



Louisiana Access to Justice Commission

10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Attendees

Chief Justice John L. Weimer, Louisiana Supreme Court; ATJ Commission Co-Chair
Jeffrey Coreil, NeunerPate; ATJ Commission Co-Chair
Amanda Brown, Executive Director, Lagniappe Law Lab
Hon. Jeffrey Cashe, Judge, 21st Judicial District Court
Brandi Cole, Associate General Counsel, Lumen Technologies
Ann Gregorie, Executive Director, Baton Rouge Bar Association
C.C. Kahr, Executive Director, Pro Bono Project New Orleans
Christy Kane, Pro Bono Counsel, Entergy of Louisiana
Hon. Patricia Koch, Judge, 9th Judicial District Court
John Nickelson, Board of Directors, Louisiana Bar Foundation; Shreveport City Council
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
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

Staff

Stephanie Beaugh, Access to Justice Projects Counsel
Mariarenee Contreras, Access to Justice Projects Counsel
Amy Duncan, Access to Justice Training and Projects Counsel
Jordan Maier, Access to Justice Assistant
Rachael Mills, Access to Justice Projects Counsel
Monte Mollere, Access to Justice Director

Minutes

- I. **Welcome and Introductions** – Chief Justice John Weimer welcomed the group and commended members on their role in ensuring that those of modest means have access to legal services.
- II. **Consent Calendar** – The consent calendar was adopted without opposition as written.
- III. **Access to Justice Strategic Plan** – Jeff Coreil explained that the ATJ strategic plan was created to incorporate goals from the JFA project, the LSBA strategic plan, and the goals of the Commission. Amy Duncan gave an overview of the five items included in the plan, listed below:
 - a. Goal 1: Increase and equalize access to justice through uniformity in ATJ resources and services across Louisiana.
 - b. Goal 2: Increase awareness of and collaboration on access to justice efforts and issues.

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- c. Goal 3: Increase participation in and support for ATJ Commission activities.
- d. Goal 4: Increase lawyer and litigant participation in access to justice projects and pilots.
- e. Goal 5: Explore improvements to triage and referral.

Amy further explained that meeting would focus on two items from the strategic plan being worked on by ATJ Committees.

IV. **Pro Bono – Strategic Plan Goal 4:** *“Continue implementation of best practices to increase attorney/legal volunteerism and develop initiatives and best practices.”*

Ann Gregorie and C.C. Kahr presented plans for a pro bono campaign in fulfillment of goal 4, which calls for the continued implementation of best practices to increase attorney volunteerism. C.C. noted that despite Hurricane Ida and the pandemic, fall had been busy for pro bono activities, inspired in part by encouragement from the Supreme Court, the LSBA President, and the ABA. However, she noted that the personal and professional challenges that the pandemic has wrought on attorneys has decreased pro bono volunteerism overall.

Ann and C.C. requested the support of the judiciary in promoting the 2022 campaign. Justice Weimer offered to send a letter to judges and a letter to attorneys and requested that they coordinate with court staff Raul Esquivel and Sandra Vujnovich to provide rough drafts for the letters and for a thank you to volunteers. He noted that personal stories by people who have benefited from pro bono services are more likely to be picked up by the media. Monte also noted that ATJ has a Judges Pro Bono Toolkit that could be revised for the letter. Judge Koch requested the creation of a form letter for each jurisdiction for judges to disseminate local opportunities to attorneys.

In further discussion and consideration of goal 1, Judge Woodruff-White noted that she reached out to the Judicial College to get a commitment for 1 hour of ATJ-related education annually for judges. The recent NYC CLE for new judges is one possible model; the presentation discusses the continuum of services for low-income litigants, IFP forms, and more. Alainna agreed and volunteered to present CLE again. Jeff Cashe noted as well that their local bar association would welcome a presentation on pro bono at their next meeting.

Finally, Virginia Listach requested a speaker to talk about the importance of pro bono work to her students. Justice Weimer noted that the justices speak to the incoming classes about professionalism and could add a promotion of pro bono work to that presentation as well.

