

ARKANSAS ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

In 2004, The Arkansas Supreme Court in response to a petition from the Arkansas Bar Association created the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission with a singular mission – *to provide equal access to justice in civil cases to all Arkansans.*

The Commission has accomplished a number of things to advance that mission:

- Conducted Congressional District based Town Hall Meetings to examine the status of civil legal aid for the poor,
- Produced a DVD, *Forging the Road to Civil Justice*, which outlines the needs and presents three client stories of work done by legal aid and pro bono attorneys,
- Surveyed Circuit Court judges [2005, 2008] and clerks [2005] regarding pro se litigants and ways the Commission could facilitate court efficiency and effectiveness,
- Recommended to the Supreme Court changes in Model Rule 6.1 to encourage increased pro bono participation,
- Developed on-line materials for pro bono volunteers and pro se litigants which provide court approved forms and automatic document assembly for various types of cases,
- Secured funding from the Legislature in 2005 and 2009 which annually brings over \$850,000 to support civil legal aid for low-income Arkansans.

These are having a significant impact on the provision of legal services to more of our fellow citizens. But, there is much more that needs to be accomplished. For example:

- 1 in 5 Arkansans qualify for free civil legal aid
- 50% of those who seek legal services have to be turned away because of limited staff
- IOLTA funding was halved in 2009 and will be non-existent in 2010
- Greater numbers of Arkansans will need free legal aid as the economy deteriorates

The Commission has identified an important way other states have increased the level of support for civil legal aid. Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington and Maine, among others, conduct an annual statewide “campaign for justice.” These programs do two things: **raise funds** to expand legal services and **raise pro bono volunteers** to take cases in conjunction with legal service programs. Both legal aid programs in Arkansas [Center for Arkansas Legal Services based in Little Rock, and Legal Aid of Arkansas based in Jonesboro] currently conduct their own campaigns. But the data from other states is clear; a single statewide campaign better educates the justice community, enhances funds raised, and expands the number of pro bono volunteers.

This is why the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission is launching this fall its first statewide effort called:

The Promise of Justice Campaign

We are here at the Arkansas Bar Meeting to share this important effort with you. If you would like to help out as a leader of your bar section or committee please go to the Commission website www.arkansasjustice.org and complete the volunteer information. Help us bring the *Promise of Justice* to more Arkansans.

Will Bond	Bill Brown	Judge Waymond Brown	Angela Duran	Nate Coulter
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George Shelton	Judge Jim Spears	Sen. Robert Thompson	Bill Waddell	Danyelle Walker
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