

LOUISIANA ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

2020-2021 END OF YEAR REPORT

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 LSBA 2020-21 Bar Year follows:

Justice for All

The Louisiana Access to Justice (ATJ) Commission has been awarded 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](#) undertaken in 2020 as part of the JFA Project. 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. [The final report with recommendations is available here](#). Louisiana's Justice for All leadership includes active participation from the Louisiana Supreme Court, Louisiana ATJ Commission, the Louisiana State Bar Association, legal aid providers, public libraries, and local community leaders in areas where access points will be implemented. The Louisiana Justice for All Grant will be financially administered through the Louisiana Bar Foundation. For more information about this project and the implementation phase contact Amy Duncan (amy.duncan@lsba.org).

Building Bridges Committee, Adrienne Wheeler, Chair

The mission of the Building Bridges Committee is to address issues where civil legal needs intersect or flow from contact with the criminal justice system, the ultimate goal being to reduce barriers to reentry and address Louisiana's high incarceration rate. This year, the committee held a free CLE on April 30th to increase awareness of *Second Chance* month and educate attorneys on how they can help reduce collateral consequences of incarceration by providing assistance in certain legal matters, such as accessing driver's licenses and managing child support arrearages and obligations during and after incarceration. The CLE coincides with the reopening of the

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[Reentry Clinic](#) operated by First 72+, Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana, and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, in which volunteer attorneys provide advice and counsel on civil legal issues including child support modifications, consumer debt, collections, driver's license reinstatements, and tax liabilities. The committee recently completed a brochure on child support payments for noncustodial incarcerated parents under the changes to the law that took effect in 2020. Contact Staff Liaison Amy Duncan at amy.duncan@lsba.org for more information.

Funding Committee

The Funding Committee coordinates a statewide plan to investigate diversified mechanisms available to increase civil legal aid funding, including collaborative grant efforts, changes to LA RS 13:1000, and a state appropriation. In preparation for the 2021 legislative session, committee members met with Commissioner Jay Dardenne about the need for civil legal aid funding and the positive impact civil legal aid provides our communities. In addition, a \$1,000,000 request was submitted in the annual NGO application form. Louisiana Appleseed continues to coordinate lobbying efforts for this civil legal aid legislative initiative. As part of these efforts a lunch was held on Wednesday, April 7th for the House Appropriations Committee. In addition, Civil Legal Aid Day was scheduled for Tuesday, May 11th this year.

Language Access Committee, Professor Luz Molina, chair

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. In furtherance of this goal, Members of this committee, together with the DOJ and the OLA's Stakeholder Committee, participated in the drafting of the statewide Language Access Plan (LAP), which was approved by the Louisiana Supreme Court in September 2020. The Committee has since been working with the Supreme Court on implementation of the LAP, starting with drafting the "Do You Need a Court Interpreter?" brochure which was translated into six different languages and distributed to clerks throughout the state. The Language Access Committee also collected and compiled a list of vital court documents from direct services providers throughout the state. Using this list, the OLA will translate the documents into languages most prevalent in those parishes. As a part of the LAP implementation phase, the Committee recently assisted OLA with drafting revisions to Louisiana Supreme Court's administrative rules regarding free access to Language Access services in all court proceedings and operations for limited English proficient individuals. The Committee will continue working with OLA on recommendations to make state laws consistent with the LAP.

Finally, the Committee recently hosted a planning session on May 13th to devise new long-term goals now that implementation of a statewide Language Access Plan is underway.

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Modest Means Committee, Professor Virginia Listach, Chair

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. After creating an online directory, the Committee is now focused on ways to increase attorney participation in providing affordable legal services, particularly by offering free CLEs, resources, and tools for attorneys listed on the Directory. The Modest Means Committee has completed a first draft of the Limited Scope Representation Practice Aid Guide to help attorneys increase access to affordable legal representation by providing unbundled legal services to low- and moderate-income families and as part of the Justice For All project. It will be released along with a pre-recorded webinar for CLE credit available to those who join the Directory. Since its launch in April 2018, the Directory has been viewed 6,700 times. 70 attorneys offering services in 16 practice areas covering 64 parishes are listed on the Directory. To learn more about the Directory, go to: www.lsba.org/ATJCommission/ModestMeans.aspx.

Self-Represented Litigants Committee, Judge Jeffrey Cashe, chair

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. The “Find Legal Help” Portal has recently been updated with some parish-specific resources for domestic abuse victims and with the Louisiana Civil Legal Navigator.

After the passage of the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act, the Committee worked with legal aid on a bench card on evictions under the new laws. With Supreme Court approval, this Committee helped disseminate the bench card and hosted 3 virtual trainings for over 160 judges and Justices of the Peace. The Committee is currently working on creating video guides addressing remote access to courts.

The SRL Committee is also an integral part of the LSBA’s Justice for All (JFA) Project. On February 11th, the Committee hosted a Planning Session to update their strategic plan to dovetail with the JFA project and incorporate the priority activities identified by the GIS maps into the Committee’s work plan. The SRL Committee committed to working with the Technology Committee on the following priorities: 1) pursue annual mandatory access to justice training for judges and court staff; 2) increase the availability of access points for legal resources in civil legal resource deserts; and 3) create additional plain-language forms with instructions.

The SRL Committee met on May 13th and prioritized the “Top 10” Forms SRLs need and is working with the Supreme Court’s Technology Commission and the ATJ Commission’s Technology Committee on form development.

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Technology Committee, Amanda Brown, chair

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. This year the Technology Committee launched a multiyear project with ALSC and SLLS to gather content and build modules for a Statewide Learning Management System. Both firms will share the same substantive law materials to ensure that training is uniform across the state.

The Committee has also continued to expand content for the [Civil Legal Navigator](#). The Navigator is an online software that guides members of the public through basic questions to match them with the most appropriate legal resources for their particular legal issue. Current issues addressed include: Divorce, Child Custody, Private Landlord-Tenant Law, Unpaid Wages, and Unemployment Law. Forthcoming Navigators include Workplace Discrimination, Name Change/Gender Marker Change, and Successions. Additionally, the Committee is collaborating with the Supreme Court Technology Commission and the Suffolk University Law School to adopt a document automation system.

Finally, the Committee hosted a Technology Planning Summit on March 23 which brought together civil legal aid stakeholders to discuss public-facing tech solutions as well as internal procedures that can streamline workflow. Participants in the meeting identified priorities for the next year: 1) increasing self-help kiosks or points of access in courts and community gathering spots in rural areas; and 2) advancing the availability and use of automated forms.