

**LSBA Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee
Virtual Meeting**

Date: Thursday, September 30, 2021

Time: 12:00PM – 1:00PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84149123310?pwd=QStZVG9DTmt3a0ZuTVVKSmFMTkNzQT09>

Meeting ID: 841 4912 3310

Passcode: 779640

LSPD Committee's Mission

“The mission of the Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee shall be to provide members of the bench, bar and the general public with a greater understanding and knowledge of the legal needs and rights of persons with disabilities; to better meet the legal needs of persons with disabilities, and to increase the knowledge that persons with disabilities have regarding their rights and resources.”

Attendees:

1. Debbie Weinberg – *Disability Rights Louisiana* – Co-Chair
2. Elena Perez – *Southeast Louisiana Legal Services* – Co-Chair
3. Paul Fleming – *Paul Fleming Law*
4. Melanie Bray – *Disability Rights Louisiana*
5. Derek Warden – *Louisiana Supreme Court*
6. Jesse Lind – *CrescentCare Legal Services*
7. Joshua Holmes – *CrescentCare Legal Services*
8. Sean Morrison – *Sean Morrison Law Offices, LLC.*
9. Wendra Moran – *Attorney at Law*
10. Chris Edmunds – *Chris Edmunds Law*
11. Rubye Noble – *Attorney at Law*

Students:

1. Mallory Knudsen – *Loyola College of Law*
2. Jessi Dominique – *Loyola College of Law*

LSBA Staff

- Stephanie Beagh
- Monte Mollere
- Mariarenee Contreras

MINUTES

1. **Welcome & Introductions –**

- Welcome New Members/ Law Students –
Elena and Debbie welcomed all committee members to the committee and asked for all new and existing members to introduce themselves. New members included attorneys from CrescentCare Legal Services and students from Loyola College of Law.
- Minutes – 5.20.2021 –
Melanie moved to adopt. Derek seconded the motion. There was a typo under item number seven. Minutes passed with corrections.

2. **COVID-19 Issues & Updates –**

- Members were asked to provide updates to any legal needs or resources relating to Covid-19.
 - i. The Governor's mask mandate was extended to October 29th. People who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are now eligible to receive a third dose of the COVID-19 shot. Additionally, booster shots are available for certain individuals.
 - ii. Disability Rights Louisiana is continuing its efforts to help accommodate persons with disabilities needing access to vaccines. Vaccines are also available at CrescentCare. There have been a high number of individuals being placed together in congregate settings such as group homes for intellectual disabilities and as a result have led to high covid-19 positive tests.

3. **Hurricane IDA/Nicholas Issues & Updates –**

- Members were asked to provide updates on any legal needs or resources relating to the recent natural disasters in the State.
 - i. SLLS has been assisting with issues relating to evictions, FEMA appeals and other public benefits assistance. The moratorium has been lifted and there's been an increase of illegal evictions since then along with Hurricanes Ida and Nicholas exasperating the issue.
 - ii. Disability Rights Louisiana has been assisting the Aging & Disability Coalition of Emergency Management. They have been tracking some of the evacuation and disaster preparedness problems resulting from Hurricane Ida in the State's nursing homes and developmental group homes. DRLA is ensuring individuals are properly accommodated and are receiving the services they need. Additionally, DRLA received a list of all the nursing home residents that were immediately evacuated during the early days following Hurricane Ida. If anyone is trying to locate a loved one, please contact DRLA.

DRLA is also helping the housing unit at SLLS with further investigating improper home/apartment conditions impacting older tenants and tenants with disabilities. DRLA reported on other hurricane and COVID-19 disability related issues affecting employer/employee shortages, school safety, and virtual learning

accommodations. DRLA shared a flyer listed on the agenda listing all the services DRLA can assist with relating to disaster recovery. However, some of the government offices and other agencies listed on the form are closed due to the storm and may not be able to assist now.

- iii. Chris Edmunds pointed out that this is not a current problem, but many schools in Terrebonne and Lafourche parish are closed due to the hurricane's devastation in the area and surrounding parts. Students will most likely need to re-enroll in new school districts, but this does not mean that their accommodations will automatically be applied in their new schools. IEPs and 504 forms are hard to transfer between schools and much harder between school districts. IEPs are in the server system, but 504 forms are not updated into a server system creating another barrier. Debbie asked if any attorneys are seeing these issues come up to please reach out to the committee and its members. There are a few members in the committee that work with the Department of Education and may be able to help provide information and resources.

