



Louisiana Access to Justice Commission

10:00 a.m. on Thursday, November 17, 2022

Attendees:

- Alainna Mire, ATJ Commission Co-Chair
- Hon. Jeffrey Cashe, 21st Judicial District Court
- Lawrence J. Centola, LSBA Board of Governors
- Hon. Cynthia Clay Guillory, Louisiana Bar Foundation
- Jennifer Eagan, Louisiana Supreme Court
- Christy Kane, Pro Bono Counsel, Entergy of Louisiana
- Hon. Patricia Koch, 9th Judicial District Court
- Prof. Luz Molina, Loyola Law School
- Chris Ralston, Phelps Dunbar
- Sachida Raman, Acadiana Legal Service Corporation
- Veronica Sizer, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness
- W. Michael Street, Louisiana Bar Foundation
- Sandra A. Vujnovich, Louisiana Supreme Court
- Hon. Lisa Woodruff-White, (ret.)
- Justin Woods, 4th Circuit Court of Appeal

Guests:

- Amanda Brown, Lagniappe Law Lab
- Paul Brazil, LIFT Fellow
- Carolyn Deal, LIFT Fellow
- Jean Faria, Attorney at Law
- Evin Green, Louisiana Supreme Court on behalf of Chief Justice John Weimer
- Pamela Hall, LIFT Fellow
- C.C. Kahr, The Pro Bono Project – New Orleans
- Laura Tuggle, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services
- Brian Wiggins, Louisiana Supreme Court
- Elizabeth Williams, LIFT Fellow

LSBA Staff:

- Stephanie Beagh, ATJ Projects Counsel
- Mariarenee Contreras, ATJ Projects Counsel
- Amy Duncan, ATJ Training & Projects Counsel
- Rachael Mills, ATJ Projects Counsel
- Monte Mollere, ATJ Director

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* A G E N D A *

I. Welcome and Introductions – Chief Justice John Weimer and Alainna Mire, Co-chairs

Alainna Mire welcomed those in attendance and Monte Mollere introduced Aaron Green who attended the meeting on behalf of Chief Justice John Weimer.

II. Consent Calendar

Rachael Mills provided an addition to the “ATJ Internship Program” item, reporting that the LSBA’s Civil Law & Litigation Section will sponsor the Loyola College of Law intern. Adoption of the Consent Calendar was moved by Chris Ralston, seconded by Sandra Vujnovich and adopted with no opposition.

III. Louisiana Bar Foundation Report – *information item* – Judge Cynthia Guillory and Edmund Giering, IV – Chris Ralston and Judge Cynthia Clay Guillory updated the Commission with the following items:

- i. The LBF Child in Need of Care Project was able to secure funding to continue their ongoing initiatives.
- ii. At the recent LBF meeting, the following individuals were chosen to be honored at LBF Gala set for April 21, 2023:
 1. Distinguished Jurist – Honorable Richard T. Haik Sr.
 2. Distinguished Professor – Andrea B. Carrol, LSU Law Center
 3. Distinguished Attorney – Leo C. Hamilton, Esq.
 4. Justice Calogero Award – Hon. Ivan L.R. Lemelle
- iii. The Nutcracker Christmas Ballet on December 27th will be a fundraiser for the LBF. The LBF infinity seek to stabilize funding for ongoing operations so that all contributions would go to funding grantees. The LBF is working with the Department of Child and Family Services to help increase support and legal services to those in need. The LBF is happy to be one of only a few state bar foundations to establish such a partnership.

IV. Access to Justice Commission Issues and Initiatives

- a. **Justice for All Grant – *information item* – Alainna Mire and Amanda Brown reported the JFA Grant Project is in the last few months of its full implementation. Legal Help Access Points (LHAP) were implemented in East Carrol and Vidalia Parish. In support of the LHAPs and in collaboration with Lawyers in Libraries, two Law Talks were held on custody and visitation, and successions for the public. Both sessions were livestreamed at the libraries. Another Law Talk is planned for January on Divorce.**

The JFA team will create a third access point at the LaSalle Community Action Center next to the 7th J.D.C Courthouse. The date and time for the ribbon cutting ceremony will be shared with the Commission. The JFA team was able to track the LHAP data for the LaSalle Community Action Center and it has had 13 patrons use the kiosk. The LHAP in Concordia has had 33 individuals use the kiosk. The LHAP in East Carrol has served 200 patrons.

Stephanie Beagh and Judge Laurie R. Brister from the 6th JDC presented at the Rural Judges Conference in Alexandria. They provided information about the LHAPs implemented across the State. Information included details about where the access points are located and how they worked. Other SRL resources were shared as well.

