November 30, 2012

ABA Announces 2012 Grants to Promote Innovation in Expanding Access to Justice; Further Grants to be Made in 2013

The American Bar Association's Access to Justice Commission Expansion Project has announced the award of seven grants to state Access to Justice Commissions to promote and support innovation in the delivery of civil legal aid.

The grants will fund projects in seven different and critical areas of innovation: expanding limited scope representation and other models for affordable services; improving language access and eliminating implicit cultural bias; employing public libraries as point of access for legal aid; enhancing fundraising outside the legal community; creating partnerships with health care and social services providers, government agencies and other new partners; preserving access for low-income people as courts implement e-filing; and increasing web-based delivery of pro bono services for self-represented litigants.

The projects are intended to be replicable in other states. Grantees will share work product and lessons learned with other jurisdictions. The grants were awarded Access to Justice Commissions in Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi; and Washington State.

"These grants represent a significant new phase in expanding access to justice across the country. Working in partnership with private funders to support innovation and expand capacity, access commissions across the country will now be able to leverage their knowledge and resources to respond more effectively to the legal needs of those who seek justice.," said Justice Laurie Zelon of the California Court of Appeal, Chair of the ABA Access to Justice Commission Expansion Project's Advisory Group, which made grant decisions and is guiding the Project's other initiatives.

Also, in October, the Project announced the award of seven grants to promote the development of new state Access to Justice Commissions and strengthen emerging Commissions. The grants

went to: the Georgia State Bar Access to Justice Committee; Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts; Indiana Bar Foundation; Montana Justice Foundation; New Hampshire Access to Justice Commission; Supreme Court of Virginia; and Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands.

The Project also announced further rounds of grants to be made in 2013. Applications for Grants to Promote the Creation of new Access to Justice Commissions are due by February 15, 2013; applications for Innovation Grants are due on May 1, 2013.

Additional information about 2012 grants and the 2013 application process is available at www.ATJsupport.org, under "Grants."

The ABA Access to Justice Commission Expansion Project is funded by the Public Welfare Foundation; the Bauman Foundation; and the Kresge Foundation. It is administered by the ABA Resource Center for Access to Justice Initiatives. The purpose of the project is to expand the number of state Access to Justice Commissions, strengthen existing Commissions, and promote innovative initiatives by Commissions.

"The emergence of state Access to Justice Commissions have been one of the great successes of the last decade," said Lisa Wood, Chair of the ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants, which oversees the work of the Resource Center for Access to Justice Initiatives. "The fact that major foundations are investing in developing and strengthening the Access to Justice Commission movement is a real testament to what has been accomplished so far and the potential for the future."

As of October 1, 2012, there are Access to Justice commissions in 27 states and the District of Columbia. Access to Justice Commissions are formal entities that bring together the highest level of the state's courts, organized bar, and other stakeholders to support the expansion of access to civil justice for low-income and disadvantaged people. (For the definition of "Access to Justice Commission" used by the ABA Resource Center for Access to Justice Initiatives, see www.ATJsupport.org.) Most of the Commissions were created by the state's Supreme Court. Several other state Supreme Courts are currently considering creation of a new Commission.

Existing Access to Justice Commissions have had a major impact in expanding support for self-represented litigants in the courts, increasing state-level funding for civil legal aid, developing new initiatives to increase pro bono services by attorneys, promoting collaboration and coordination among civil legal aid providers, building a commitment to pro bono and support for legal aid among law students and new lawyers, and increasing awareness among legislators and other key decision makers, the bar, the judiciary, and the general public about the legal needs of low-income and disadvantaged people and the social and economic benefits of ensuring that they do not go unmet.

Members of the ABA Access to Justice Commission Expansion Project Advisory Group are:

- Justice Laurie Zelon, California Court of Appeal, Chair
- Chief Justice Carol Hunstein, Georgia Supreme Court
- Judge Vanessa Ruiz, District of Columbia Court of Appeals (retired)
- Carl Reynolds, Director, Texas Office of Court Administration (retired)
- Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald, Hawaii Supreme Court
- Esther Lardent, President, Pro Bono Institute
- Judge Sarah Singleton, Co-Chair, New Mexico Access to Justice Commission
- Karen Lash, liaison, U.S. Department of Justice Access to Justice Initiative.

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