



**Joint Meeting of the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission and  
the Louisiana Access to Justice Committee**

**10:00 a.m. on Friday, October 1, 2021**

*ATJ Commission Attendees*

Chief Justice John L. Weimer, Louisiana Supreme Court; ATJ Commission Co-Chair  
Jeffrey Coreil, NeunerPate; ATJ Commission Co-Chair  
Mary Barrios, Board Member, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services; Private Practitioner  
Amanda Brown, Executive Director, Lagniappe Law Lab  
Hon. Jeffrey Cashe, Judge, 21<sup>st</sup> Judicial District Court  
Brandi Cole, Associate General Counsel, Lumen Technologies  
Hon. John Davidson, Judge, 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Ann Gregorie, Executive Director, Baton Rouge Bar Association  
C.C. Kahr, Executive Director, Pro Bono Project New Orleans  
Patricia Koch, Judge, 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Greg Landry, Executive Director, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Virginia Listach, Director, Southern University Law Center Legal Clinic  
Alainna Mire, LSBA Immediate Past President; City of Alexandria  
Luz Molina, Clinic Professor, Loyola College of Law  
John Nickelson, LBF Board of Directors, Nickelson Law  
Chris Ralston, President, Louisiana Bar Foundation; Phelps Dunbar  
Veronica Sizer, Executive Counsel, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency  
Preparedness  
Sandra Vujnovich, Judicial Administrator, Louisiana Supreme Court  
Adrienne Wheeler, Executive Director, Louisiana Appleseed  
Hon. Lisa Woodruff-White, Judge, East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court

*ATJ Committee Attendees*

Tina Suggs, ATJ Committee Co-Chair, Frederick A. Miller & Assoc.  
Hon. Lisa Woodruff-White, ATJ Committee Co-Chair; East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court  
ReAzalia Allen, Senior Staff Attorney, 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Talya Bergeron, Directing Attorney, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Miriam Childs, Director, Law Library of Louisiana  
Franchesca Hamilton-Acker, Managing Attorney, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Arlene Knighten, Executive Counsel, Louisiana Department of Insurance  
Elena Perez, Pro Bono Coordinator, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Robert Lancaster, Assistant Dean of Experiential Education, Louisiana State University  
Kathleen Legendre, Zara Zeringue, LLC  
Joe Oelkers III, Acadiana Legal Service Corporation  
Camille Patti, LIFT Graduate, Attorney at Law  
Sara Pic, Head of Public Services, Law Library of Louisiana  
Sachida Raman, Deputy Director, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Graham Ryan, Business Litigation Partner, Jones Walker LLP  
Vanessa Spinazola, Executive Director, Justice and Accountability Center  
Lisa Stansky, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services

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Jane Thomas, Attorney at Law

Ranie Thompson, Director, CrescentCare Legal Services

Laura Tuggle, Executive Director, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services

Josef Ventulan, ABA-YLD District Representative, East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court

Sharonda Williams, Director of Government Affairs, Loyola University

## *Guests*

Andretta Breaux-Atkins, LSBA Leadership Class

Quinn Brown, LSBA Leadership Class

Rubi Brown, LSBA Leadership Class

Farren Davis, LSBA Leadership Class

Raul Esquivel, Executive Counsel, Louisiana Supreme Court

Jimmie Herring, LSBA Leadership Class

Alexis Joachim, LSBA Leadership Class

Taylor LeDuff, LSBA Leadership Class

Dan Rees, Deputy Executive Counsel, State Office of Community Development

Hayley Terry, LSBA TIP Program

Joseph Tran, LSBA Leadership Class

Alexis Yeboah-Kodie, Justice and Accountability Center

## **Minutes**

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

- a. **Chief Justice John Weimer and Jeffrey Coreil, Co-chairs ATJ Commission** – Chief Justice John Weimer provided opening remarks and emphasized the court’s commitment to supporting access to justice. Co-chair Jeffrey Coreil noted that the ATJ Commission and ATJ Committee were meeting jointly due to Hurricane Ida.

Last year, the Commission focused on responding to the pandemic, racial justice issues, and the JFA project. The purpose of this meeting was to reacquaint members with strategic goals, allow organizations to give updates regarding updates to Hurricane Ida, and adjust the goals to address new needs.

- b. **Judge Lisa Woodruff White and Tina Suggs, Co-chairs ATJ Committee** - Judge Woodruff-White and Tina Suggs echoed the Chief Justice’s sentiments. Judge Woodruff-White noted that although she will be retiring in January, she will remain committed to the Committee and to access to justice.

### **II. Meeting Minutes**

- a. Greg Landry moved to approve the May 14, 2021 Louisiana Access to Justice Commission Minutes; Chris Ralston seconded and the minutes passed as written.
- b. Tina Suggs moved to approve the March 12, 2021 Louisiana Access to Justice Committee Minutes; Jeff Coreil seconded and the minutes passed as written.