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- i. **Amy Duncan** introduced the LIFT rural justice fellows. The LIFT program is working in conjunction with the JFA project on two fronts. One of the projects is the *Disaster Title Clearing Project* which focuses on people who were impacted by Hurricane Ida. The attorneys working on this project are Paul Brazil and Amber Mason.
 - The second project is the *Rural Justice Project* which focuses on the needs of individuals in legal deserts hoping to bring civil legal services in those areas. The program is supporting new solo practitioners who are starting their private practices in these identified areas. The project was initiated with the help of ALSC's Executive Director, Sachida Raman. These LIFT fellows are Pamela Hall, Carolyn Deal and Elizabeth Williams.

b. Technology & Self-Represented Litigants Committees

- i. **Forms Project** - Amanda Brown provided that the ATJ Commission's Technology and SRL Committees have made it their priority to look at self-help forms and their automation in partnership with the Supreme Court technology commission. So far there have been two automations produced, the 103 divorce (both with and without children) and an adult name change form. They are updating and revising existing forms for child custody, child and adult name change, and the article 102 divorce form (with and without children). The committees met recently to approve the forms and will move into the automation of the forms for 102 divorce and child custody soon.

The committees are now looking at whether they should create entirely new forms on other legal issues. These forms have been made available in the new District Court websites and advertised in the Legal Access Points.

Jennifer Eagan has requested form usage be tracked by the Supreme Court IT department. The data is meant to help better identify the legal needs of each district. Christy Kane added that Entergy will be working with Amanda in providing more information in all the access point locations about Entergy's services and bill payment assistance programs to help address consumer needs.

- ii. **Trainings and SRL Summit** –Judge Cashe reported that the forms Amanda and the SRL Committee have helped develop are very much helpful to courts and patrons. The Louisiana Supreme Court's Technology Commission is working on updating all the district court websites and have incorporated the SRL forms on their websites. Jennifer Eagan reported that 28 district websites have been updated out of the 42 jurisdictions, and it is part of a collaborative effort to help create uniformed websites across the State. Online calendaring has even been incorporated into the new websites and other SRL resources.

Judge Cashe announced the SRL Summit will be held in Baton Rouge at the office of Taylor Porter in January 2023. The last one was held prior to COVID-19 in Chalmette. The SRL committee has been able to relaunch the Summit for 2023 and has invited state court judges, clerks of court, judicial administrators, law clerks, legal aid, the Bar Association, and other ATJ partners to attend. There will be great sessions, distribution of information, best practice tools, and other resources that will be shared.

Language Access Committee - Brian Wiggins reported that the Supreme Court is almost finished with their 3-year implementation plan with the U.S. Department of Justice regarding Louisiana's language access services in state courts. With the help of the LSBA's language access

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committee, the Supreme Court has accomplished many milestones. Professor Luz chairs the Committee and reported that the group is focused on the issue of interpreters within the Code of Evidence. Traditionally interpreters have been identified as experts, but an expert is meant to give opinions and can be deposed. Suggestions were sent to the Louisiana Law Institute for policy change. The Committee has met frequently to help with providing information to the Supreme Court's work.

Sandra Vujnovich reported that the Supreme Court public rules are on the Supreme Court websites, and everyone is encouraged to look at it. The Justices will be reviewing the comments soon. Sandra also reiterated the court's commitment to continue furthering language access in the courts.

- c. Funding Efforts**– Veronica Sizer has been able to connect someone from the legislature to be part of the Funding Committee as recommended by Chief Justice Weimer. Chris Ralston reported that for 10 years of the Commission's existence, there was no funding allocated for LSC's and Louisiana was one of only a few states that did not provide funding for LSCs. However, for the past few years funding has been made possible. Last year the Committee was able to get 1 million dollars for LSC programs. The intention is to continue these efforts this year. Adrienne Wheeler remains the liaison with those in government. Chris commended Adrienne and Appleseed for their efforts in creating educational materials that help state legislators understand the legal needs of their communities.
- d. Mental Health & the Criminal Justice System** – Jean Faria reported on discussions regarding the development of a multi-disciplinary group to examine the implications of mental health factors on Louisiana's Criminal Justice System. Jennifer Eagan provided an overview of the Court's recent mental health initiatives. A power point was shared that showed the results of a Mental Illness Survey taken at the Fall Judges Conference on October 3rd of 2022 and at the Louisiana Association of Drug Court Professionals Annual Meeting on October 7th of 2022. There were 75 respondents in total. Judges have been dealing with the need to provide and address adequate resources and assistance to patrons dealing with mental illness and encountering the justice system. The ATJ Commission is examining the issue originated by the Criminal Justice Committee and invigorated by Chief Justice Weimer.

The survey results from the Fall Judge's conference provided information regarding the areas of concern that most judges are facing in their court room and the reasons for those concerns. Information on suggested trainings and educational resources were also shared through Jennifer's survey. Responses from the Drug & Specialty Court Professionals Annual meeting included similar areas of concern from judges and court staff, but also included responses from social workers, case managers, and probation and parole enforcement.

