

**“WE WHO
BELIEVE IN
FREEDOM
CANNOT
REST UNTIL
IT COMES.”**

Ella Josephine Baker

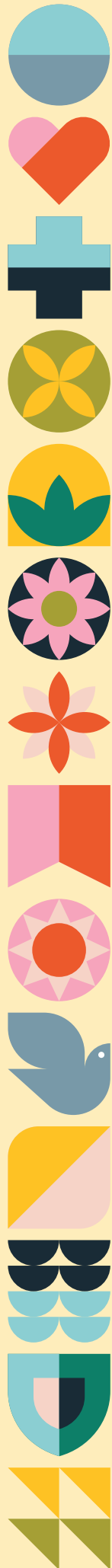
Access to Justice Board 2023 Annual Report



**“WE WHO
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TOO.”**

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Letter from the Chair

HELLO FRIENDS!

As I write this, Summer has given way to Fall and we are days away from our 2023 Access to Justice Conference, back in person after four years. This time before the conference is a very good time to review our work and our Board developments over the last year and the important items coming up in the very near future.



This has been an immensely productive time for the Access to Justice (ATJ) Board. We resumed our community visits with a trip to Wenatchee in April 2023. We have been hard at work fulfilling our statutory role to lead the selection of the next Office of Civil Legal Aid director. We have also been active with our internal equity work and supporting our Community Advisory Panel. And convening the statewide conference back in person will be a highlight for the Board and the community.

But more than those items, we have worked on developing our Board structure and programs into a more community-focused enterprise. Our origins have focused us on civil legal aid service delivery. But more and more our communities point out the need to break down the silos between civil and criminal legal issues, as incarceration has caused many civil collateral consequences. Our three-year old Community Advisory Panel, created as part of the racial reckoning after George Floyd's murder, has ceased to be a separate "think tank" and more of a part of the Board over the last year. Even the biannual conference has changed since 2019 to be more centered on community voices and less a lawyer-driven continuing legal education forum.

Last, but not least, our Supreme Court order requires us to have at least one non-lawyer member. We now have three. For community members to meaningfully participate, we must compensate members for their lived experience. The other seven Board members are judges and attorneys in various practices. All seven are

"covered" by their employers to serve on the Board and its committees. We cannot continue to expect the community members, who are financially in the least powerful positions, to donate their time and energy for the long haul. The Attorney General's request legislation, 2022 Senate Bill 5793, which was passed into law, addressed this issue for the Executive Branch. It is time that we, who are located in the Judicial branch, make the same headway. As the ATJ Board is the one with its finger on the pulse, we should be the ones to lead with this. And we are.

Ella Josephine Baker, civil rights icon, famously said, "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." To borrow from her, our mission can be summed up: we who believe in justice cannot rest until it comes, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Terry Price". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Terry J. Price
2022-24 Access to Justice Chair

Below are other reflections on a few of the access to justice issues for the 2022-23 year:

Selection of the Next Office of Civil Legal Aid Director

The long-time Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) Director, Jim Bamberger, announced in December 2022 his intention to retire in early 2024. Per RCW 2.53.020 and guidance from the Chief Justice, the ATJ Board, in concert with our Community Advisory Panel and the OCLA Oversight Committee, has been in the first-of-its-kind director search since the agency was formed. Four representatives from civil legal aid organizations have also served on the search committee and an OCLA staff member is *ex officio*.

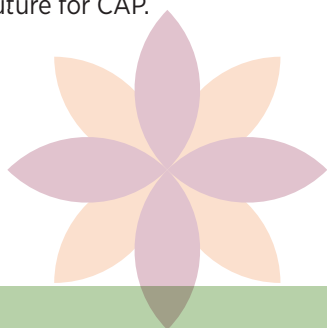
The search committee spent the Spring identifying a search firm. Now the search firm is in the process of community discovery and questioning as part of preparing for the job description for publication. The Fall will include interviews and selection of the three top finalists. We are on target to meet the Supreme Court's November 17 deadline to submit three candidates.

The logo for the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) features the letters 'OCLA' in a large, light blue, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized cross symbol composed of three overlapping squares: a light blue square at the top, a yellow square at the bottom, and a light green square on the right side.

ATJ Community Advisory Panel (CAP)

This past year has seen a dramatic shift in the Community Advisory Panel, from the “think tank” model where the members give information to the ATJ Board leaders who then transfer that information to the Board, to a more integrated model. In October 2022, the ATJ Board had its first post-Covid in-person retreat at Highline Community College. The ATJ Board, CAP members, and staff attended. This marked the first time that both groups met together. The results were powerful—not just for the relationship building, but because the community members want to know how ATJ Board actions were going to make things better on the ground in their neighborhoods. This was also the beginning of a discussion of the future for CAP.

CAP members also attended, online and in-person, our half-day retreat at the end of our time in Wenatchee (see next page). Again, there was great discussion about the future of CAP. The group has lasted for three years and has experienced recent changes in how it is facilitated. There are conversations about whether CAP should be folded into the ATJ Board and not exist as a separate entity. And whether CAP should have “deliverables” and not just be a “think tank.” We will continue these conversations at the ATJ Conference, as the final presentation will be a plenary about community advisory panels informing our work. We anticipate a great resurgence of energy into what we call CAP 2.0.

The text 'CAP 2.0' is displayed in a large, light purple, sans-serif font. The '2' is slightly smaller than the other characters.