### **III. Updates from Partners on the impact of the Hurricane Ida on respective agencies/institutions**

#### **a. The Courts**

- i. Supreme Court/statewide – Justice Weimer described how Lafourche, Terrebonne, St. John, and St. Charles parishes were devastated by Hurricane Ida and Tropical Storm Nicholas, with some courthouses (St. Charles) suffering catastrophic damage. Efforts are ongoing in

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establishing temporary locations for hearings or proceeding via Zoom. Justice Weimer noted that suspending court deadlines will be important for recovery, as will be the restoration of the courthouses.

Several efforts were very helpful in responding to the storm. Justice Weimer noted that before the storm, the district judges set up a SOLACE-type mutual assistance program which allowed them to communicate and fulfill personal and court needs. Judge Scott Schlegel also distributed hot spots to assist with communication in impacted areas. Finally, the LSBA prepared an information sheet to distribute to first responders (firemen, national guardsmen, deputy sheriffs, etc.) throughout the state providing guidance on insurance issues. The resource was very well-received and the Justice suggested it might be useful to share at food distribution points as well.

- ii. East Baton Rouge Family Court – Judge Woodruff-White commented that remote court has allowed the East Baton Rouge Family Court to continue operating throughout pandemic. However, she noted that there was a gap in communication with SRLs regarding this transition of services. Overall, the number of SRLs decreased, as well as the use of uniform forms, with more people paying for forms or creating their own.
- iii. Supreme Court (cont.) – Sandra Vujnovich noted that the LSBA was effective in relaying Supreme Court information to attorneys during the storm. The Court worked through the storm and the LDJA kept judges in the loop with each other.
- iv. 9<sup>th</sup> JDC – Judge Patricia Koch shared that the court has a monthly spotlight to appear via Zoom on local TV to promote the 9<sup>th</sup> JDC self help desk, which has resulted in increased traffic to the desk. She noted that TV is great way to reach rural residents.

## **b. Bar Associations**

- i. Louisiana Bar Foundation – Chris Ralston reported that the LBF established the Hurricane Ida Relief Fund to support impacted areas. Chris, Monte, Rachael, and Minor Pipes met with Representative Zeringue in Houma to assess needs and provide flyers to be distributed on where to access legal help. Chris noted that providers can expect a timeline of needs after a storm, beginning with basic services and following later with legal needs.
- ii. Louisiana State Bar Association – Monte Mollere reported that the LSBA set up the disaster response page ([lsba.org/dr](http://lsba.org/dr)) following the storm to distribute updates from the courts and recruit volunteers for the disaster hotline. Access to Justice provided disaster legal training resources (for attorneys and the judiciary) and connected attorneys in need with resources.
- iii. Baton Rouge Bar Association – Ann Gregorie reported that the BRBA is utilizing their hotlines and online applications for self-help and are working with SLLS on evictions projects. Ann echoed that SRL numbers are down since the self-help desk began operating virtually; they hope to resume services in the courthouse and the libraries soon.

## **c. Civil Legal Aid and Pro Bono Organizations**

- i. Southeast Louisiana Legal Services – Laura Tuggle reported that all 22 parishes served by SLLS were within the disaster declaration. SLLS’ seven offices sustained very little damage and were able to reopen as soon as they regained power; however, they are looking for a new outreach location in Houma as their outreach post was destroyed. 10 staff of 125 lost homes and 35% had significant damage.
  1. SLLS is planning to do community-based legal clinics in hardest-hit areas but needs help finding locations to set up weekly outreach (churches, community centers, etc.). Members were asked to contact Laura if they have connections in the area. Members interested in volunteering in those areas should contact Elena ([eperez@slls.org](mailto:eperez@slls.org)), the Pro Bono Managing Attorney.
  2. Through support from the Greater New Orleans Foundation, LBF, and United Way, SLLS was able to hire several one-year disaster legal fellows to address emergency legal needs. The new hires start shortly and include three Spanish-speaking attorneys.

