In conjunction with the Supreme Court of Louisiana, the Louisiana State Bar Association created the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission. The Commission pursues a coordinated and systemic approach to ensuring the public’s access to the legal system.

The purpose of the commission is to “assure continuity of policy and purpose in the collaboration between the private bar, the courts, and the civil justice community so as to further the goal of assuring that Louisianans, regardless of their economic circumstance, have access to equal justice under the law.” The initiatives and work of the Commission’s committees during the first half of the LSBA 2019-20 Bar Year (July-Dec 2019) are as follows:

**Building Bridges**

The Building Bridges Committee supports relationships between criminal and civil legal aid communities to address legal barriers of people formerly incarcerated using a coordinated approach. The members of this committee continue to work closely with the courts and LA Department of Corrections (DOC) to identify legal barriers to reentry. Currently, the Committee is working with DOC to create a standardized letter of incarceration to address *failure to appear* in court and *credit for time served* on attachments. The Committee is also working on a high legal needs priority DOC has identified regarding ways to better identify and address detainers prior to release. A meeting to discuss detainers took place on January 14.

**Funding**

The Funding Committee of the Access to Justice Commission continues its efforts to promote funding options and increase funding of Louisiana civil legal aid organizations. This year, members continue to discuss and coordinate a statewide funding plan to investigate the numerous avenues available to increase civil legal aid funding. These avenues include collaborative grant efforts, encouraging statewide adoption of LA RS 13:1000, and a state appropriation. Most recently, members met with Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne to discuss FY2021 funding. With the legislative session fast approaching, committee members are looking to continue conversations with our legislative representatives about the need for civil legal aid funding and the positive impact civil legal aid provides our communities.

**Language Access**

The Language Access Committee provides input to the Commission regarding how it might further support work on access to the courts for limited-English proficient (LEP) individuals. The Committee met on December 5. Two new members have been added: Matt Vogel, National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, and Brian Wiggins, newly appointed Supreme Court Coordinator of Language Access. The work being concentrated on includes developing CLEs on ethics and “best practices” for using interpreters with limited-English proficient clients. In addition, the Committee hopes to assist the Supreme Court and advance the goals of the
Louisiana Supreme Court and Department of Justice’s Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Supreme Court Coordinator Brian Wiggins reviewed the MOA’s compliance dates and current status. He anticipates the Committee’s support in the form of suggesting policies and relating real-life examples occurring in courts involving LEP individuals. Members discussed a Language Access Plan (LAP), which each court will create and adopt, which could theoretically be based on the ABA Standards on Language Access. Professor Luz Molina volunteered to draft an outline on which a LAP could be based; Brian agreed and said he would discuss this approach with his DOJ contact and provide feedback to members. A follow-up meeting is anticipated in January 2020.

Modest Means

The Modest Means Committee was created to address the lack of legal services available to people who do not qualify for free legal services but cannot afford market rate prices. The committee created and now manages an online directory that connects attorneys who offer affordable legal services with people who fall at or below 400% of the annual Federal Poverty Level. The Directory has 67 members, and 3,250 applications to view the Directory have been submitted from individuals seeking an attorney. The Modest Means Directory was recently nominated for the Louis M. Brown Award as an innovative program that increases access to legal services for moderate income families.

The Committee is currently working to finalize the Limited Scope Representation Toolkit that will provide guidance to attorneys interested in increasing access to legal services for moderate-income clients who can pay for limited representation – where limited representation is reasonable under the circumstances. The Committee is also working to distribute a letter to all local bar leadership requesting that they share information about the Modest Means Directory with their members who might be interested in being listed on the Directory.

To learn more about the Directory, go to: www.lsba.org/ATJCommission/ModestMeans.aspx.

Self-Represented Litigants

The SRL Committee continues to work on expanding and improving online resources for self-represented litigants. This includes the LSBA “Find Legal Help Portal,” which has received thousands of visits since being launched in 2018, as well as customized websites for district courts. To get a more in-depth understanding of the issues and concerns faced by service providers, the Committee decided to undertake a statewide SRL survey. The Committee is in the process of designing this survey for targeted populations, including judges, clerks and court staff, and self-help desk staff and volunteers. The Committee has also partnered with the Louisiana District Judges SRL Committee and Judge Juneau from the 34th JDC to hold an SRL Summit at Jackson Barracks on January 31, 2020. This summit will focus on SRL issues and populations, including domestic violence, veterans, and active-duty members of the military. The Committee also
continues to undertake outreach in order to educate judges, hearing officers, clerks of court, and judicial staff and provide them with relevant referral information and materials. Most recently, committee members attended the Fall Judges Conference and met with the Clerks of Court in Shreveport and Alexandria.

**Technology**

The Access to Justice Commission Technology Committee’s goal is to improve technology for the more efficient delivery of legal services in the civil legal aid arena. With the view that technology can assist legal aid providers as their caseloads grow and budgets are constricted, committee members reviewed current and past technology innovations developed and in use by legal aid programs.

The Committee met November 1 and began mapping a structure for a learning management system. This is a long-term project that may be supported by LSC, which recently announced its interest in purchasing an application for their individual programs. Due to the amount of common training needs for staff, the legal services and pro bono programs can benefit from many of the same training requirements and materials. The Committee is also interested in identifying a role to support the strategic goal of court unification from a technology perspective. Another meeting is planned for January 31.