Wenatchee

Access to Justice Board trip to Wenatchee, April 2023



ATJ Board and CAP members gather in Wenatchee

The ATJ Board visited Wenatchee at the end of April to meet with local legal services and community leaders, and to hold our monthly meeting in the community. We had not done that since 2019 in Richland, WA. The community in North Central Washington was extremely welcoming. We heard important things about the legal system on our trip, both from community members and civil legal service providers. From the community members:

- 1. “De-silo-ing legal services.”** When the community members have needs, they do not silo them into civil versus criminal needs. They have “legal needs.” The legal system’s way of creating silos works against the community members, requiring them to get multiple legal service providers to cover their different issues. The need to de-silo the provision of legal services in the communities was a story heard repeatedly and is part of a continuing effort we have discussed in our Delivery System Committee.
- 2. Scarcity of resources.** When the community has civil legal needs, it can be daunting getting those met. First, there are substantial language barriers in that community, as there are in many of the farming and ranching communities in Eastern Washington. Secondly, the legal

service providers are overwhelmed by the need. Community members end up going to social service agencies to get information about their legal issues. Many of these involve:

- a.** Housing (which is substantially limited in the area, to the point where people are willing to live in substandard housing provided by their employer just to be housed and remain employed).
- b.** Creditor/debtor (particularly with hospital bills sent to collection where the person would have qualified for uncompensated or charity care, if the hospital had done their duty to inform them)
- c.** The intersection of family law and immigration.

Some of the traditional means of getting service, such as calling the CLEAR line, are so overburdened that they cannot access any legal assistance that way. Community members end up at social service agencies (the YMCA, for example) to get explanations of legal documents. The social service providers can explain what a document is (like a jury summons) but they cannot tell a person what to do about it.





From the legal service providers, we heard their frustration with three issues:

- a. Inability to fill lawyer positions.** They were very clear with us—if you want to fill legal service provider positions in rural areas, there must be student loan repayment assistance. Nothing else will work as well. This dovetails with the WSBA Small Town and Rural Committee’s findings about provider shortages in less populated areas.
- b. The variety and inconsistency of local rules.** Providers in North Central WA serve six to ten counties. The variety and inconsistency of local rules makes their jobs incrementally harder. Any work to trim local rules or make them gel together would be appreciated by them.
- c. Multiple log-ins and passwords.** Like the plethora of inconsistent rules, the multiple log-ins and passwords for each county’s filing systems creates unnecessary hurdles and inefficiencies to filing cases.

Undocumented Communities Report

In addition to these takeaways from our Wenatchee trip, our Undocumented Communities subcommittee released its report this year as well. In the summer of 2022, the Access to Justice Board’s Delivery System Committee (DSCo) launched a [needs assessment of the undocumented community in Yakima Valley, Washington](#). The assessment examined demographic and economic data, the availability of legal services, the legal and structural inequities that harm the undocumented community, and recommendations for addressing barriers. Thirty-seven interviews with community members were conducted to get an overview of legal needs. For reference, Yakima is a community with a 1:667 lawyer-to-resident ratio, which is more than twice the statewide ratio of 1:294.

As we heard in Wenatchee, the report’s conclusions spoke to scarcity of resources and some ways to increase them, such as:

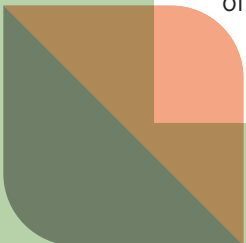
1. Strengthening the Washington Supreme Court Admissions and Practice Rule 6 (APR Rule 6 Law Clerk Program) and creating access to a Law School in Central Washington to grow the number of attorneys of color in these communities;
2. Revision of statute RCW 2.53.030 and generally removing restrictions on areas of law for which funding can be used; and
3. Reforming the statewide model for centralized intake and coordination of services through technology innovation and regional localization of access points.

Interestingly, the Yakima community hit on two other possible solutions to the scarcity of resources: Community Justice Workers and law clerks. Community Justice Workers would be trained paraprofessionals who could give some legal guidance. This would help, for instance, at the social service organization entry point. Or, instead of creating a new category of training, the report emphasized an existing pathway: APR 6 law clerks. The issue is not only finding professionals but finding and retaining those professionals who have ties to the community, and preferably are bilingual. Expanding Rule 6 law clerk programs would be one way to address this need.

Addressing the civil legal needs of the undocumented community continues to be a priority for the Access to Justice Board. In the coming year, the Board will further explore the [primary recommendations](#) in the needs assessment and advocate for increased resources to the undocumented community throughout the state.

Regardless of how it is accomplished, Washington is nearing a crisis with legal service delivery in rural communities. Of note, neither this report from Yakima nor the Wenatchee community representatives recommended a telehealth model. The primary issue is a lack of “personal touch. The communities must feel they can trust the provider, which is incrementally harder via technology. And accessing a “tele-legal” service when there is no broadband or a personal cell phone makes it that much more difficult, if not impossible.

Undocumented Communities



CONFERENCE

Reflecting on the 2023 Access to Justice Conference

The 2023 Access to Justice Conference has come and gone, leaving in its wake a profound impact on all who participated. This biennial event brought together an inspiring mix of community members, legal system advocates, judges, attorneys, and policymakers from across Washington State, united by a shared commitment to dismantling legal systems of oppression and poverty.



Logo artwork provided by Consuelo Soto Murphy

Under the theme ***Shifting Justice Towards Accountability and Trust***, the conference served as a testament to our collective dedication to fostering justice, accountability, and trust within our legal systems. As we reflect on the event, we are reminded of the pledge made by all involved in this system—to be accountable to and build trust with the communities we serve.



Keynote Speaker Spotlight: Representative Jamila Taylor

One of the conference's highlights was the keynote address delivered by Representative Jamila Taylor from Washington's 30th Legislative District. Representative Taylor, an attorney, youth advocate, and small business owner, shared her insights and experiences, inspiring attendees with her dedication to social justice. She addressed the importance of us all working together across sectors and amplifying the voices of communities closest to the problem.





