

Arkansas Access to Justice Commission - Commissioner Expectations

About the Commission

All citizens are said to be equal under the law. People who are charged with crimes have a right to a lawyer, but the same is not true for people who have legal problems that threaten their homes, their families or their livelihoods. The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission works with policymakers, attorneys, and legal aid to make sure all Arkansans get the protections of the law, regardless of how much money they have.

The Commission does not provide direct services, but serves as a thought leader and facilitator of policy initiatives to increase access to the civil justice system. While the Commission's primary focus is on ensuring access to justice for low-income Arkansans, this is not its exclusive focus. Much of the Commission's recent work has focused on making the court system more accessible for self-represented litigants.

The Commission was established in 2003 at the request of the Arkansas Bar Association, which petitioned the Court to create the Commission. It is one of about 41 such commissions around the country. The Access to Justice Commission movement grew out of a recognition that broad buy-in from courts, bar associations, the business community, and legislators is essential if meaningful progress is to be made in ensuring equal access to civil justice.

The Commission is funded by the Arkansas Supreme Court, which allocates a portion of attorney license fees to support the Commission's operation. The bulk of the Commission's \$327,000 annual budget pays for four full-time staff (an Executive Director, Program Coordinator, IOLTA Program Manager, and Executive Assistant), as well as meeting expenses. Those staff also share responsibility for staffing the Commission's sister nonprofit organization, the Arkansas Access to Justice Foundation.¹ Most other expenses related to the Commission's work are subsidized by the Arkansas Access to Justice Foundation.

Expectations of Commissioners

Attend and Actively Participate in Meetings: The Commission meets three to four times per year, typically for three to four hours on a Friday. The location of meetings rotates. There will usually be one to two meetings in Little Rock, one meeting in Northwest Arkansas, and one meeting in Northeast Arkansas. Every other year in even-numbered years, the Commission and Foundation meet jointly for an overnight retreat. Commissioners are expected to attend all meetings in-person whenever possible, as most meetings include committee work sessions. Conference calling is

¹ The Foundation helps fund our state's two civil legal aid organizations—the Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Arkansas. Together, their lawyers help thousands of struggling Arkansans to understand and enforce their rights, and by being their voice in court.

usually an option for the business portion of the meeting. Mileage reimbursement and lodging are provided for Commissioners who travel out of their hometowns for meetings.

Participate in a Committee: The Commission accomplishes much of its work through committees. There are three standing committees: **The Research Committee** (which assists the Commission with research projects, e.g., the development of maps that demonstrate the need for civil legal aid). **The Policy Committee** (which develops policy proposals that support the delivery of civil legal aid, pro bono services, and self-help), and **Resource Development** (which assists the Commission and our sister Foundation in both private fundraising and development of public financial support for civil legal aid). Commissioners are assigned to a committee based on their interests and Commission needs. Committees meet at each Commission meeting and at least once via conference call between Commission meetings. Committee meetings generally last one hour and committee members are often assigned tasks to complete by the next meeting. These tasks vary, but typically require only an hour or two to complete.

Give: Each Commissioner is expected to give a personally significant annual donation and participate in at least one Foundation- or Commission-sponsored event.

Other Responsibilities: Commission members are asked to facilitate communication and relationship building between the Commission and other organizations in which the Commissioner is active. From time to time, Commissioners may also be asked to speak about Commission activities to local bar associations or civic groups. Staff support is always available for these tasks.

Contact Information

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