- Resources:
 - i. DSNAP applications deadlines were extended.
 - ii. *Trach Mommas of Louisiana* just received a fund to have a disability related resource page with a disaster focus for people to become informed. The page does not contain any legal resources. Link: [Resources \(trachmommas.org\)](https://trachmommas.org)

4. **Justice Index:**

- Every year the National Center for Access to Justice releases its Justice Index results, the committee has taken on the initiative to review its results. Though this year, the committee would like to take on the items listed in the Justice Index and turn them into initiatives for the new Bar Year. The goal is to review different sections from the 2020 Justice Index and think about projects that could help resolve some of the statewide disability related issues listed.

The committee created a separate document that lists only Louisiana's Justice Index results. Some of the issues are beyond the committee's ability to resolve but creating awareness of the problems relating to disability access in the courts and the legal system can be a way to encourage more attorneys and advocates to find solutions.

Some of the items picked by the committee are to plan and provide training to both judges and judicial staff on how to better assist people with disabilities in the courts and inform on available resources throughout the state. Committee Member *Derek Warden* agreed to help plan these trainings and possibly hold them in the Spring. Derek will help reach out to the Law Library to get things started

Melanie Bray is also working with Loyola University's law school on updating the Pro Bono Desk Manual. The Desk Manual was last updated in 2013 and is not getting a revamp. This desk manual is going to be delivered in an online format for attorneys to use. Melanie will be updating the manual's sections on accessibility to courts throughout the state and the common access issues that are experienced by people in the courts. Melanie can provide a training on the issues she will be writing about as another way to help solve some of the Justice Index items listed in the 2020 report.

Stephanie Beaugh added that the Language Access committee has started working with the Supreme Court's Language Access coordinator and its JA to implement its recent language access implementation plan. Some of the listed initiatives include improving interpreter services for the deaf. Therefore, some of the disability related Justice Index items may fall under the recent adopted language access plan. Debbie asked if the language access plan includes sign language interpreter services and if not, if this is something we can ask the Language Access coordinator about. Stephanie will check but believes that a lot of the items listed under the Justice Index report may have been resolved or are in the process of being resolved through the Language Access Plan. The Language Access plan was not adopted until after the Justice Index survey had been submitted. Elena suggested that the committee may want to coordinate with the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs to help with the Justice Index initiatives or see if something has already been done. The Justice Index's results are based on access and progress coming from the judiciary side, but the Governor's office may be able to help.

5. **Bar Journal Publications:**

- Elena thanked committee member, Sean Morrison for his recent Bar Journal and CLE presentation. Links to both items are listed on the agenda. Bar Journal publications are always a great way to share information about the Committee's work and create awareness about the issues that are discussed during the committee's meetings. It is also another opportunity to get law students engaged with initiatives and the committee's work. Attorneys on the committee can always invite law students to help collaborate with these articles. Every year, committee members have written at least one article and it would be great to have more publications this year. If anyone is interested, please reach out to Mariarenee Contreras and Stephanie Beaugh. The process is simple but does require some planning before an article can be published.

6. **2021-22 Disability Law CLEs**

- Justice Community Conference:
 - i. The Justice Conference will be held virtually on October 14th and 15th and is open to all committee members following with an additional set of CLEs titled *Justice Fridays*. Two committee members are presenting this year. Melanie Bray is offering a training on supportive decision making. Jesse Lind is providing a training on social security advocacy on behalf of clients who are trauma survivors.
- Upcoming CLEs:
 - i. Derek Warden is presenting an in-person CLE at Tulane Law School on December 28th from 12:45 to 1:45 p.m. More information about the CLE will be shared with the committee later on.
 - ii. National Alliance of Melanin Disabled Advocates Leadership Summit
 1. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/our-presence-is-our-power-tickets-168782080747>
 - iii. Families First Virtual Conference
 - <https://www.latwc.org/index.html>
- Other CLE Ideas:

- i. Members are encouraged to propose future CLE topics the committee can help host for the new Bar Year. This is always a great opportunity to share about the committee's work and promote awareness about disability related issues. Law student trainings are also encouraged.

7. **Policy/Legislative Updates**

- The Committee is looking for members who are interested in helping track state and federal legislation for the committee. The Committee use to have a designated member who would track all legislation related or impacting disability related issues and would provide updates to the committee. If anyone is interested, this would also be a great opportunity to work with law students as a possible long term research project.

8. **Engaging Law Students**

- LSU Apprenticeship Week: DRLA, the LSBA and other organizations are visiting LSU law students to help educate students about the different opportunities that are available for them participate in and potentially work on post-graduation.

9. **Adjournment:**

- No other updates were provided. The next meeting is set for Thursday, December 2, 2021, at Noon.