

Focus on *Access to Justice*

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Louisiana Justice Community Conference: Moving towards 100% access

In October, the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Access to Justice Program hosted the 13th annual Louisiana Justice Community Conference in Baton Rouge. This two-day event is designed to provide civil legal aid attorneys from around the state with cutting-edge training they can use to effectively represent low-income and vulnerable clients.

This year's conference theme was "100% Access to Advance a Continuum of Legal Services." The theme was based on Resolution 5¹ adopted in 2015 by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators reaffirming the commitment to meaningful access to justice for all with a goal of 100 percent access. This means ensuring access to justice in adversarial proceedings involving basic human needs, like housing, sustenance, safety, health and child custody.

The conference programming focused on ways to advance a continuum of services, including expanding self-help services available to litigants, creating new or modified rules and processes that facilitate access, increased pro bono assistance, effective use of technology, increased availability of legal aid services, enhanced language access services, and triage models to match specific needs to the appropriate level of services.

The conference kicked off with welcome remarks from LSBA Young Lawyers Division Chair Scotty E. Chabert, Jr. and Louisiana Bar Foundation President E. Jane Sherman.

Julie Baxter Payer, deputy chief of staff/communications, legal, special projects for Gov. John Bel Edwards, delivered a powerful keynote address encouraging attorneys to work together with other programs, other attorneys and self-represented litigants to address not only the civil legal needs of impoverished communities, but also the needs of families above the federal poverty guidelines who can barely afford basic necessities.²



Luz M. Molina, left, presented the Louisiana Civil Justice Center with the Legal Service Innovation Award. Jonathan M. Rhodes, from left, Amelia Hoppe and Jesse Rafert accepted the Award.

On the second day of the conference, two civil legal aid awards were presented.

The Legal Service Excellence in Advocacy Award was presented to David H. Williams, litigation director at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) for his more than three decades of work fighting for the rights of people living with disabilities and vulnerable clients and making permanent improvements in their lives.

The Legal Service Innovation Award was presented to Louisiana Civil Justice Center for its ambitious 2016 Louisiana Civil Justice Tour that set out across the state to provide legal clinics and free legal assistance to low-income Louisiana residents in the state's most rural areas — some areas where the closest legal aid attorney was well over an hour away.

In addition to the regularly scheduled programming, the Child in Need of Care (CINC) Task Force, chaired by Rodney B. Hastings of SLLS, hosted a 7.0-hour pre-conference CLE program for CINC professionals. The LSBA Self-Represented Litigants Subcommittee hosted a Service Provider meeting bringing in representatives from Louisiana courts, legal aid organizations and local bar associations to discuss collaborative opportunities to meet the civil legal needs of individuals in Louisiana who cannot afford legal representation.



David H. Williams, left, accepted the Legal Excellence in Advocacy Award presented by Luz M. Molina.

The conference hosted participants from the state's three legal service programs and nonprofit public interest firms, including the Advocacy Center, Greater New Orleans Fair Housing, the Pro Bono Project, the Baton Rouge Bar Association, Crescent Care, Southwest Louisiana Law Center and the Mental Health Advocacy Center.



Julie Baxter Payer delivered the keynote address at the Louisiana Justice Community Conference.

FOOTNOTES

1. Conference of Chief Justices/Conference of State Ct. Admin. Access, Fairness and Public Trust Comm., Resolution 5, *Reaffirming the Commitment to Meaningful Access to Justice for All* (2015) (adopted at the 2015 Annual Meeting) available at: https://www.ncsc.org/~media/Microsites/Files/access/5%20Meaningful%20Access%20to%20Justice%20for%20All_final.ashx.

2. See, Louisiana Assoc. of United Ways, *United Way ALICE Report – Louisiana* (Fall 2015, last revised August 2016), available at: http://issuu.com/louisiana-associationofunitedway/docs/15uw_alice_report_la_hires_1.13.16_1?e=22574709/38228535. 

Coming soon (to your inbox): Louisiana Statewide Pro Bono Survey of Attorneys

The Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) is announcing participation in a new project to gather information about Louisiana's commitment to pro bono. The LSBA's Access to Justice Program and Louisiana pro bono projects are partnering with the American Bar Association to distribute a statewide survey to collect valuable information concerning pro bono access throughout the state. Specifically, the survey is designed to assess the state of pro bono in the legal profession, quantify and recognize the pro bono work done by attorneys, and understand the factors that encourage or discourage pro bono service.

The LSBA needs your help and input, whether you've volunteered within the last year or not. The survey will be distributed electronically in January 2017. Stay tuned! 📧

Need CLE? We can help and you can help a person in Re-Entry Court!

The Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Access to Justice Program is offering a CLE program from 1-5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 13, at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana, Ste. 1600, 650 Poydras St., New Orleans. The CLE program seeks to train and assist attorneys in Jefferson, Orleans, St. Tammany and Washington parishes who accept cases on a pro bono basis and will focus on the collateral consequences participants in the Re-Entry Court face after release from incarceration.

Handle a legal matter for a person and get 3.0 hours of free CLE (including one hour of ethics).

Louisiana is beginning to aggressively address its high incarceration rate through a variety of means, including a system of Re-Entry Courts. These courts oversee the re-entry of a discreet group of returning citizens who have gone through extensive technical, vocational and moral

rehabilitation program during a two-year period of incarceration. Although people sentenced to the program typically receive certification in a specific trade or field to increase employment opportunities, successful re-entry is often stopped short due to minor infractions and legal matters not dealt with prior to or during incarceration.

A coalition of organizations, including the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana, the Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Louisiana Appleseed, Loyola University College of Law and Rising Foundations, is working to support the Re-Entry Court Programs.

To review the agenda and access a registration form, go to: <http://files.lsba.org/documents/CLE/ATJ/ReEntryREGFORM.pdf>. Space is limited. 📧



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED *LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org* A free online forum for civil legal questions

Fulfill your pro bono obligation of 50 hours without ever leaving your office, seeing a client, or even changing out of your pajamas. *LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org* offers attorneys a quick, easy way to help low-income, elderly, and disabled Louisiana residents.

LA.FreeLegalAnswers.org allows volunteers to:

- Log in whenever/wherever
- Choose the question you answer and respond anonymously
- Receive training and access to resources
- Be covered by malpractice insurance

To volunteer contact Rachael Mills with the LSBA at rachael.mills@lsba.org or 504-619-0104.

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