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3. Laura reported that Congress just approved \$40 million for LSC to respond to disaster-related legal needs in states such as Louisiana (covering Hurricanes Laura, Ida, Delta, and Zeta).
  4. The housing unit is currently responding to eight wholesale apartment complex evictions following Ida. Additionally, the CDC eviction moratorium ended the night before the storm, resulting in 30-40 calls per day for eviction representation in New Orleans office alone.
- ii. Acadiana Legal Service Corp. – Greg Landry reported that six of ALSC’s seven offices are open and no staff were displaced from Ida, though a few are still repairing damage from Hurricane Laura. They also recently opened a new office in St. Mary parish. Three parishes in their service area were declared federal disaster areas from Ida, containing 20,000 FEMA registrants.
1. ALSC has a grant application pending with HUD for an eviction representation project, and are waiting on a response from the state regarding Medicaid grants for statewide medical legal partnerships.
  2. They are seeing a loss of housing stock, especially low-income housing, from multiple storms. Entire housing complexes have been ruled uninhabitable, leading to people relocate. Lafayette now has the highest rental costs in state. ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Programs) in Caddo, Lafayette, and Lake Charles operate on reimbursement basis and are waiting on funding from the state, which has resulted in uptick in evictions as landlords are not willing to wait.
- iii. The Pro Bono Project – C.C. Kahr reported that their paralegal lost their home in LaPlace. They are seeing an uptick in family and consumer law issues, including bankruptcy and succession requests. She noted that volunteers are spread thin and suggested engaging others, such as students, to help.
- d. **Louisiana Law Schools**
- i. SULC – Virginia Listach noted that law students are available to assist with intake. Their disaster relief clinic has faced issues with accessing clients, as most students are remote and have to operate by phone or Zoom.
  - ii. Loyola – Luz reported that Loyola has established a disaster legal clinic headed by Rebecca Holmes. SLLS is referring undocumented clients to the clinic, as service to that population is limited.
  - iii. LSU – Robert Lancaster reported that although their students have been greatly impacted by Ida, PILS volunteers are extremely interested in providing help and are adaptable for immediate response.
- e. **Governmental/Social Service Agencies**
- i. GOHSEP – Veronica Sizer shared that they are working with the governor’s office to provide temporary shelter to the people in Lafourche, Terrebonne, St. Charles, and St. John parishes. They are hoping that this will bridge the gap between now and when more long-term housing solutions become available.
- f. **Other entities**
- i. Louisiana Law Help – Amanda Brown reported that they have updated information on the FEMA process and appeals, the SBA process, housing and evictions information, repairs, etc.
  - ii. Lagniappe Law Lab – Amanda Brown reported that LLL is pursuing a content strategy to educate the public on legal issues based on the post-disaster legal needs timeline, publishing content as it becomes relevant time-wise. They are publishing longer content on Louisiana Law Help and shorter pieces on social media and through the disaster legal tip line.
    1. LLL is also working on improving their search engine optimization to ensure that their resources come up when people search in Google. To do this, she requested the assistance of members in creating “backlinks” by linking and republishing content. “Backlinks” are links from one website to a page on another website. Google and

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other major search engines consider backlinks “votes” for a specific page, meaning that Google will rank the page higher on the screen when including it in search results. The higher a page’s ranking, the more likely someone will click on it.

- iii. Probono.net/la – Ann Gregorie reminded the group that probono.net is available to be utilized as a central resource for coordinating pro bono response to Hurricane Ida.
- iv. Justice & Accountability Center – Vanessa Spinazola shared that the JAC will be assisting people with criminal records with SBA disaster loans and appeals at the next monthly Reentry Legal Clinic, scheduled for 5pm on 10/20 at the VOTE office.
- v. Louisiana Appleseed – Adrienne Wheeler shared that Appleseed is doing public awareness campaigns on where to get disaster assistance as well as working on a campaign to recruit pro bono volunteers. They are still waiting to see whether the court will allow pro bono attorneys to assist with disaster response pro hac vice.

## IV. ATJ Community Coordinated Response to Hurricane Ida

- a. **Disaster Response Subcommittee** – Ann Gregorie shared that the subcommittee, comprised of legal services, pro bono agencies, GOHSEP, FEMA, Red Cross, and others, has been meeting weekly since the storm. The ABA/LSBA YLD Hotline has been activated. Calls are being routed to SLLS, since a majority of those impacted are in their service area. Eligible callers will stay on as clients; those who do not qualify by income are referred to volunteers from the private bar. Josef Ventulan shared that the LSBA YLD has 30+ volunteers currently signed on in Louisiana, with 40+ ready around the US if the court approves Katrina rules. As of the meeting, FEMA reported receiving over 700,000+ applications, with over 500,000 having been accepted. A DRC is also set to open in Belle Chasse.

Ann also mentioned an ongoing issue that occurs when a FEMA applicant does not list their income or lists it as \$0: the applicant receives an automatic referral to the SBA loan program, which delays them from receiving aid. Ranie Thompson noted that this was an issue during Katrina as well. She report that FEMA has the ability to rule immediately, and we should continue to push FEMA to do the at-the-desk decision-making rather than cycling people through program applications. Dan Rees with the State Office of Community Development and Adrienne with LA Appleseed noted that their organizations are each looking into solutions to this matter.

## V. Upcoming Events

- a. **Lawyers in Libraries** – The LSBA Lawyers in Libraries program, scheduled for October 25-30, will be holding in-person and virtual events with libraries throughout the state. Attorneys can volunteer for 2-hour time slots for consultations or workshops, and we will also be broadcasting webinars daily through the Facebook page. Additional events have been added to meet the increased need in parishes hardest hit by Hurricane Ida. Stephanie requested that members consider volunteering in the remaining parishes without a volunteer.
- b. **Louisiana Justice Community Conference** – The Louisiana Justice Community Conference is scheduled for October 14 and 15 and will be held virtually again this year. Additionally, the conference will be followed by a series of “Justice Fridays” online CLE programming. Attendance to these programs is open to attorneys and support staff employed full time by civil legal aid providers, as well as members of Access to Justice committees and task forces.

VI. **Access to Justice Strategic Plan** – Due to time, the plan will be circulated to members and input requested electronically, to be discussed at the next meeting.

## VII. Adjournment

- a. Next ATJ Commission Meeting: Wednesday, December 15 at 10:00 am
- b. Next ATJ Committee Meeting: Friday, January 21 at 10:00 am