

**Access to Justice Commission
Minutes
April 9, 2014**

The Access to Justice Commission met at the Supreme Court Building on April 9, 2014. Those attending the meeting in person, by video, or by phone were Chief Justice Marilyn Kite, Justice Jim Burke, Justice Kate Fox, Senator Tony Ross, Judge Tim Day, Judge Shelley Cundiff, Judge Rick Lavery, Amanda Roberts, Larry Wolfe, Walter Eggers, Sharon Wilkinson, Ray Machia, Angie Dorsch, Kristin Karr, Rendy Lemke, Gen Tuma, Patrick Korell, Paul Phillips, Rennie Polidora, Cathy Duncil, Devon O'Connell, Marcia Shanor, and Ronda Munger.

Introduction:

Justice Burke welcomed the commission members and guests, and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the various programs and to discuss the future of the Commission. He introduced the newest member of the Supreme Court Bench, Justice Kate Fox. He also introduced Devon O'Connell, the President of the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association, and Marcia Shanor, the Executive Director of the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association, who are looking for ways that the WTLA can contribute to the access to justice effort.

Provider Updates:

Wyoming Center for Legal Aid – Angie Dorsch, Executive Director of the Wyoming Center for Legal Aid, expressed appreciation for the funding that the Center receives through the state. She reported the following:

- In the first half of the grant cycle the appropriation from the state made it possible to help 1,700 people through services that are provided by the Center and its grantees. There continues to be an increase in the use of these services and in the need.
- The Legal Aid hotline, which is the central intake point, is funded through the Center's funding and operated by Legal Aid of Wyoming. During the first year of its operation, the number of people who were provided with advice and services increased by 314%. There was a 79% increase in the number of people who received the help of an attorney to litigate their case. As the hotline is made even more efficient, there will be an increase in its usage and in the number of cases that are litigated.
- Through the Center's four grantees (Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc., The Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the Teton County Access to Justice Center, and the Wyoming Children's Law Center) 175 cases were opened in the first two quarters of the grant cycle.
- During the last grant year, \$740,000 in funds were granted. The grant cycle was opened on March 14, 2014, and will receive applications through April 30, 2014.
- The Center has been working in-house to automate the Supreme Court's pro se forms. Automation of the first of the divorce packets is in the testing phase, and the Supreme Court's IT Department is working to set up a portal by June 1st. The forms should be available to the public by the end of June.

- Through collaborative relationships between organizations, offices have been opened and full-time legal aid attorneys have been employed in Rock Springs and Gillette.
- Private attorneys are being encouraged to offer limited scope representation to the public. Five trainings have been provided to attorneys across the state.
- With the help of the Wyoming State Bar and Legal Aid of Wyoming, efforts are being made to recruit attorneys for the “I’ll Do One” *pro bono* program.
- The Center, with the help of the Wyoming State Bar, held 16 *pro bono* events throughout the state last October to recognize National Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week. Attorneys provided free legal services to 120 individuals during those events.
- Rawlins held a *pro bono* event; the Center will continue to work with other local bar associations to do the same.
- The Center, with the assistance of the State Bar, has recruited 50 attorneys from across the state to help with the Veteran’s Assistance Program. This program provides assistance to veterans and military families.
- The Center is hoping to partner with organizations that hold job trainings and job placement for single parents, such as CLIMB Wyoming. This new initiative will provide education and outreach to individuals who have legal issues that are preventing them from finding employment.
- A *pro bono* portal was launched on the Center’s website on April 1st that contains a variety of resources for *pro bono* attorneys.
- The Center has been holding monthly Skype clinics since October, 2013 in underserved areas of Wyoming. There are remote access sites in Cody, Douglas, Evanston, Newcastle and Thermopolis that provide Skype consultations with a volunteer attorney to answer civil legal questions.

Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault – Rennie Polidora, a Staff Attorney at the Coalition (the umbrella organization for all of the safe houses around the state) reported the following:

- Their office has two staff attorneys and one paralegal who provide comprehensive legal services. Each staff attorney typically handles between 15-25 cases at one time—mostly family law cases. Most of the applications that they receive come from the safe houses. If a person is financially qualified, but the Coalition cannot handle the case, the individual is referred to Legal Aid of Wyoming.
- The Coalition is researching ways for the federal funding and the state funding they receive to complement each other.
- Goals: continue to collaborate with Legal Aid of Wyoming and the Wyoming Center for Legal Aid; conduct trainings for *pro bono* attorneys; locate *pro bono* attorneys who are willing to handle protection order hearings; continue to work closely with the UW Law School clinic; handle more housing and employment issues.

Legal Aid of Wyoming Update – Ray Machia, the Executive Director of Legal Aid of Wyoming, reported the following:

- Legal Aid of Wyoming now has five (5) offices: Cheyenne, Casper, Lander, Rock Springs, and Gillette. LAW hopes to open an office in Cody in the near future.
- In 2013 there were over \$80,000 in sequestration cuts. Many states are finding it necessary to cut staff and close offices, but with the Center’s assistance, LAW continues to grow. Forty percent of Legal Aid of Wyoming’s funding comes from the Center.
- In 2013 Legal Aid of Wyoming closed 4,181 cases—directly due to the hotline. If a hotline attorney assesses a case and decides that more extended services are needed, the case is placed with a staff attorney or a *pro bono* attorney. In the past two years the amount of cases that were taken as litigation cases has doubled. Cases that involve veterans and seniors receive the highest priority.
- The additional \$10 filing fee (indigent civil legal services fee) has made an incredible difference to Legal Aid of Wyoming and the people of this state.

Wyoming State Bar’s Pro Bono/Access Initiatives – Cathy Duncil, *Pro Bono* Coordinator at the Wyoming State Bar, reported the following:

- There are currently 91 volunteer attorneys in the Bar’s *pro bono* database, and the recruiting efforts continue. The Bar has funds available to reimburse attorneys for non-staff expenditures (postage, mileage, filing fees, copy costs) on *pro bono* cases.
- The State Bar now offers a number of free CLE programs to its members.
- The information for the “I’ll Do One” initiative is available on the Bar’s website. In the month of March there were 14 attorneys who signed up specifically for this program.

Commission Initiatives:

District Court Clerk Program – Ronda Munger, Deputy State Court Administrator, explained that this program’s main emphasis is to find ways to assist the clerks in communicating with pro se parties, and also to supply the clerks with informational materials that they can give to the public. She reported that recent revisions were made to the signage posted in each clerk’s office that indicates the types of assistance the clerks can and cannot give to litigants. The clerks have reviewed the signage and recommended that it be adopted in its new format. Tony Ross moved and Larry Wolfe seconded a motion requesting that the Board of Judicial Policy and Administration review and recommend that the new signage be adopted. Motion passed unanimously.

Requests from Wyoming Center for Legal Aid –

Discussion was held on landlord/tenant issues and attorney fee issues that the Center and Legal Aid of Wyoming have encountered while working on their cases. Discussion was held about what role the AJC

could possibly have in being a resource to help address procedural obstacles and general obstacles to the access to justice effort that are brought to light by the Center, LAW, and other grantees.

Discussion was held about the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association and its recent magazine's emphasis on access to justice issues. Justice Burke urged each member of the WTLA to make a commitment to provide representation to *pro bono* clients.

Future Plans:

Justice Burke informed the Commission members that Justice Kate Fox will now be the Chair of the Access to Justice Commission.

Meeting adjourned.