



Louisiana Access to Justice Commission
10:00 a.m. on Friday, May 23, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Commission Attendees:

- Hon. John Weimer III, ATJ Commission Co-Chair, Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, Thibodeaux
- Alainna Mire, ATJ Commission Co-Chair, LSBA Past President, Alexandria
- Charles Bourque, Jr., Saint Martin & Bourque, LBF Officer Representative, Houma
- Larry Centola, Martzell, Bickford & Centola, New Orleans
- C.C. Kahr, The Pro Bono Project, New Orleans
- Prof. Robert Lancaster, Louisiana State University Law Center, Baton Rouge
- Paula Miles, LBF Board, Office of the Public Defenders, Baton Rouge
- Prof. Luz Molina, Loyola University College of Law, New Orleans
- Chris Ralston, Phelps Dunbar, LLP, New Orleans
- Tina Suggs, LSBA Board of Governors, Frederick A Miller & Associates, Metairie
- Laura Tuggle, Executive Director, Southeast Louisiana Services Corporation, New Orleans
- Hon. Lisa Woodruff-White, (Ret.), Chair of the LSBA ATJ Committee, Baton Rouge
- Stephen I. Dwyer, LSBA Past President, Metairie

Guests:

- Jasmine Bellard, ATJ Developing Leadership Intern
- JD Deming, ATJ Developing Leadership Intern
- Dave Ernest, Louisiana Bar Foundation
- Stashia Liegl, ATJ Developing Leadership Intern
- Ryn Neucere, ATJ Developing Leadership Intern
- Hon. Patricia Oppenheim, Judge 22nd Judicial District Court, Covington

LSBA Staff:

- Stephanie Beagh, ATJ Projects Counsel
- Bridget Berins, ATJ Coordinator
- Amy Duncan, ATJ Training & Projects Counsel
- Rachael Mills, ATJ Projects Counsel
- Monte Mollere, ATJ Director

I. Welcome and Introduction

Alainna Renee' Mire opened the meeting by ensuring a quorum was present. She noted that this was the last meeting of the current commission for the year and the last meeting with Monte Mollere as director before his retirement.

II. Introduction of the ATJ Interns

Rachael Mills introduced the Access to Justice Developing Leadership Interns. The four interns were introduced: Stashia Liegl (LSU Paul M Hebert Law Ctr), JD Deming (Tulane Law School), Jasmine Bellard (Southern University Law Center), and Ryn Neucere (Loyola College of Law). The interns shared their experiences working with various civil legal aid organizations during their six-week internship program. The program was highlighted as a unique opportunity for law students to gain experience in public interest law, with sponsors including Phelps Dunbar, Entergy, Butler Snow, and the LSBA Civil Law and Litigation Section.

III. Consent Calendar

Adoption of the Consent Calendar was moved, seconded, and approved unanimously.

- IV. Louisiana Bar Foundation Report** – Charles Bourque from the Louisiana Bar Foundation reported on key developments, including the approval of nearly \$10 million in sustaining grants for 2025–26, with anticipated total awards nearing \$15 million due to rising interest rates. New leadership includes President Edmond Giering, Vice President Mike Mestayer, and Colleen Jarrott in a new executive role. The Foundation is expanding law school partnerships to build a pipeline for public interest attorneys, including new programs with Loyola and Southern, and ongoing discussions with LSU, Tulane, and Mississippi College of Law. Recent achievements include receiving Loyola's Social Justice Champion Award and continued efforts to engage law students and support civil legal aid.

V. Access to Justice Commission Issues and Initiatives

- a. Self-Represented Litigants Committee** – Judge Patti Oppenheim provided an update from the Self-Represented Litigants (SRL) Committee, highlighting the 6th annual SRL Summit held on May 2 at the 22nd JDC with over 50 participants. Topics included IFP procedures, ethical engagement with SRLs, self-help center models, AI in court forms, and barriers to justice. The committee is developing a Safe Harbor Rule to distinguish legal information from legal advice, aiming to protect volunteers and assist SRLs better. Consultations included legal aid groups, pro bono programs, LSBA leadership, and others. Additional discussions addressed technological access in rural areas and the importance of human support for SRLs.
- b. Community Outreach and Education Committee** – Amy Duncan reported on the Third Annual Conclave held in April at the Louisiana Supreme Court, which brought together courts, legal aid, the private bar, and community organizations. Highlights included panels on pro bono development and community-led partnerships, with presentations on key resources like the