A Dynamic Learning Journey: Conference Agenda

The conference agenda was a dynamic tapestry of sessions and activities that provided valuable insights and opportunities for collaboration. Attendees had the chance to explore the diverse range of sessions, both in person and virtually. The Welcome Ceremony included a land acknowledgment from our friends with the Puyallup Tribe, which included an invitation to visit their tribal home and learn more about their people and culture. Throughout the conference, breakout sessions touched on housing and homelessness, immigration, youth justice, gender justice, community-centered advocacy, trauma-informed services, the school to prison pipeline, criminal justice reform, education access, accessibility, and more. The three days were capped off with an inspiring panel discussion and call to action from members of community advisory panels about how organizations can be in right relationship with system-impacted people and hold themselves accountable to community leadership.



Accessibility at the Core

At the heart of the Access to Justice Conference was a steadfast commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. We recognized that true progress towards justice demands that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, should have the opportunity to participate and contribute. To actualize this commitment, we implemented a sliding scale registration system, ensuring that attendees could select the registration level that best suited their financial situation. We were able to make the event accessible by awarding over 75 scholarships, thanks to generous sponsors.

Our comprehensive registration form was designed to capture individual needs, enabling us to tailor the conference experience to accommodate a wide range of requirements.

Every aspect of the event, from virtual participation options and snack boxes for remote attendees to making it a fully masked in-person event to center attendees who may be more susceptible to health issues, was meticulously considered to make the conference as accessible and inclusive as possible. We also offered various quiet spaces for attendees to take time away from the conference to reflect, build community and decompress. We believe that by prioritizing accessibility, we strengthen our collective mission to shift justice towards accountability and trust.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE CONFERENCE



Virtual Attendees' Experience Enhanced

Virtual attendees were not left out of the conference experience. Virtual participants had the opportunity to join sessions in real-time via Zoom meetings and earn Continuing Legal Education credits.

Livestreams of select sessions, including the Welcome session on Thursday, the Access to Justice Awards and the Keynote on Friday, and

the Closing Plenary on Saturday, allowed virtual attendees to engage with the event as if they were there in person.

The event app provided a platform for online discussions, networking, and scheduling meet-ups, fostering connections and community-building among attendees, both on-site and virtually.



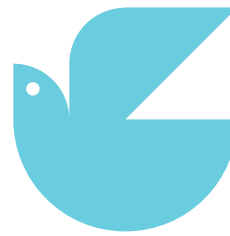
Community Allies: Partners in Justice

The conference was honored to partner with organizations dedicated to social justice:

- **La Resistencia:** A grassroots organization led by undocumented immigrants, La Resistencia fights to end the detention of immigrants and stop deportations.
- **FlyStart Foundation:** This organization provides mentorship and support to incarcerated artists and at-risk youth, fostering artistic talent and hope for the future.
- **Puyallup Tribe:** Angeline Totus, Yelkie Bill, Victoria Horrell, Vince Kenyon with the Puyallup Tribe people offered a poignant land acknowledgment that paid homage to their ancestral villages and their connection to the land on which we gathered.

These partnerships exemplify the conference's commitment to collaboration and solidarity in the pursuit of justice.

As we reflect on the 2023 Access to Justice Conference, we are reminded that our journey towards justice is one of continuous learning and growth. The event has reaffirmed our collective strength and resolve to shift justice towards accountability and trust. Together, we will continue to work tirelessly to effect change and create a more just and equitable world.



The Access to Justice Conference by the Numbers

1st

ever hybrid
Access to Justice
Conference

50%

of attendees identified
as Black, Indigenous,
and other People of Color

492

in person
registered
attendance

16%

of attendees
were from non-legal
community partners

122

virtual
registered
attendance

84%

of sessions highlighted
voices from people with
lived experience with
the legal system

AWARDS



Celebrating Our Partners

The Access to Justice Board honors colleagues and partners who promote access to justice through their leadership, courage, and innovation by presenting the Access to Justice Awards. The deserving individuals and organizations were honored during the Access to Justice Conference. Please join us in thanking the award recipients for their dedication and commitment to justice and equity!

Access to Justice Judicial Leadership Award



The Honorable George Fearing is recognized as a member of the judiciary who has shown significant leadership in improving access to the justice system. Judge Fearing demonstrated courage and conviction in his Division III Court of Appeal's dissent in the case of *State v. Vaile*. In his 60-page concurrence in part and dissent in part, Judge Fearing meticulously outlined how the case "presents a primer on racial prejudice inside America's justice system" and detailed how racial bias permeated the process. Judge Fearing wrote, "...I unreservedly side with the Washington Supreme Court that an appellate judge should base decisions on the assumption that racial prejudice continues to unfairly impact racial and ethnic minorities. I conclude with the Supreme Court that history objectively establishes a long saga of racism that continues to impact decision making in America's judicial system." We applaud Judge Fearing for using his platform to spotlight the necessity for judges to identify and eradicate racism from the courts.

Access to Justice Partnership Award

The Mockingbird Society is recognized as a community-based, grassroots organization that has collaborated with Alliance members and provided leadership in serving current and former foster youth. The Mockingbird Society engages youth and young adults who have experienced foster care and homelessness to lead the efforts to reform systems, end homelessness, develop their full and powerful selves, and change narratives about who these young people are. The youth prepare a policy agenda year after year that is focused on improving the economic opportunities they need to successfully move forward from experiences of homelessness and foster care. They champion housing options, supportive family connections, creative solutions to overcome the stigma of juvenile court involvement, and ideas

that help to heal young people from traumatic experiences stemming from system involvement and economic hardship. Young people, through the Mockingbird network, develop the policy agenda, seek input and collaboration



from partners in the legal, social service, and government communities, testify on their own behalf to advance bills, and talk to media and the public about why their agenda is vital to the success of youth across the state.

