



ARKANSAS
ACCESS TO
JUSTICE
REPRESENTING HOPE

Arkansas Access to Justice Commission
February 05, 2021
9:00 a.m.
via Zoom

Commissioners Available: Mark Mayfield (Chair), Rep. Andrew Collins, Judge Carlton Jones, Skye Martin, Cliff McKinney, Dr. Karama Neal, Prof. Tiffany Murphy, Prof. Kelly Browe Olson, Kerri Michael, Justice Robin Wynne, Dequeshia Prude-Wheeler, Lee Richardson, Andrea Walker, and Jean Carter

Guests: Kara Butler, Kendall Lewellen, & Courtney Nosari-Wall

Staff: Tameka Parker, Jordan Bates-Rogers, and Desirae' Walker

Minutes

1. Mr. Mayfield welcomed everyone and introductions were made.
2. Professor Murphy made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes from September 2020. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martin. No further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.
3. Executive Director's Report-Mr. Jordan Bates-Rogers (for information):
 - a. Mr. Bates-Rogers reported that Cristy Park has been selected as the new Program Coordinator for AATJ and will officially start on February 15, 2021. She comes to us from Disability Rights Arkansas.
 - b. Pending Commission appointments consist of Kendall Lewellen, Kerri Michael, and Dr. Chad Rodgers. The appointments notices are forthcoming within the next week.
 - c. Free Legal Answers
 - i. 2020 Performance report for AR Free Legal Answers: This is a program the Commission has taken on partnership with American Bar Association/Arkansas Bar Association and with support from the Bar Foundation. There were 536 clients served and the answer rate rose to 85%, mostly due to virtual clinics increasing volunteer engagement.
 - ii. The AR Bar Foundation provided AATJ with a \$1,500 grant that will be used to upgrade out volunteer management software and for advertising the program to rural and minority communities.
 - iii. We plan to do 24 clinics this year, which will help to serve more clients.
 - d. Eviction Defense CLE
 - i. In partnership with CALS and LAA we presented an eviction defense CLE in January. There were over 400 participants, with approximately 80% of those being attorneys and 26 attorneys agreed to take on some sort of pro bono case. We appreciate

Kendell Lewellen and Jason Auer for teaching that course. We hope to schedule one webinar per month on ATJ topics.

e. Justice Index

- i. The Justice Index is a project Fordham Law School puts on to rank states based on their performance on key access to justice measures. We think Arkansas will see a lot of positive changes due to the court adopting the rules for the limited scope representation and approving CLE for pro bono.
- ii. Fines and fees will be considered for the first time in the state ranking in the Justice Index.
- iii. We hope to have the staff from the Justice Index come to speak during the joint Commission/Foundation meeting this summer. They will talk about what we have done right and where we need to improve.

4. Project and Partner Organization Updates

a. Foundation Report-Mr. McKinney:

- i. Mr. McKinney discussed how they are monitoring the low interest rates and the economy very closely. Interest rates are at historic lows and there is no indication that this will change soon. According to the Federal Reserve it could be 2024 before we could see any change. The Foundation has budgeted for a further decline in interest rates in 2021.

b. Project & Partner Organization Updates

- i. Mr. Richardson reported that LAA closed out 2020 with over 7000 cases, 25% were full service and 75% were limited service. There were 651 cases opened in January, which consisted of COVID-related matters, evictions, domestic violence and opioid/substance abuse.

LAA has a budgeted deficit this year, but has reserve funds available. They currently have 24 funding sources and 35 attorneys on staff.

- ii. Ms. Carter reported that the 2020 figures are currently being finalized. Overall, their numbers are down due to the pandemic, working remotely, and challenges with public awareness during the pandemic. CALS has received some new funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and the King Foundation.

5. Research & Technical Assistance Committee Report:

- a. Prof. Murphy reported that they were working on a draft administrative order to provide guidance to court staff on what assistance they can provide to self-represented litigants. The committee is reworking a prior proposal to more narrowly define the types of assistance authorized.
- b. She also reported that Ms. Butler provided a presentation to them on how courts can utilize existing technological resources to provide resources to self-represented litigants.

6. A Study on Technological Resources for All Court Users in Arkansas Courts & Law Libraries-Kara Butler
 - a. Ms. Butler provided an update on her efforts to collect information about the self-help resources and services provided by courts around the state.
 - b. After discussion and questions Professor Murphy made a motion to approve the report and endorse the recommendation. This would be published on the AATJ website and staff would work with the Supreme Court and AOC to implement the recommendations. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martin, after no further discussion, motion passed unanimously.
7. Breakout Sessions
 - a. Commissioners divided up into breakout rooms and discussed several policies recommended by the Justice Index. The goal was to identify which of the recommendations would be the quickest and easiest to implement.
 - b. The consensus was that the policy recommendation that could be implemented the quickest was to develop instructions for self-represented litigants on how to complete the *in forma pauperis* petition and affidavit and to post those instructions on the Supreme Court's self-help page, along with the forms.
 - c. Access to Justice staff will work on this project and report back at the next Commission meeting.
8. Meeting adjourned.
9. Next meeting date June 4, 2021 at 9am (Joint meeting w/Foundation Board)