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Concordia Parish Legal Help Access Point Opens in Vidalia Library

The Louisiana Access to Justice Commission, through the Justice For All Project, held a Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony on Thursday, Aug. 18, 2022, for the launch of its Legal Help Access Point inside the Concordia Parish Library in Vidalia, La. State and local leaders, including Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Jay B. McCallum, Louisiana State Representative C. Travis Johnson, City of Vidalia Mayor Buz Craft, representatives from the local Community Action Agency, the District Attorney's Office, the Clerk of Court, the Sheriff's Office, and many more, attended the event.

The ceremony was led by Louisiana State Bar Association 2020-21 President Alainna R. Mire, who explained that this project was developed in response to findings that identified parts of the state where residents struggle to access legal help. Concordia Parish residents, for example, had to drive more than an hour to access civil legal services at civil legal aid offices, self-help centers, and law libraries. The findings also showed that people experiencing civil legal problems, like divorce or applying for unemployment, struggle to get the basic information and services they need to resolve their issues. To review the full findings of the report, go to:
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/45fb46ed32854ab2b88a7e459f022068>.

The Legal Help Access Point, a private space located inside the library, provides community members with a continuum of options for legal help. Using the technology provided, community members can access self-help resources and automated court forms; find out if they qualify for free legal aid; get customized legal help and referrals through the Louisiana Bar Foundation and Lagniappe Law Lab's Civil Legal Navigator; meet virtually with a civil legal aid attorney by appointment in a confidential enclosed space; and attend a virtual hearing with participating courts via an online court program.

The library was chosen as the inaugural location because, for years, librarians have ensured that the public has access to information and resources. "Local libraries and their staff are often familiar, reliable, and trusted sources of information in their communities," Mire explained. "When people have legal issues but do not know where to go for help, they often start at a library."

In his remarks, Louisiana Supreme Court Justice McCallum emphasized that the access point will not only help residents of Concordia Parish manage their affairs and have access to the law but will also be an asset to the Court system by allowing for an efficient and effective court experience.

The Legal Help Access Point provides the community with a place to go for help navigating their legal problems and, at the very least, a starting point. “With this resource, our patrons will have access to the legal system,” said Library Director Amanda Taylor. “This Access Point makes finding legal help and understanding the process for navigating Louisiana’s legal system within reach of our community members.”

The Legal Help Access Point in Concordia Parish is located inside the Vidalia Branch Library and is accessible Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Additional Legal Help Access Points will open at a future date in Ferriday Parish library and the LaSalle Community Action Association office in Catahoula Parish.

The Louisiana Access to Justice Commission, Lagniappe Law Lab and the Louisiana Bar Foundation and its collaborative partners hope to continue to leverage technology to address access to justice issues in Louisiana and to scale this model by building additional access points in civil legal deserts throughout the state. To learn more, go to www.lsba.org/ATJ.

Photos are available at:

<https://www.lsba.org/ATJ/NewsArticle.aspx?Article=f86f21ac-3dcb-4d60-9eb9-94ca3fd404>

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The Louisiana State Bar Association assists its more than 22,000 members in the practice of law. The statewide association, as part of its multi-faceted mission, promotes and maintains access to justice initiatives for the state’s residents, assists the Louisiana Supreme Court in its regulation of the practice of law, upholds the honor of the courts and the profession, and supports programs that increase public understanding of and respect for the law.