Access to Justice Advocacy Award



Maureen Janega is recognized for her outstanding work as an advocate in furtherance of the promise of equal justice for those who face economic and other significant barriers. Maureen is a paralegal with the Institutions Project at Columbia Legal Services. Maureen has been an integral part in providing access to legal services for people residing in mental institutions, nursing homes, jails, juvenile detention facilities, and prisons since 1985. She provides a connection to our legal system for people who are outside it and struggle to obtain legal assistance due to the barriers created by institutionalization. Moreover, Maureen is an incredible advocate. She has been an essential part in cases to ensure humane conditions in our state's institutions, upholding the Constitution and fight for humane treatment. She has been the rock and support in federal and state class action litigation including overcrowding, ensuring prisoners with disabilities were protected from discrimination, providing equal access to services for men and woman prisoners, ending the overuse of restraints on children and adults, obtaining necessary medical care, securing access to

law libraries, securing educational services for children in institutions, and ensuring safety for people in prison during the current COVID epidemic. She has worked on cases to end overlong sentences including complex procedural work on personal restraint petitions and habeas corpus filings to release prisoners unjustly held.

Access to Justice Leadership Award



Elizabeth Fitzgeard is recognized for her efforts in helping to build and promote a statewide, integrated, non-duplicative civil legal aid delivery system that is responsive to the needs of low-income Washingtonians. In her role as Executive Director of Clark County Volunteer Lawyers (CCVL) Program, Elizabeth has grown the organization into the bustling legal aid office it is today. Under Elizabeth's leadership the CCVL has grown to assist with: Right to Counsel in eviction cases, housing justice work, Survivor Support relating to domestic violence, a new Indigenous Legal Services Program, Community Court, and Court Navigation program. The growth of CCVL in recent years has allowed them to expand services and help in more substantive ways, as well as aided in establishing credibility as a legal aid firm in the community and local courts. Elizabeth's tireless work in seeking out applicable grants and composing thoughtful and articulate proposals paved the way for this expansion. Elizabeth is also passionate about expanding language access and has created a culture of language accessibility. Additionally, her care for staff has created

an environment that values kindness, honesty, and consideration of others. This has included creating opportunities for staff to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being. The staff of CCVL speak very highly of Elizabeth's positive influence on the culture of the organization.



Leadership

Access to Justice Community Leadership Award



Vanna Sing is recognized for playing a strategic, significant, and courageous leadership role in improving access to the justice system. Vanna founded the nonprofit Tacoma Healing Awareness Community (THAC) to disrupt the cycle of systemic/internalized oppression in Southeast Asians as well as other ethnic groups in Tacoma and surrounding communities. THAC's vision is to empower and support youth, families, and individuals in need by providing tools and resources. Vanna is a grassroots leader committed to serving the cause of human rights and human dignity. Here are just a few examples of the ways Vanna shows up for her community:

- Organizing an event to dismantle the school to prison pipeline where students receive backpacks, school supplies, books and more; advocating for special needs students.
- Organizing a Khmer Refugee Deportation Town Hall and an Immigration & Naturalization Town Hall.
- Supporting families facing deportation and incarceration from new immigration laws.
- Supporting groups addressing domestic violence awareness and women's empowerment.

Vanna sometimes appears in court to support people navigating the system. Other times she provides a meal for families to share their stories and get advice and support from each other. Vanna also regularly shares her own story as a genocide survivor from Cambodia and her path to becoming a community leader—serving

as an example for other emerging community leaders. Vanna envisions an equitable community with engaged individuals, working together to improve the health and well-being of all community members.

Community Leadership



Access to Justice Community Leadership Award



A WAY HOME
WASHINGTON

A Way Home Washington (AWHWA) is recognized for playing a strategic, significant, and courageous leadership role in improving access to the justice system. AWHWA is a statewide movement to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness, with a focus on prioritizing young people of color and LGBTQ+ young people who experience homelessness at higher rates than their white, straight, cisgender peers. AWHWA's flagship program, the Anchor Community Initiative (ACI), supports communities in identifying and implementing innovative services and strategies needed to effectively end youth homelessness, informed directly by young people with lived experience of homelessness and other community

stakeholders. The Anchor Community Initiative encourages communities to take a holistic look at services needed, as housing alone will not solve homelessness. AWHWA recognizes the essential role that legal aid can play in resolving housing instability for young people and pushes the boundaries to what wraparound support means for this population. In addition to direct services, AWHWA and its ACI community partners and young people are also invested in providing legal education to the community, increasing awareness of rights and system navigation.

Norm Maleng Leadership Award

Jointly given by the Access to Justice Board and Washington State Bar Association, this award honors Norm Maleng's legacy of innovative and optimistic leadership, love of the law, and commitment to diversity and mentorship.



Tahmina Watson is recognized as someone who embodies these characteristics as an influential member of the equal justice community. Tahmina, 2022-2023 President of the King County Bar Association, has emerged as a highly accomplished leader among Washington immigration lawyers, spearheading numerous projects to assist immigrants who would otherwise lack legal assistance. Among many projects, she helped create:

- Airport Lawyer, a web portal to help passengers held by Customs and Border Protection to connect with volunteer attorneys.
- Co-founded WIDEN, (Washington Immigration Defense Network).
- Worked with CAIR-WA (the Washington Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations) to create a legal clinic to help at-risk Afghans.

She is a prolific writer-educator, who authored two books and works as a columnist for Above the Law, writing monthly thought pieces on trending immigration issues. Her opinion pieces have been published in the Seattle Times, Huffington Post, Yes! Magazine, and Scary Mommy, to name a few.

Norm Maleng Leadership Award

CAP

Empowering Change: The Access to Justice Community Advisory Panel's Journey

In the pursuit of justice and equity, we often hear the mantra, “Change moves at the speed of trust.” Over the past year, the Access to Justice Board’s Community Advisory Panel (CAP) has embodied this principle as they navigated the challenging landscape of advocating for true justice and equity in our communities. CAP is a beacon of inspiration, information, and meaningful change, ensuring that the commitments made by the ATJ Board in their 2020 racial justice call and commitment to action are not mere words, but actionable steps towards progress.

