

**Charge of the  
Access to Justice Commission  
2017**

Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers in 2011 formed the Judicial Branch's Access to Justice Commission with the goal of increasing access to justice for all people, by identifying and removing barriers. Since its inception, the Commission, under the leadership of members of the Bench, has collaborated with internal and external stakeholders to identify justice gaps and craft meaningful responses to help ensure that the judicial system is accessible.

It is the mission of the Connecticut Judicial Branch to “*serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.*” To support that mission, the Commission developed a guiding principle:

*The mission of the Access to Justice Commission is to develop recommendations to help ensure equal access for all people, including low- and moderate-income individuals, people with different physical or developmental abilities, the elderly, limited English proficient individuals, and ethnic, cultural and racial minorities.*

Among the Commission's most successful initiatives since 2011:

- Successfully secured a seed-funding grant, from the American Bar Association's Fund for Justice and Education grant under the Kresge and Public Welfare foundation ATJ expansion project, to launch *Lawyer Corps Connecticut's* website and recruitment materials. The program allowed for the hiring of new attorneys for 1-year periods at three legal aid providers.
- Established an ongoing relationship with Connecticut's public library system via the Commission's Workgroup on Libraries and Access to Justice. This important partnership cemented itself with the September 2015 “Access to Justice Fair,” and ongoing partnership with more than 165 public libraries. The Workgroup's efforts are ongoing, and an important collaborative effort in bringing justice information to the public.
- Developed a remote videoconferencing pro bono program, in which volunteer attorneys in one location provided legal advice to people with foreclosure cases in another judicial district.

The Commission's makeup has changed over the half-dozen years since its establishment. In order to continue to ensure that the voices of providers and other stakeholders, including the legal education community, are represented and included in a wide-ranging collaboration, the Chief Justice recommends that the Commission continue to be led by experienced Judges. The membership should include representatives from the legal aid community, the state's three law schools, the Connecticut Bar Foundation, the Connecticut Bar Association, affiliated Bar associations representing minority communities, attorneys from small, mid- and large firms that include pro bono as part of their practices, and the state library system. Judicial Branch members should include those who manage the court operations system, and others as needed.

The Commission's role is to serve as an advisory board; it may establish workgroups or subcommittees as necessary to address these important initiatives:

- 1) Conduct a symposium for attorneys to demonstrate how unbundled legal representation, or limited scope representation (LSR), can be an effective way to assist low and moderate income people who are parties to cases, to access affordable legal representation.

- 2) Develop a pro bono program to assist self-represented parties with cases at the Appellate level. The Commission will conduct reviews of similar programs, including one in neighboring Massachusetts, with which the Commission has a working relationship.
- 3) Assess the feasibility of existing incubator programs that provide legal assistance to people of moderate and modest means, and providing assistance as needed.
- 4) Increasing the use of videoconferencing as a tool to effectuate pro bono service.
- 5) Develop recommendations on how to recognize attorneys who provide pro bono service to Connecticut residents.

Additionally, in 2017, the Chief Justice accepted a number of recommendations from the *Civil Gideon Task Force*, a legislative-appointed group that examined access to civil justice for Connecticut residents. The Commission will review and consider the Task Force's recommendations to determine which of these efforts are feasible in the current economic climate:

- 1) **Study additional ways in which it might be able to facilitate providing legal services to the poor.** *This might entail quicker resolution time, reducing the amount of time spent at court appearances, and promoting limited appearances and information.*
- 2) **Continue to enhance Judicial Branch systems to facilitate access.** *The Judicial Branch has taken many steps in the last decade to make the courts and their systems accessible to both represented and unrepresented parties. One of the areas of significant progress by the Judicial Branch is in the field of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), an idea that has recently gained traction in several other jurisdictions.*
- 3) **Improve Access to Counsel for People with Disabilities.** *We...recommend funding improved outreach to disabled persons. In addition to funding community partnerships, Connecticut should consider funding mobile, wheelchair-accessible legal help centers that could travel directly to rural communities and to people with disabilities that would otherwise be unable to reach community-based legal assistance programs.*
- 4) **Encourage Lawyers Employed by the State to Perform Pro Bono Services.** *Consideration...should be given to appropriate means to facilitate pro bono work by state-employed attorneys.*
- 5) **Commission a Study of the Potential Rule Changes to Support Funding.** *Further study should be undertaken to determine how Connecticut might use its leverage to help the organizations find and secure available public grants and private foundation dollars.*
- 6) **Study of New Legal Services Delivery Methods.** *Many changes are underway in the methods by which entities are delivering legal information and legal services, especially through the internet. RocketLawyer, Shake, and LegalZoom offer online legal document creation services and "education centers" for people and small businesses searching for help with their legal needs. The Judicial Branch and the Connecticut Bar Association should study the impact of these new service delivery models and provide guidance on how the State should respond to them.*