

**LOUISIANA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION  
ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING  
10:00 A.M. Wednesday, September 23, 2020**

*Attendees:*

Talya Bergeron, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Amanda Brown, Lagniappe Law Lab  
Miriam Childs, Law Library of Louisiana  
Jeff Coreil, Co-chair, Neuner Pate  
Micah Fincher, Jones Walker LLP  
Ann Gregorie, Baton Rouge Bar Association  
Franchesca Hamilton-Acker, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Arlene Knighten, Attorney at Law  
Luz Molina, Loyola University College of Law  
Greg Landry, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Jeffery Nicholson, Nicholson Law Firm  
Joe Oelkers, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Elena Perez, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Sara Pic, Law Library of Louisiana  
Sachida Raman, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.  
Lisa Stansky, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Tina Suggs, Co-chair, State Farm  
Jane Thomas, Elder Law Task Force, Attorney at Law  
Ranie Thompson, CrescentCare Legal Services  
Laura Tuggle, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Adrienne Wheeler, Louisiana Appleseed  
T.C. Wicker, ABA-YLD Representative, Jones Walker LLP  
Sharonda Williams, Fishman Haygood Phelps Walmsley Willis & Swanson, LLP

*Staff:*

Stephanie Beough, ATJ Projects Counsel  
Amy Duncan, ATJ Projects and Training Counsel  
Jordan Maier, ATJ Assistant  
Rachael Mills, ATJ Project Counsel  
Monte Mollere, ATJ Director

**MINUTES**

- I. **Welcome and Introductions** – Co-chair Jeff Coreil welcomed the group.
- II. **Consent Calendar** – The consent calendar was passed as written.
- III. **Overview of Louisiana Access to Justice Community** – Co-chairs Jeff and Tina Suggs gave a brief orientation to the Access to Justice Committee.
- IV. **2020-21 Overarching Issues** – Co-chairs Jeff and Tina introduced three main issues the committee will be working on this Bar Year, including disaster response, strategic planning, and racial justice in the context of civil legal aid.

- a. Disaster Response by the ATJ Community** Ann Gregorie shared the background of the disaster response committee, which grew out of Hurricane Katrina, and gave updates on its current work. The committee updates a disaster manual annually and monitors all impending disasters in anticipation of activating the legal aid community's disaster response system. The committee has been meeting biweekly to discuss the response to COVID-19 and recent hurricanes.

### **COVID-19 Response**

Currently, legal services and pro bono providers have established outreach efforts related to evictions, employment issues, and domestic violence. Legal services were not included in the stimulus package so no financial assistance was received for COVID-19 and the disaster response hotline has not been activated. Due to COVID-19, disaster response now centers on virtual outreach rather than establishing a physical presence in disaster recovery centers (DRCs).

Louisiana Appleseed has released bulletins on the COVID-19 phases as well as the updated disaster manual for 2020, which can be found at [www.lsba.org/dr](http://www.lsba.org/dr). They are now working on a manual for health-related and economic crises.

### **Hurricane Laura Response**

ABA-YLD Liaison T.C. Wicker reported that they are finalizing the press release announcing the activation of the disaster response hotline following Hurricane Laura.

Amanda Brown created a free text alert system to send out timely legal information after the disaster. The content is based on the LSC timeline of post-disaster legal needs. Disaster Legal Tip Line: text "subscribe" to 318-405-4185. Amanda will send the flyer and disaster legal issue lifecycle chart to the group via email.

Laura Tuggle reported that the Flood Proof App, which was created after 2016 flooding in Baton Rouge to triage title-clearing cases and help flood victims access FEMA funding, has now expanded to include the entire state and all future disasters. An update to the app is coming out in October.

- b. Strategic Planning** – Amy Duncan reported on the progress of the Justice For All project and how its findings affect the ATJ Committee's goals. Louisiana was one of three states awarded the JFA grant from NCSC last October 2019. The grant is intended to help states identify solutions for reaching 100% meaningful access to justice. The JFA team has completed the statewide inventory assessment and is now working on the strategic planning and prioritization portion.