Over the past year, the CAP has achieved milestones and carried out impactful activities:

Space for Sharing and Celebrating: The CAP has provided a safe space for sharing community experiences and personal and professional accomplishments. Here, members celebrate each other’s successes and amplify their voices.

Effective Administration: CAP has diligently worked to refine its administration, with the generous support of a grant from the Legal Foundation to cover lived experience stipends and expenses. This past year, CAP initiated discussions on leadership, priority setting, and integration into the Access to Justice Board, ensuring that community voices are not only heard but also influential.

Widening the Door: Recognizing the need for fresh perspectives, the CAP has embarked on a recruitment plan to expand its membership and bring in additional diverse voices and experiences.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities: The CAP is grappling with the question of whether it should engage in specific projects or continue its role as an advisory space. This introspection ensures that its purpose remains aligned with its goals.

Insights and Impact: CAP members have been strategically positioned in leadership roles that impact the broader Alliance for Equal Justice. Their presence on committees and panels has created opportunities for community voices to be heard and integrated into decision-making processes. This has included service on the OCLA Director Search Committee and offering feedback and guidance on issues like de-siloing the civil-criminal legal systems and updating forms for post-conviction relief.

Bridging the Gap: An all-day retreat in October 2022 brought both the ATJ Board and CAP together, enhancing relationships and revealing opportunities for deeper collaboration. CAP members encouraged the ATJ Board to think outside of the box and consider innovative, community-centric strategies for pursuing justice.

Unity of Purpose: CAP continues to inspire, agitate, educate, collaborate, and take actions that unite individuals in the pursuit of equity and justice. Their commitment to empowering voices from the community underscores the interconnected reality of oppressive systems. Several CAP members partnered with the QLaw Foundation to present a plenary at the Access to Justice Conference about how community advisory board can hold organization accountable and build stronger movements.

The Community Advisory Panel underscores the vital importance of lived experience in advising and decision-making processes. Their presence ensures that the reality of marginalized communities is at the forefront of the pursuit of justice and equity. Together, they are building a future where trust, change, and justice move hand in hand, illuminating a path towards a more inclusive and equitable world. The Board is still learning how to integrate and amplify the leadership of the CAP while seeking to cultivate continued relationship building and power sharing.

The inclusion of CAP in our work as a Board challenges the traditional role the community has played in our legal system. That role has been to stand in the shadows while legal professionals, along with the legislature, define the problem or issue, then come up with and implement solutions. Historically, this has not worked for those most impacted. Building understanding, respect, and an awareness that community members are best equipped to tell us what the problems are and the best way to address them is an uphill endeavor but we must continue to make this paradigm shift.



Members of the Community Advisory Panel and Access to Justice Board members gather for a day-long retreat.

*“Change moves
at the speed of trust.”*

Hallmarks

A Decade Later, the Access to Justice Board Reimagines its Commitment with Community-Led Hallmarks

Since 2014, the Alliance for Equal Justice and Access to Justice Board have been guided by the vision and values outlined in the Hallmarks for Equal Justice. These Hallmarks, crafted in 2014 by dedicated legal aid attorneys, aimed to make Washington State’s legal system fair, effective, and inclusive.

Nearly a decade later, we’ve gained deeper insights into what these ideals mean to the communities we serve and whether we’ve lived up to our promise. In the wake of the 2020 racial reckoning, the global pandemic, and growing poverty, the Alliance and Access to Justice Board continue to navigate a paradigm shift, seeking leadership from those closest to the issues to shape our future vision and goals. We’ve asked ourselves if the Hallmarks still adequately reflect our direction or if the community we serve can guide us toward a new vision.

In the past year, the Access to Justice Board has invested significantly in a comprehensive and inclusive community outreach plan to gather input on our vision and values. Under the guidance of the consulting firm JLP Solutions, we’re concluding a nearly year-long process that places individuals and communities with lived experience at the heart of the conversation. An advisory committee has taken the lead in visiting communities across the state, especially those with the least access to legal resources, to understand their priorities for the legal aid system. This outreach has included in-person listening sessions and widespread distribution of online surveys to civil legal aid clients, legal service providers, and other community advocates. We’ve inquired whether the current legal aid system adequately serves their communities and, if not, where the Alliance and Board should focus to enhance access to civil legal aid, among other questions.



JLP Solutions hosts a table at the Access to Justice Conference to gather broad community input on the revised Hallmarks

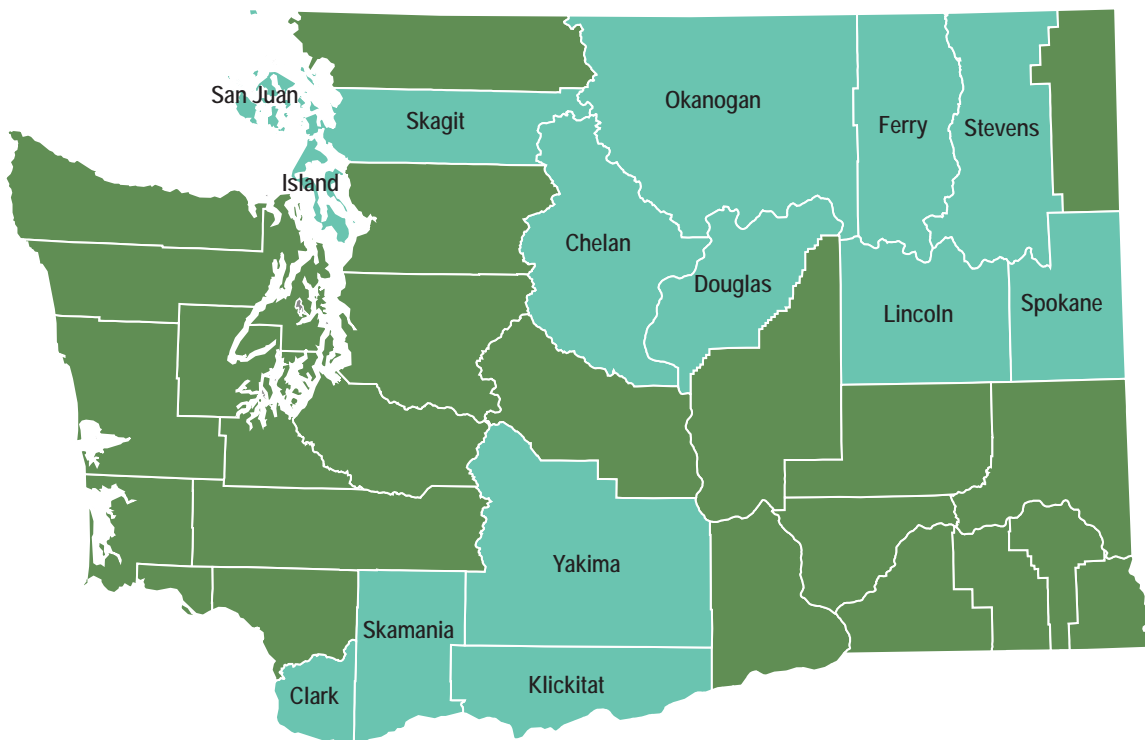
KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS EFFORT INCLUDE:

