

Focus on *Access to Justice*

For more information, visit www.lsba.org/atj.



The inaugural “ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program” was launched on May 23 with a luncheon hosted by Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson, fourth from left. Attending the event were the student interns and their law firm sponsors. From left, Christopher K. Ralston, Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P.; Sarah M. Smith-Clevenger, Tulane University Law School; Annie Lemoine, Loyola University College of Law; Chief Justice Johnson; Kara Brown, Southern University Law Center; Hilary Renshaw, Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center; Christopher M. Vitenas, Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, P.C.; and Mark C. Surprenant, Adams and Reese, L.L.P.

ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program launches on May 23

Cultivating the next generation of access to justice leaders was identified as a priority in the 2015 Access to Justice Summit Report. Acknowledging this goal as sensible succession planning to ensure continued efforts within Louisiana’s justice community, representatives of the Louisiana State Bar Association, the Louisiana Bar Foundation, Louisiana civil legal aid providers, the Louisiana District Judges Association, Louisiana law schools, the Louisiana Supreme Court and the private bar joined forces to create the “ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program.”

Only four students — all having completed their first year of law school — were selected to participate in the inaugural program. The interns are sponsored by law firms with records of dedication to access to justice issues — Adams and Reese, L.L.P.;

Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, P.C.; Jones Walker, L.L.P.; and Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P.

Participating students are Hilary Renshaw, Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center; Annie Lemoine, Loyola University College of Law; Kara Brown, Southern University Law Center; and Sarah M. Smith-Clevenger, Tulane University Law School.

The five-week program began on May 23 with a luncheon hosted by Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson. Weekly programming will focus on the various civil legal needs of low-income people, the ways in which organizations within the justice community address those needs, and how these services are increasing the quality of life for those served. 📖

6th Annual Criminal Justice Summit focuses on ways to improve the system

The Louisiana State Bar Association’s (LSBA) Criminal Justice Committee hosted the sixth annual Criminal Justice Summit in Baton Rouge in May. The summit brings together judges, legislators, prosecutors, public defenders, correction officials, private attorneys and advocates working in various fields of the criminal justice system. The summit focused on identifying shared issues and developing recommendations with the commitment that participants will assist in carrying them out.

This year’s summit was set up differently than in years past. With the creation of three subcommittees narrowly focused on significant issues within the criminal justice system, each hosted a session pursuant to its work and goals. The Subcommittee on Over Incarceration, for example, hosted a session on ways to reduce incarceration rates through pre-trial detention reform, in which panelists discussed the lack of correlation between bond amount and risk and the importance of an accurate risk assessment tool.

During the same panel, speaker Judge (Ret.) W. Ross Foote announced the start of a pilot program in Shreveport City Court requiring presumption of release on recognition for misdemeanor charges except for enumerated offenses. This program will serve as a way to immediately reduce incarceration rates in Shreveport city jails. The new policy is also meant to require a judicial determination in the setting of bond for those arrested for the enumerated offenses, such as domestic abuse battery and aggravated assault.

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Five new attorneys form the third class of participants in the Louisiana State Bar Association's legal incubator and accelerator program, Legal Innovators for Tomorrow (LIFT). From left, Natalie S. Blackman, Paul C. Mitchell III, Kara A. Larson, Michael A. Tassin, Jr. and Adrian C. Ross.

Five new attorneys form LIFT's third class

Five new attorneys jump-started their legal careers this month as the third class of participants in the Louisiana State Bar Association's legal incubator and accelerator program, Legal Innovators for Tomorrow (LIFT).

The five attorneys — Natalie S. Blackman, Kara A. Larson, Paul C. Mitchell III, Adrian C. Ross and Michael A. Tassin, Jr. — practice law throughout south Louisiana including Baton Rouge, greater New Orleans, Marksville and Slidell. Their practice areas cover civil rights, criminal defense, employment law, family law and immigration law, among others.

LIFT aims to help new attorneys launch their legal careers, while providing legal services to low- and moderate-income cli-

ents. During the 18-month program, participants receive free resources, mentoring, legal technology tools, practice management and substantive law training, networking and collaboration opportunities. Each attorney has agreed to provide 100 pro bono hours and volunteer at one of the 22 court self-help desks within their judicial districts to develop their practice skills through experiential training.

"I am beyond excited to participate in the LIFT program. I hope to gain professional and personal growth and increase equal access to legal services to better serve my community," said Blackman, who operates a solo law firm in Avoyelles Parish. 📱

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On a later panel focused on Justice Reinvestment Initiatives, Mississippi Sen. Brice Wiggins from Jackson shared the state's successes in passing sentencing and correction reforms. H.B. 585 was aimed at refocusing prison space for violent and career criminals. The reforms resulted in a prison population reduction of 11 percent since the year of enactment. Mississippi dropped from the second highest incarceration rate in the nation to the fifth, averting the state's anticipated growth in prison population to save taxpayers an estimated \$266 million over the next 10 years. Some of the cost savings will be

reinvested to state supervision agencies and programs aimed at better preparing offenders returning to the community.

The summit ended with a discussion on the use of diversion programs to alter outcomes. East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar C. Moore III discussed his office's DWI pre-trial intervention program, established six years ago and designed to reduce recidivism of first-time DWI offenders. Orleans Deputy District Defender Jee Y. Park discussed the model for Orleans Municipal Court Judge Desiree M. Charbonnet's Crossroads Diversion Program, allowing in-

LSBA to participate in Online Pro Bono Project

The Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Access to Justice (ATJ) Department announces that Louisiana will be one of the 38 states participating in a new American Bar Association (ABA) program providing free, online legal advice to low-income citizens. Louisiana's website will be called *LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org*. The website's launch date will be in August.

The ABA will run the site and maintain the software, and the LSBA, through the ATJ Department, will be responsible for recruiting volunteers to answer the online submissions and making the public aware of the service. *LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org* allows attorney volunteers to log in whenever and wherever they like to answer legal questions submitted by those who could not otherwise afford to consult an attorney.

To volunteer, contact Rachael Mills, email rachael.mills@lsba.org or call (504)619-0104. 📱



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dividuals arrested and accused of a crime the opportunity to gain access to social services and other assistance. This model is a collaboration of the court, criminal justice agencies and a local nonprofit organization.

"It's important to provide a platform that fosters a frank discussion in which criminal justice stakeholders can come together to address critical issues and construct solutions to enhance administration of justice for all," LSBA President Mark A. Cunningham said. "The summit provides this platform and we thank all those who attended and actively participated." 📱