The inventory assessment included survey of key stakeholder groups (legal community, nonlegal service providers, and members of the public) as well as GIS mapping of the legal and socioeconomic landscape in Louisiana. Funding for the GIS mapping project was reallocated from the community listening sessions, which were cancelled due to COVID-19. JFA Project Coordinator Amanda Brown, SRLN Cartography and Story Maps Lead Alison Davis-Holland, the 2020 ATJ interns, and ATJ staff mined data for the project.

A key finding from the GIS mapping project was that huge swaths of Louisiana – approximately 60% of the state’s land mass and 34% of the population below 200% of FPL – live in areas termed “civil legal resource deserts,” where in-person legal information or assistance is at least a 45-minute drive away. These areas additionally experience extremely high rates of poverty and limited broadband internet access, making access to any kind of legal information nearly impossible.

Next steps for the project include developing a strategic plan to address this finding and obtaining additional funding to implement the plan.

- c. Racial Justice and Civil Legal Aid** – Jeff and Tina opened the floor for discussion of the following question: How do we respond to the issue of racial equity in terms of our civil legal aid work?

**Ongoing work:**

- Louisiana Appleseed is using resources from the TapRoot Foundation to assess the structure of their own organization and staff. She also noted that an emerging law firm antiracism alliance is reviewing the entirety of Louisiana’s laws for systemic racism and will hold a conference in October to present its findings – good opportunity to connect civil legal aid to the private bar.
- SLLS participated in an equity audit and is looking to improve their phone service to Spanish speakers.
- ALSC – Greg Landry noted the importance of having firm bylaws to ensure that clients are included on the Board of Directors – including people of color, elderly, those in poverty, across geography – and that middle management is diverse is as well, not just intake staff.
- CrescentCare requires annual cultural competency training that is essential for their work and are looking at hiring an external consultant to evaluate their practices.

**Next steps:**

- Tina floated the idea of forming an ad hoc subcommittee or task force to address these issues. Luz noted that legal service providers already seemed to be acting within their own organizations; questioned what goal an additional subcommittee would accomplish. Ranie Thompson concurred, noting that participating in a subcommittee is a substantial commitment and many are already overwhelmed.
- Ranie noted that there is already a diversity committee and department within the LSBA – she, Arlene Knighten, and Franchesca Hamilton-Acker are already on the committee.
- The committee concluded that Jeff and Tina would talk to Tricia R. Pierre, Director of Member Outreach and Diversity, to see what work was already being done and what opportunities there may be for collaboration.

V. **Access to Justice Projects, Issues, & Initiatives**

- a. **Louisiana Justice Community Conference** – Amy Duncan reported that the conference would be held virtually December 2-4 due to COVID-19. This year, the LSBA is pleased to be able to open up registration to non-attorney staff and the ATJ Committee. Invited national speakers include the National Employment Law Project, American Association for People with Disabilities, and National Consumer Law Center. The conference will focus on racial equity, social justice, and issues arising during COVID-19. Committee members were encouraged to register.

VI. **ATJ Committee Subcommittee Reports**

- a. **Pro Bono Subcommittee** – The Pro Bono Awards ceremony is rescheduled to take place virtually on Thursday, October 29. All Committee members are invited to attend.

VII. **ATJ Commission Committees Reports**

- a. **Funding Committee** – Adrienne Wheeler reported on the activities of the funding committee, which researches ways to secure funding for LSC-funded organizations. Last year, we were able to secure a state appropriation in the amount of \$500,000. This had not been done in over a decade! Were able to keep that funding this year. Additionally, Louisiana Appleseed collaborated with Greg and Laura on a virtual webinar series aimed at educating legislative representatives on the legal aid resources available to their constituents. This year, the funding committee is pushing for \$1 million in state funding for legal aid.
- b. **Language Access Committee** – Stephanie Beagh reported that the Language Access Committee is working with the Supreme Court's Office of Language Access and the Dept. of Justice to develop a statewide language access plan. The plan was vetted over the summer and recently approved by the Supreme Court. Moving forward, the Committee will be working on statewide implementation of the plan, including translation of forms, creation of brochures, revisions to rules and laws, and education for attorneys on the importance of language access.

VIII. **Adjournment and next meeting**

- a. The next ATJ Committee meeting will be virtual and is scheduled for Jan 22, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.