- The need to update the language and tone of the original Hallmarks.
- The recognition that the original Hallmarks lacked inclusivity.
- Acknowledgment that many of the Hallmarks remain unaccomplished.
- A critical understanding that rural communities are severely underserved and underrepresented.
- The importance of prioritizing diversity among service providers in the broader legal and justice ecosystem.

The advisory committee and JLP Solutions have gathered a wealth of input and will draft a new set of Hallmarks for adoption by the Access to Justice Board in the fall of 2023. A comprehensive report of our findings will also be made available, providing a dataset that can inform and educate the entire legal community.

Revisiting the Hallmarks represents the first step in a broader process to build a more robust coalition of legal aid providers and community representatives. Once we establish our new vision and values, the Access to Justice Board intends to invest resources in updating the State Plan for the Coordinated Delivery of Civil Legal Aid through a community-led process.

The advisory committee prioritized visits to communities across the state with the least access to services, conducting listening sessions in these areas:



Internal Equity Workgroup

Advancing Equity: ATJ Board's Commitment to Community-Centered Change

The Access to Justice Board's Internal Equity Workgroup has focused on how to live the values of courageous advocacy and leadership and hold ourselves accountable to the communities most impacted by the civil legal system. The ATJ Board is committed to putting into practice these values to ensure we value our different lived experiences and identities that inform how we approach this work, build a culture of reflection, learning, and belonging as we move forward in this work together.

With the recommendations from JustLead Washington's organization equity assessment, the Internal Equity Workgroup has identified five organizational equity areas for growth:

- Building capacity and competency in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Creating a culture of healing and belonging.
- Recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce.
- Developing accountability to and partnership with communities most impacted by poverty, racism, and other forms of oppression.
- Applying an equity lens to programs, operations, and decision-making.

The ATJ Board has worked to address these equity areas throughout the year. We adopted community agreements which focus on relationships, trust, understanding and practicing self-reflection at our ATJ Board retreat. We include the practice of personal check-ins, gratitude practice, and grounding exercise at the start of each monthly ATJ Board meeting which centers us in relationship-building, trust, and purpose.

This spring, the ATJ Board facilitated community meetings in Wenatchee to learn about the barriers to the civil legal system and how the Board can advocate for communities throughout Washington state. While we were in Wenatchee, the ATJ Board joined the Wenatchee community in this annual march against racism.

The ATJ Board continues to center the voices of communities with lived experiences by including Community Advisory Panel members in ATJ Board retreat and meetings. Saleena Salango, a WSBA Equity and Justice Lead, presented two trainings and facilitated two discussions about how the Board can center community voices and representation on the ATJ Board.

Earlier this year, the ATJ Board committed to hold ourselves accountable to the communities most impacted by the civil legal system by compensating people with lived experience and including community voices on the ATJ Board. We are actively working to find funding for this compensation and are drafting a proposed policy to present to our funders so that others working with the community will commit to paying people for their expertise.

INTERNAL EQUITY WORKGROUP

We will continue to build relationships with our community partners to ensure we live up to our mission to achieve equal access for those facing economic and significant barriers to the legal system. We are also committed to developing a relational culture of healing and belonging that will improve access to justice for all.

ATJ Board participates in the Stand Against Racism rally in Wenatchee



Bridging the Digital Divide: The Role of the ATJ Technology Committee

Members of the Technology Committee serve as the Access to Justice Board's liaisons to various court technology groups and organizations, such as the Superior Court User Work Group, Courts of Limited Jurisdiction User Work Group, Judicial Information Systems Committee, JISC's Data Dissemination Committee, and the Practice of Law Board.

The Technology Committee also serves as an unofficial clearinghouse for technology related issues. It serves as a forum for interested community members to:

- Identify emerging issues.
- Exchange information.
- Utilize the collective experience of the committee to determine the potential impacts of emerging issues and determine the best institutions to alert to those impacts.
- Collaboratively engage in advocacy work.

Two examples of the Technology Committee's work in this role over the last year are:

- Identifying an emerging issue when the public and legal profession lost the ability to search for existing case records when the publicly accessible portion of the Odyssey case search system was temporarily disabled for security reasons. The ability to perform a simple and free name-based case records search had been used extensively by the public to complete *Blake*-related, guardianship, and other court pleadings. The Technology Committee communicated the impacts of the issue to the Administrative Office of the Courts and worked collaboratively to resolve the issue and monitor its progress.
- Identifying the potential benefits of coordinating the existing and time-tested Washington Law Help resources (that use an interview to automatically fill in and complete pleadings for self-represented litigants) with the Administrative Office of the Court's creation of a program to purchase and develop resources for a commercial product that offers a similar service.

