

BUILDING BRIDGES - COMMITTEE REPORT

LOUISIANA ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

MARCH 2020

Committee Chair: Adrienne Wheeler

Committee Members: Erica Andrews, Stephanie Beaugh, Cynthia Bordonaro, Douglas Carey, Daniel Engelberg, Alexis Erkert, Jean Faria, Samuel Ford, Harrece Gassery, Naomi Kim, Gwynne Mashon, Kelly Orians, Steven Reed, Vanessa Spinazola, Cherie Teamer, Laura Tuggle, Dominique Verner, Adrienne Wheeler, and Sarah Whittington.

ATJ Staff Liaison: Amy Duncan

Mission

The Access to Justice Commission established the *Building Bridges Committee* to help connect, develop, and support the collaboration of the civil and criminal legal aid communities to prevent gaps in services and address legal issues that create barriers to people in reentry after incarceration.

Current Activities

Through the efforts of members of the Committee, the LA Department of Corrections' (DOC) Louisiana Prisoner Reentry Initiative Program recently formed a Statewide Legal Subcommittee in conjunction with its Implementation Steering Team. Legal subcommittee membership includes judges, attorneys, and DOC staff. The goals of the group are:

- identify highest priority legal needs that create barriers to reentry for people identified as medium and high risk;
- develop solutions and best practices to address legal needs identified; and
- maintain direct line of communication between Department of Corrections and legal partners representing both civil and criminal legal aid.

During its three meetings, the subcommittee is developing a pilot program to address detainer holds preventing release (summary attached), a standardized proof of incarceration letter, and ways to address child support obligations during the incarceration period. Some of the issues discussed are being reviewed by the Building Bridges Committee members for input and suggestions. The Building Bridges Committee will use the solutions developed by this group to include in a statewide best practices manual for addressing reentry legal needs.

Action Plan

From its meetings, the Committee has proposed the following enumerated action items to accomplish during the 2019-2020 LSBA year:

1. Form subgroups focused on specific issues that create barriers to re-entry.

Update: Currently, the Committee has broken out into two subgroups – PDL/DL subgroup focused on issues related to obtaining provisional and class e driver’s licenses and child support subgroup focused on the new law that suspends child support obligations to noncustodial parents incarcerated for a period of 180 days or more.

2. Form a strategic alliance with the public defender’s office to identify and address collateral consequences of incarceration before release.

Update: In addition to working with the public defenders, the Committee is working closely with DOC and members of the judiciary to develop solutions to common legal needs facing the reentry population at a systemic level. The solutions developed will be included in a best practices manual written by the Committee.

3. Develop best practices for handling legal obstacles to reentry.

Based on the solutions developed by the LAPRI Statewide Legal Subcommittee of the Implementation Steering Team, the Committee is working on a best practices manual for addressing reentry legal needs across the state.