Law Library of Louisiana and Civil Legal Navigator. Stephanie Beagh reported on the resources organized and available in Dropbox tailored to various stakeholder groups. Next steps include strengthening partnerships with United Way and 2-1-1, developing educational tools, and supporting pro bono organizations through collaboration with the Louisiana Bar Foundation. The committee remains focused on increasing access to legal information and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

- c. **Criminal Justice Committee** – Amy Duncan reported on its 10th Summit, held in February in Baton Rouge, which brought together prosecutors, defenders, law enforcement, mental health advocates, and community organizations. Topics included legislative updates, juvenile justice, medical marijuana, forensic toxicology, and mental health diversion strategies. The committee is exploring statewide coordination for mental health courts, drawing on models from 18 states, including Kentucky and Illinois. Key efforts focus on diversion, cross-sector collaboration, and reducing the use of incarceration for individuals with mental health needs. Partnerships and funding opportunities are being explored, particularly in under-resourced areas, in collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Health.
- d. **Technology Updates** - Amanda Brown provided a technology update highlighting progress on several initiatives. The Kiosk Project is active in 17 courts, with two kiosks installed, though facing sourcing delays. A redesigned Navigator is in development, with content migration underway and a summer launch expected. The TIG-funded Legal Issue Screening Tool is in the design and testing phase, incorporating partner feedback and plain language content. The Will Generator continues onboarding pro bono programs, with plans to expand content and explore a subscription model. Additional efforts include form automation funding requests, protective order process improvements, and AI-related intern projects. These initiatives aim to expand tech-based access to justice solutions.

VI. Access to Justice Committee Issues and Initiatives

- a. **IFP Working Group** –Judge Lisa Woodruff-White reported that the IFP Working Group continues to address non-compliance with In Forma Pauperis procedures, particularly among new judges and mayor’s courts. A recent survey confirmed ongoing issues. The group is focusing on judicial education, including a session at the spring judges conference, and updating the IFP white paper. They are developing a bench card to clarify procedures, emphasizing the use of current federal poverty guidelines, written reasons for denials, and the 125% poverty level as a rebuttable presumption. Outreach includes one-on-one meetings, such as a recent session with Kenner’s Mayor Court. The group is also exploring the publication of IFP writs for educational purposes, with support from Chief Justice Weimer.

b. Pro Bono

- i. **25 Hours in 2025 Campaign** - Rachael Mills reported that the 25 in 2025 Pro Bono Campaign is a collaborative initiative involving the judiciary, private bar, State Bar, and legal aid organizations to increase pro bono engagement. Key efforts include a supportive letter from Chief Justice Weimer to attorneys, a revamp of the Pro Bono Net website, centralization of pro bono resources, promotion of volunteer opportunities, and recognition of pro bono award winners through LSBA social media. The campaign focuses on increasing awareness, participation, and support for pro bono work across Louisiana.
 - ii. **Lawyers in Libraries** – Stephanie Beaugh reported the Lawyers and Libraries Program is scheduled for October 20–25 during National Celebrate Pro Bono Week. The program will feature ask-a-lawyer sessions (in-person and by phone), on-call volunteer options, and daily educational webinars. Last year, 55 library branches participated, 152 lawyers volunteered, and over 365 hours of pro bono service were provided.
- c. Disaster law Collaboration Summit** – Rachael Mills reported that the Third Disaster Law Collaboration Summit will be held at GOHSEP Emergency Operations Center, with a unique focus on engaging non-legal community response organizations. This hybrid event aims to educate participants on the role of civil legal aid in disaster response and strengthen collaboration between legal and non-legal stakeholders. Timed in light of potential FEMA changes, the summit will include organizations from across Louisiana and emphasize the importance of coordinated efforts in disaster preparedness and recovery.

VII. Meeting Adjournment A motion to adjourn was unanimously approved.

Next Meeting: September 11, 2025, at the Louisiana Supreme Court