The Technology Committee also updates and advocates for the application of the Technology Principles (adopted & approved by the Court in 2020) to ensure that the adoption of new technologies and their associated court procedures result in an equal opportunity to access and use the justice system.

An example of the Technology Committee's work in this role over the last year has been to provide a diverse perspective for updates to General Rule 30. GR 30 sets the standards for when a party may use an electronic signature and what qualifies as an electronic signature. The Technology Committee has worked to ensure that all parties can enjoy the benefits and improved accessibility of electronic signatures by advocating for people who may not be able to afford expensive notary-grade signature verification software, who may have limited access to the internet, and who only have a mobile phone as their computer.

Technology

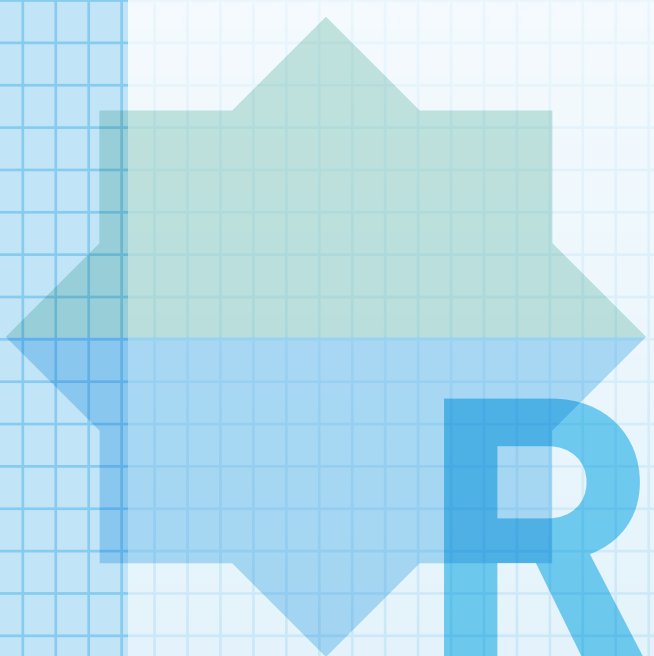
The Rules Committee's Role in Removing Barriers

The Court has tasked the Access to Justice Board with addressing “existing and proposed laws, rules, and regulations that may adversely affect meaningful access to the civil justice system.” The Rules Committee makes recommendations for ATJ Board comment on proposed court rules or considers new court rules when necessary to implement Board policy. This committee comprises members from both the civil legal aid community, private bar, and government.

The Committee's tasks are derived from various sources, including the Court, committee members, the Washington State Bar Association, and the civil legal aid community. In 2023, the Committee went beyond state court rules by corresponding with a local district court in response to a request from the civil legal aid community. Their objective was to express concern about a proposed local rule change that would require unrepresented litigants to “observe the formality consistent with good courtroom practice.”

As another example of their proactive approach, the Committee expressed support for proposed changes to the Rules of Professional Conduct and Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct. These changes aimed to increase funding for civil legal aid.

The Committee remains steadfast in its commitment to support initiatives that ensure Washington's vulnerable populations with civil legal needs receive assistance and are not impeded by court rules.



Rules

Pro Bono Council

Advancing Access to Justice: Statewide Pro Bono Council's Year of Impact

The mission of the Statewide Pro Bono Council is to further access to justice by supporting and advocating on behalf of the Volunteer Lawyer Programs (VLPs) in Washington State. In the last year, we had a full in-person meeting of the PBC and redeveloped our PBC Priorities to better fit our current efforts and goals.

Building a Better Pro Bono Council

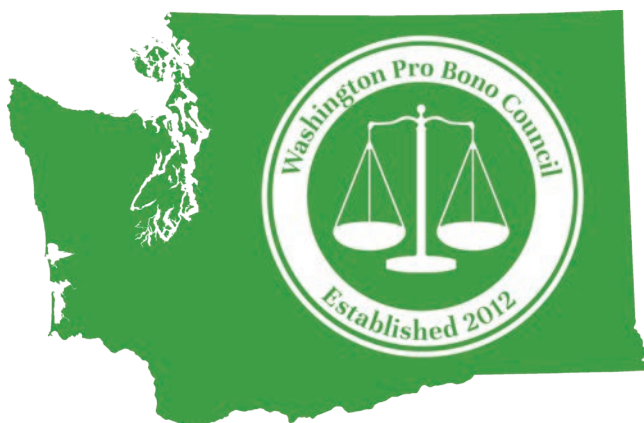
Pro Bono Council spent several weeks on a PBC Priorities review and redraft project which culminated in an in-person PBC retreat in Wenatchee. The new PBC Priorities serve as a guidepost for PBC staff and help focus our time and efforts towards what is most useful for PBC members and their clients.

The priorities concentrate our efforts into two main areas: supporting our programs and their clients and supporting the Alliance and the ATJ Community.

Implementing Better Intake—For Legal Aid Staff and For Clients

Two major trainings produced over the last year focused on streamlining and standardizing client intake. This not only improves our demographic and client information but also creates a better client experience. In collaboration with NJP we created one hour of training covering client income eligibility guidelines and rules, and one hour of training covering the newly implemented client demographic questions.

These new video guides on best practices are immensely helpful for VLP staff training and will significantly increase the quality of client interactions during intake.



Recognition for Good Work Done!

Pro Bono Council Members and their staff received numerous awards and recognition over the last year.

