

Presentation to the Judicial Council



*Justice Gail Ruderman Feuer,
Vice-Chair*

*Jack Londen,
Executive Director*

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History of the Access Commission

- In 1996, the Access Commission was established under the auspices of the State Bar of California to be bridge among lawyers, judges, and other stakeholders.
- The State Bar provided staff until 2019, when the Access Commission separated from the Bar due to changes in the Bar's mission and operations. Since then, the Access Commission has operated as a non-profit public benefit corporation.
- In 2023, the Legislature enacted [Government Code sections 68655-68659](#), codifying the Access Commission's authority, purpose, and structure.
- The Commission's appointing entities reflect the broad range of access to justice stakeholders. The Judicial Council appoints three Commissioners.

California Judges' Involvement

- Justices Earl Johnson, Jr. and Laurie Zelon were lead authors of the 1996 report that led to creation of the California Access Commission and served as initial Chairs and, along with other bench officers, as members of the Commission.
- Supreme Court Justices Goodwin Liu and Martin Jenkins have served as Commissioners, and Justice Kelli Evans is a current Commissioner. Six Court of Appeal Justices and over 25 Superior Court Judges have served on the Access Commission.
- California Justices and Judges continue to have significant leadership roles. Justices and Judges have been Chairs or Vice-Chairs of the Commission, and many more have led our Committees.

Our Work on Access to Courts

Accomplishments include:

- **1990s:**
 - Supported the Judicial Council in establishing the Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants
 - Supported establishment of the Self-Help website and funding of family law facilitators, then Self-Help Centers.
- **2005:** Language Access Report
- **2015:** Support for Judicial Council's 2015 Language Access Plan
- **2020:** Report on Remote Hearings and Access to Justice During COVID-19
- **2021:** Pilot unlawful detainer mediation program.
- **2024:** Issue Brief: Access to the Record in California Trial Court Proceedings

Our Work on Access to Courts

Current work includes:

- Continuing work to address other barriers to access to the record of court proceedings:
 - The underfunded Transcript Reimbursement Fund (which does not cover transcripts from electronic recording).
 - Possible improvements to forms and processes for SRLs to obtain a court reporter or transcript
 - Continuing support for remote court proceedings conducted to facilitate access to justice.
- Continuing support for adequate funding for California Courts and for Self-Help Centers.

Our Work on Access to Lawyers

Accomplishments include:

- **1999:** Advocacy for creation of the Equal Access Fund to provide grants to legal aid organizations; funding with over \$500 million over last 20 years.
- **1990s on:** Advocacy and practice guides for affordable, limited scope legal representation for moderate-income clients.
- **2009:** Planning and advocacy, with others, for the Shriver Civil Counsel Project.
- **2010-2021:** Issued seven policy and research papers on Rural Access to Justice
- **2013-2014:** Organized the Incubator Project (led by then-Commissioner Justice Liu) with the State Bar to train affordable community lawyers.
- **2021:** Pilot social media messaging on healthcare problems most people do not recognize as legal issues - to narrow the “Knowledge Gap.”
- **2022:** Pilot on urban lawyers’ pro bono help for rural small businesses.

Our Work on Access to Lawyers

Current work includes:

- For the fifth year, Commission selects and administers \$5 million/ year **Innovation and Infrastructure Grants Program** for legal aid organizations, including IOLTA recipients and non-IOLTA programs.
- Created and now operates a tax-advantaged **Loan Repayment Assistance Program** to overcome a major barrier to legal aid hiring and retention.
- Seeking funding for LRAP coverage for legal aid lawyers denied Public Service Loan Forgiveness under new Education Department regulations
- Staff and support a **Statewide Pro Bono Coordinating Committee**.
- New project to encourage distribution of **class action residual funds to nonprofit providers of legal help**, pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure § 384.
- Continue **support for increased funding for legal aid**.

Supporting Other Forms of Legal Help

Accomplishments include:

- **1996–present:** Legislative advocacy for civil justice improvements.
- **2019:** Promulgated draft Minimum Access Standards for administrative agencies.
- **2023–present:** Created “Your Life, Your Plan” to help seniors and critically ill, low- and moderate-income people secure end-of-life planning documents, with referrals from healthcare providers, information from county law librarians, and guidance from pro bono, legal aid, and affordable attorneys.
- **2025:** Prepared a report on rules to implement the amendment to Bus. & Prof. Code § 6155 for nonprofits, in partnership with Lawyer Referral Services, and issued recommendations for enhancing LRS practices.

Supporting Other Forms of Legal Help

Current work includes:

- E-Justice Support for **Coordinated Intake and Referral System** for identification and referral of affordable fixed-fee legal work for moderate income Californians.-
- Expanding “Your Life Your Plan” platform for **immigrant and military family preparedness** to authorize caregivers in case of detention, deportation, or military deployment.
- Support new Rules of Court and implementing legislation for **Community Justice Workers** licensed to provide low-income clients with free legal help supervised by legal aid organizations.
- Co-sponsor of **California Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (CLAIR)** with the State Bar and Legal Aid Association of California to improve coordination between legal aid and state agencies on the delivery of services.

Future Collaborations

- The Access Commission is available to support the Judicial Branch's agenda and to respond to any questions about our work.
- We welcome an annual check-in meeting with the Judicial Council to update you on our work.
- We will maintain regular communications with the Judicial Council's officers and advisory committees.
- We would be grateful for Judicial Council support for the Access Commission's work in the future.
- Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you.