legal experts, with the rest merely providing support. The lack of HR at the Medan City Legal Aid Institute often results in delays in handling cases received by the Institute, due to the high volume of cases being handled by the Institute.
- 4) Limited public education in Medan. To create a just and empowered society, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute still faces the challenge of a lack of legal education. Good legal education enables the public to understand their rights

³⁰ Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI), Laporan Tahunan Bantuan Hukum: Menghadapi Penyempitan Ruang Sipil, (Jakarta: YLBHI, 2024), p. 56

³¹ Ayub Jose Luhut Parulian Simanjuntak, "Tantangan Dan Strategi Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Dalam Memberikan Perlindungan Hukum Bagi Masyarakat Miskin", *Rio Law Jurnal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February-July 2025

and obligations, as well as how to enforce those rights. This limited access to the Medan City Legal Aid Institute results in a lack of public knowledge about the legal system.³²

The role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute in providing free legal aid to economically disadvantaged residents in Medan faces several challenges, particularly due to a lack of legal understanding and a lack of awareness of the LBH and its role. Many people still mistakenly believe that LBH services are paid, so they hesitate to seek assistance. This situation means that not all cases can be handled directly, making the provision of pro bono legal services less effective. Some of the factors that make it difficult for people to obtain legal assistance from the Medan City Legal Aid Institute are as follows.

- 1) The cost of lawyers or advocates tends to be high, making people in Medan afraid to seek legal assistance because they have thought about the costs that will be incurred in order to obtain legal assistance.
- 2) People in Medan City are less aware of the existence of Medan City legal aid institutions or lack information regarding pro bono legal assistance to those who need it.
- 3) Lack of knowledge regarding the function and role of the Medan City Legal Aid Institute.
- 4) The perception of the people in Medan City is that the Medan City Legal Aid Institute is paid to handle Legal Aid cases.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research and discussion, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute plays a crucial role in providing free legal protection and assistance to low-income citizens. This role is divided into two main types: litigation and non-litigation. In the judicial process, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute assists in providing legal assistance in criminal, employment, civil, and social and economic rights cases for unemployed citizens. This assistance includes writing legal documents, representing clients in court, advocating for their rights, and acting as a facilitator, helping connect citizens with appropriate legal services. On the non-litigation side, LBH provides legal education by providing counseling, legal consultations, mediation, and assistance from paralegals. They strive to improve citizens' understanding of the law so they know their rights and avoid unfair or oppressive practices. Through this role, LBH Medan City not only helps people directly but also contributes to building a more just and legally literate society. However, the Medan City Legal Aid Institute (LBH) faces numerous obstacles that impact the effectiveness of its pro bono legal aid program. One major obstacle is the lack of public awareness regarding the right to legal aid, leading many to be reluctant or hesitant to access available services. Furthermore, limited human resources and facilities, such as a limited number of advocates and paralegals, cramped

³² Rafli Haris Silmi, Muhammad Ishaq Maulana, dan Deni Satya Bagus, "Peranan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Dalam Menjamin Terpenuhinya Akses Keadilan Bagi Komunitas Berpenghasilan Rendah", *Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA)*, Vol. 3, No. 11, November 2025.

workspaces, and inadequate equipment, hinder the handling of the increasing number of complaints each year. Limited government support, including operational budgets for pro bono services, also impacts LBH's capacity. Therefore, although LBH has a legal basis through Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, its implementation still requires extra attention from both the government and citizens to ensure the principle of equality before the law is optimally realized for all citizens, especially those from low income brackets.

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