Awards received this year include:

- **Access to Justice Board's 2023 Access to Justice Leadership Award:** Elizabeth Fitzgearld, Executive Director, Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program (CCVLP)
- **Clark County Bar Association's Dean Langsdorf Family Law Attorney of the Year:** Marla Rapp, Survivor Support Staff Attorney, CCVLP
- **Nonprofit Network of Southwest Washington's Nonprofit Excellence Volunteer Program Award:** Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program
- **Snohomish County Bar Association's 2022 Attorney of the Year for Outstanding Community Service:** Jane Pak, Executive Director, Snohomish County Legal Services
- **Yakima Herald Republic's Readers Choice Best of Best Nonprofit:** Yakima Volunteer Attorney Services
- **Central WA Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit Latina leader:** Jessica Mendez, Housing Justice Project Manager, Yakima Volunteer Attorney Services
- **Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association Community Service Award for "Distinguished Agency":** Tacomaprobono
- **WSBA APEX Pro Bono Award:** Michael Goldenkranz, longtime King County Bar Association Clinic Volunteer
- **Access to Justice Board's Promoter of Justice Award:** Chelan-Douglas County Volunteer Attorney Services

While formal recognition represents only a small fraction of the work of VLPs, awards from our communities are truly gratifying.

Dementia Advanced Legal Planning

Pro Bono Council continued to host the statewide Dementia Legal Planning Program. We saw consistent growth in both volunteers and client services. Outreach efforts focused on connecting with local senior centers, senior communities, and tabling at community events.

With an influx in client interest from across the state, we now operate 2 regular clinics in King County, plus clinics around the state on a rotating basis. We also engage the legal community through CLE events, connecting with local law firms, and collaborating with community partners to find more ways to reach marginalized clients and better serve our older population.

Service Numbers

17,370 hours of volunteer legal services provided.

1,505 volunteers engaged statewide.

19,259 total clients provided with no cost legal services.

Events and Activities



Yakima VAS staff received the Yakima Herald-Republic nonprofit of the year award.



Chelan-Douglas Volunteer Attorney Services community outreach team



Clark County VLP Team with Survivor Support Program attorney Marla Rapp, who received the 2023 Dean Langsdorf Family Law Attorney of the Year Award



Skagit Legal Aid legal clinic in Concrete, Washington



Pro Bono Council members at the PBC Retreat in Wenatchee, meeting in-person for the first time in years!

Equal Justice Coalition Update

The EJC is a committee of the ATJ Board that is managed and funded by Legal Foundation of Washington. Its purpose is to advocate for public funding for civil legal aid. Staffed by the Legal Foundation of Washington’s Communications and Advocacy Director, the EJC works with contract lobbyists as well as elected officials, Alliance for Equal Justice partners, and stakeholders.

State Funding

During the 2023 legislative session, the EJC supported the Office of Civil Legal Aid’s 2023-25 biennial budget request by focusing on basic civil legal aid services, including the vendor rate adjustment for the Northwest Justice Project and subcontracted volunteer attorney and specialty legal aid providers. The request was vital to protecting existing client service capacity. Throughout the session, EJC lobbyists and several advocates met with legislators to communicate this message and gain support for the request.

At the end of session, the House and Senate budget conferees recommended passage of the FY 24-25 operating budget proposal, which included the \$4.401M for the basic civil legal aid vendor rate adjustment. This fully funded the requested amount to address the needs mentioned above.



EJC

Equal Justice Coalition members and staff visit Washinton D.C. for the ABA’s Annual Lobby Day.



Federal Funding

In FY 2023, Congress appropriated \$560 million for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), increasing its budget by \$71 million over the previous year's funding level. In March 2023, LSC requested an appropriation of \$1.5 billion for its FY 2024 budget. And for the second year in a row, the Biden administration put forward the largest ever White House request for LSC's budget: \$800 million, topping its FY 2023 recommendation by \$100 million.

This year, the EJC resumed its annual trip to Washinton D.C. for the first time in-person since 2019 for the American Bar Association's Annual Lobby Days event. At the end of March, the EJC traveled to D.C. with a group of advocates including LFW Board of Trustees members, EJC staff, and the Executive Director of the Northwest Justice Project. The group had an eventful trip, meeting with all 12 offices of Washington's Members of Congress, including meetings with staff members and meetings with Senator Maria Cantwell, Rep. Suzan DelBene, and Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez. The purpose of the trip was to solidify and gain support to increase funding for LSC. During each meeting the group asked for support of the Biden administration's request to increase LSC's funding to \$800 million.

In July 2023, the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee released a proposed budget for FY 2024 that would cut LSC's funding by \$71 million to \$489 million. This proposed budget would have a devastating impact on civil legal aid throughout the United States. However, the Senate appropriations committee released an FY 2024 budget that keeps LSC funding at \$560 million, reflecting the compromise embedded in the Debt Ceiling Agreement to fund the federal government at the FY 2023 level.



Equal Justice Coalition members and staff meet with Rep. Suzan DelBene.

Leadership

2022-2023 ATJ BOARD MEMBERS

Esperanza Borboa
Jeremiah Bourgeois
Michael Chin
Hon. Frederick P. Corbit
Brynn Felix

Hon. David S. Keenan
Michelle Lucas
Terry J. Price, Chair
Vanna Sing
Hon. Jane Smith

COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

Jordan Chaney
Andre Dwayne Henderson
Karyn Kameroff
Carol Caliyah Mitchell

Marissa Perez
Yonas Seifu
Angel Tomeo Sam
Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter

STAFF

Diana Singleton
WSBA Chief Equity and Justice Officer

Nicholas Mejia
Equity and Justice Program Coordinator

Bonnie M. Sterken
WSBA Equity and Justice Lead

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Access to Justice Board would not be able to accomplish its work without the dedication and support of its many committee volunteers.

The Board is grateful to the support and guidance of its standing committees over the past year.

COMMITTEES AND CHAIRS

Access to Justice Conference Planning Committee:

Jenae Ball and Esperanza Borboa

Delivery System Committee:

Michael Terasaki and Terry Price

Equal Justice Coalition:

Kara Masters

Pro Bono Council:

Eloise Barshes and Elizabeth Fitzgearld

Rules Committee:

Hon. David Keenan and Chris Durban

Technology Committee:

Brynn Felix and
Stephen Seely

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