V. **Forms – Strategic Plan Goal 1:** *“Create additional plain language forms and instructions and encourage acceptance by all LA courts.”*

In service of the first goal, which includes creating plain language forms and instructions and encouraging their acceptance by all Louisiana courts, the SRL and Technology Committees have collaborated to identify and begin automation of the top 10 forms most often used by self-represented litigants. Amanda Brown reported that SRLs who use the form automation resource will answer a few questions about their case, learn why these questions are important, and then receive a uniform form populated with their responses. So far, two electronic forms have been completed and approved by the Supreme Court, the 103 divorce with no children form and the LA adult name change form.

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Judge Cashe requested the ATJ Commission's approval for the forms to be produced by this process; a motion was passed to formally support this project, the forms, and the process of working with the Louisiana Supreme Court's Technology Commission. The SRL and Technology committees are next seeking assistance in reviewing and updating certain family law forms. Members interested in assisting were instructed to email Stephanie Beough (stephanie.beaugh@lsba.org).

Judge Woodruff-White noted that she would also like to see live self-help centers throughout the state, as well as continued education for lawyers and judges on SRLs, as these additions are instrumental in increasing the accuracy/appropriateness of forms submitted to the courts by SRLs.

John Nickelson asked whether phone app resources would be made available. Amanda said that while ATJ has developed many mobile-compatible online resources, research shows that native apps for ATJ resources are not well-adopted by the public and are expensive to build and maintain.

VI. **Louisiana Bar Foundation Report** – John Nickelson reported that even with historically low interest rates, the LBF anticipates distributing more than \$7 million to grantees this year. The addition of funding from the Kendall Vick Foundation has allowed the LBF to assist further with public interest student loan repayment. The LBF also received a substantial donation from the Louisiana Worker's Compensation Corporation to fund scholarships through Kids' Chance, which goes to children of Louisiana workers who are killed or permanently disabled.

VII. **Funding Committee Update** – Chris Ralston gave an update on Funding Committee activities. At the federal level, the pandemic has triggered Congress to grant additional funding through the Legal Services Corporation. At the state level, funding is now instantiated in the governor's budget at \$500,000, up from \$0 just a few years ago. The Committee met with Commissioner Jay Dardenne several months ago, who pledged to support an increase in funding to \$1 million and to continue to include the line item in the governor's budget rather than a separate bill. Commissioner Dardenne was specifically interested in discussing civil legal resource deserts and what can be done to get resources to rural areas.

VIII. **Other items**

a. **Lawyers in Libraries** (October 25-30) – Stephanie Beough reported on the Lawyers in Libraries week of service, which took place October 25-30, 2021. Due to COVID-19 surges and Hurricane Ida closures, events were held both in person and virtually as needed. Over 177 events occurred statewide, with 91 volunteers participating in 37 parishes and 62 library branches. Patron numbers are still being tallied, but at least 200 people were helped through these consultations and workshops, with several hundred more viewing the legal webinars broadcast on the event Facebook page. Thanks to Jeff Coreil and Amanda Brown for volunteering this year.

b. **Louisiana Justice Community Conference** (October 14-15) – Amy Duncan shared that the October 14-15 civil legal aid training conference was a success, with about 200 attendees participating each day. Civil Legal Aid Awards were presented to Morgan Lamandre, the executive director of STAR Legal Services, and the New Orleans First City Court Eviction Diversion Project. The conference was followed by a new *Justice Fridays* training series, which was also very well attended and will be continued in the spring.

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- IX. **Justice Index** – Monte Mollere presented the Louisiana results from the National Center for Access to Justice’s 2020 Justice Index. The index is a snapshot of the degree to which each state has adopted best practices related to access to justice in several areas. The previous Justice Index was released in 2016. The 2020 report shows that Louisiana has made great strides in several areas, moving us from an overall ranking of 44th to 27th among the 50 states and Puerto Rico. The full report is available here: <https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/2021/justice-index>
- X. **Adjourn**
- a. Next meeting: Friday, February 18, 2022 at 10:00 am
 - b. Final meeting: Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 10:00 am