

Louisiana ATJ Commission receives \$100,000 grant from NCSC's Justice For All Project

The Louisiana Access to Justice (ATJ) Commission has received a \$100,000 grant from the National Center for State Courts' (NCSC) Justice for All (JFA) Project, funded by The JPB Foundation. This is one of two grants the Commission has received from NCSC under the JFA Project, with the first awarded in October 2019.

The ATJ Commission will use the funds to increase access to civil legal resources in areas with high poverty rates, limited Internet access, and long drive times to the nearest legal aid office or self-help center. These areas, termed "civil legal resources deserts," impact approximately 600,000 Louisiana residents, as uncovered through a Geographic Information Systems Project during the JFA Project in 2020.

"Through the support of NCSC's Justice for All Project, the Commission was able to identify the greatest challenges people in Louisiana face to accessing civil legal aid," Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) President Alainna R. Mire said. "Now we will use this information to expand access to civil legal resources through community-

led initiatives thanks to this invaluable opportunity."

NCSC created the JFA grant program to implement two advanced resolutions promulgated by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators: 1) meaningful access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs; and 2) for traditional and non-traditional stakeholders to collaborate and develop a comprehensive approach to achieve meaningful access to justice. The JFA Project is housed by NCSC and operated in partnership with the Self-Represented Litigants Network.

In the first grant, the Commission completed the Inventory Assessment and Strategic Planning phases of the JFA Project, which entailed a thorough statewide examination of people's access to in-person civil legal resources in Louisiana. The findings show that one in three people potentially income-eligible for civil legal aid are required to travel long distances for in-person legal help. Review the final report with recommendations at: www.lsba.org/documents/News/ATJ/JFAFinalReport.pdf.

"When the ATJ Commission received the initial JFA grant, we did not envision having to navigate through a pandemic," Jeffrey K. Coreil, co-chair of the ATJ Commission, said. "But it gave us a great opportunity to understand the impact of civil legal aid and take a deeper dive into mapping what justice for all could look like in Louisiana. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue this work and support the people of Louisiana by creating access points, expanding services and establishing partnerships."

Louisiana's Justice for All leadership includes active participation from the Louisiana Supreme Court, the Louisiana ATJ Commission, the LSBA, legal aid providers, public libraries and local community leaders in areas where access points will be implemented. The Louisiana ATJ Commission is a Louisiana Supreme Court-created standing committee of the LSBA tasked with ensuring all people have access to equal justice under the law regardless of economic circumstance. The Louisiana Justice for All Grant will be administered through the Louisiana Bar Foundation. 📌

Louisiana's Civil Legal Resource Deserts prevent 600,000 from accessing justice

Louisiana's "civil legal resource deserts" cover approximately 60 percent of the state and affect more than 600,000 Louisianans, according to a new study from the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission. Residents of these deserts struggle to access legal help because of where they live, the uneven distribution of legal resources and poor broadband and cellular coverage.

As the fourth most impoverished state in the nation, Louisiana has 1.8 million

people potentially eligible for free civil legal aid, and only 150 full-time attorneys devoted to serving low-income and marginalized populations. A total of 34 percent of Louisianans below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level live more than a 45-minute drive from in-person civil legal help.

The study, "Justice for All in Louisiana," shows an uneven distribution of resources throughout the state. Specifically, residents of civil legal resource deserts live at least a 45-minute

drive from legal resources like free civil legal services, self-help centers or law libraries. Combined with patchy Internet connections, people experiencing civil legal problems, like divorce or applying for unemployment, may struggle to get the information and tools they need to solve these issues. Geographic and technological barriers affect one in three people potentially eligible for free civil legal aid access help or other services

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LSBA to recognize exceptional Louisiana pro bono work at May 20 virtual ceremony

The 36th annual Pro Bono Publico & Children's Law Awards Ceremony is scheduled for May 20. Traditionally held at the Louisiana Supreme Court, this year's ceremony will be conducted virtually. Presiding over the ceremony will be Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice John L. Weimer and Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) President Alainna R. Mire.

Each year, the LSBA honors attorneys and other public interest professionals who have gone beyond their professional duties to provide or support pro bono services. Their work, ever more critical during the instability of the pandemic, helps ensure that those without the means to hire an attorney can access justice

through the legal system.

The following individuals will be recognized at the ceremony:

▶ **David A. Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award:** Christopher K. Ralston.

▶ **Career Public Interest Award:** Andrea M. Jeanmarie.

▶ **Children's Law Award:** Ramona G. Fernandez; and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services Child in Need of Care Unit.

▶ **Law Student Pro Bono Award:** Aber M. Farid, Southern University Law Center; Constantino Raya, Jr., Tulane University Law School; Cara Sullivan Tippett, Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center; and Jimmy Whitehead, Loyola University College of

Law.

▶ **Friend of Pro Bono Award:** Kathleen A. Crapanzano, MD, MACM; and Lindsay Meador Young.

▶ **Pro Bono Publico Award:** Patricia R. Bonneau, Andretta Breaux Atkins, Kyle M. Brennan, Jonathan T. Jarrett, Derrick McCorey, Robert A. McKnight, LaKendra D. Sampson, Frances M. Strayham and James J. Zito.

▶ **LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org Award:** Brian R. Johnson.

▶ **Century Club Award:** Kyle M. Brennan, W. Scott Brown, Joseph J. Cerise, Philip A. Franco, Ana E. Lopez, Derrick McCorey, Robert A. McKnight, Alysson L. Mills, Beau P. Sagona, Hugh R. Straub and James J. Zito. 📧

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offered by self-help centers and law libraries.

"Access to civil legal services for people unable to afford an attorney can have a significant impact on individuals and our communities," said Louisiana State Bar Association President Alainna R. Mire. "Especially in times of crisis, civil legal aid stabilizes individuals, families and entire communities by improving economic security and increasing access to basic necessities like housing, healthcare,

government benefits and disaster services. To address these issues, we must work together across organizational boundaries to find solutions."

The "Justice for All in Louisiana" study suggests a set of actions to remove barriers to justice for those living in areas identified as civil legal resource deserts. Courthouses in the state could increase the civil resource area by adding self-help centers, navigator programs (in-person and online), virtual meeting spaces or courtroom assistants. State government leaders can build a stronger culture

of limited scope representation across the state through programs such as the Modest Means Program. Partnerships with libraries, places of worship, higher education, health care and other institutions can help create community-led initiatives that will give people access to new online and in-person services in locations accessible to communities where the need is greatest.

To review the full report and GIS-data-based story map, go to: www.bit.ly/JFAStoryMap. 📧



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