Jean Faria reported on the work being done by the Criminal Justice Committee. In 2019, the Committee held its first mental health summit from the law enforcement's perspective while in 2022 the summit was held again, but with the collaboration of judges and the courts. This year the Committee is looking into building a mental health subcommittee to focus on mental health issues that will include multi-partners. They will be meeting with LAMHA soon to help promote mental health resources for people in the criminal justice system and create a track for lawyers and judges at their annual La. Mental Health Association Conference. Jean encouraged for ATJ Commission members to help with strengthening a network of resources and services for persons struggling with mental health. Luz Molina reiterated that it takes a village to help create a network of support for people with mental illness because of the lack of awareness and the stigma that follows people suffering with mental health problems. She suggested more community focused surveys that evaluate the needs of the community and how the community feels about mental health.

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- V. **Access to Justice Committee Issues and Initiatives** –Judge Lisa Woodruff-White commended the work that the ATJ Commission and its members are doing. The ATJ Committee has focused on the needs of the state’s legal aid providers. Many conversations have been held over the legal needs that community members have been experiencing in light of Covid-19 and post-disasters, and these conversations have helped set the stage for the Committee’s current initiatives.

a. Disaster Response Efforts

- i. **Disaster Law Collaboration Summit** –Amy reported that on the November 3rd and 4th the first Disaster Summit was hosted by the LSBA and SLLS, with participation by Louisiana VOAD, GOHSEP, Disability Rights Louisiana, and ALSC. Veronica Sizer was instrumental in planning the Summit and helped coordinate the invitation of both the Governor of Louisiana, John Bel Edwards, and the director of GOHSEP, Casey Tingle. Garret Graves provided the event’s closing remarks. Just over a little of 200 people attended the event, and many people have committed to hold a similar summit again.

Veronica Sizer reported that the event was well received by GOHSEP, and they hope to be part of a similar event again. The Governor was extremely impressed. The need for these types of events is evident by not only its reception, but the fact that there are still 2,000 – 3,000 disaster survivors recovering from Hurricane Ida, and some are still being housed by temporary shelter. Events like this help minimize the duplication of work and create a strong network.

- ii. **Disaster Resiliency Projects** –Collaborative effort to address Heirship and Insurance cases resulting from recent natural disasters.

Sachida Raman provided information about helping three groups of survivors in post-disaster recovery efforts. These are short term, mid-term, and long-term survivors. Legal Services is seeing that the long-term cases and issues that have persisted are in two categories, successions, and insurance related case. Legal Aid is looking into partnering with the Young Lawyers Division, the Senior Lawyers Division, and the Pro Bono groups to help expand legal access for those cases. Whether it be providing education and training resources for legal aid attorneys to know how to handle these cases or partnering with Appleseed’s project.

b. Pro Bono

- i. **Lawyers in Libraries**– Stephanie Beaugh reported that this year’s Lawyer in Libraries events were held in the last week of October in conjunction with National Pro Bono Week. This has been the 9th year that the LSBA has helped put these events together and this year it was done in partnership with the Law Library of Louisiana and the State Library of Louisiana. There were over 140 events that occurred throughout the state and were even advertised by local news programs, NPR, and social media platforms. There was a large turnout this year in terms of both volunteers and attendees with 102 attorney volunteers. Educational webinars, phone consultations, in-person consultations, and in-person presentations were all held throughout the week providing multiple opportunities for people to ask their legal questions. 71 library branches hosted in-person events which covered 41 parishes in the State. Each year the program has a goal of reaching every parish in the state, and each year the LSBA looks at new ways of improving the program to expand legal access throughout the state, and next year the LSBA will be working on creating an on-call attorney list to help fill-in last minute emergency cancellations.

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c. Other ATJ Committee Work

- i. **Justice Index** – Judge Woodruff-White provided a quick report about the Justice Index. The Index is a project introduced by the National Center for State Courts who periodically calls for each State’s supreme court to evaluate their courts’ abilities and efforts for providing access to justice and other resources.

Louisiana did well in most areas, including SRL, Language Access and Attorney Access, but there was some work that needed to be done with one area which was the Disability Access component of services.

However, Judge Woodruff-White wanted to commend the commission for all the help it has done in increasing court access, legal resources and improve Louisiana’s Justice Index result. Monte thanked Brian Wiggins, Sandra Vujnovich and Jennifer Eagan for their work in furthering court access and for sharing their firsthand knowledge on the issues that were highlighted in the National Center for State Court’s Justice Index.

Brian Wiggins reported that he helped take the Justice Index survey again and saw that the State made a lot of progress in just these past two years in the Language Access component with 25–30-point increase.

- VI. **Adjournment – Upcoming Commission Meeting – Friday March 3, 2023.** Judge Cynthia Clay Guillory moved to adjourn the meeting. It was seconded by Christy Kane and passed unanimously.