

HISTORY – KY ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

The Kentucky Access to Justice Commission was established in 2010 by order of the Kentucky Supreme Court. In announcing the formation of the Commission, Chief Justice John D. Minton, Jr., declared that the Kentucky Supreme Court was making access to justice a priority for the Judicial Branch of government. Chief Justice Minton envisioned a Commission where the Judicial Branch would collaborate with other stakeholders, including the Executive and Legislative Branches, as well as legal, business, civic and religious communities to ensure access to justice for Kentucky's low and moderate income citizens. As stated in Chief Justice Minton's remarks "the goal of the Commission is for the judiciary to take a leadership role in delivering civil legal aid to low-income citizens who have nowhere else to turn for help."

Early Development of Access to Justice Commissions

The genesis of Access to Justice [ATJ] Commissions extends back to 1994 with the creation of the first Commission in the State of Washington. In a 2010 address to the Conferences of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators, Professor Laurence Tribe, then Senior Counselor for Access to Justice for the U. S. Department of Justice, highlighted the importance of Access to Justice Commissions. Professor Tribe called the Commissions one of the most important justice-related developments in the past decade. During that meeting, the Conferences passed a resolution supporting "the aspirational goal that every state and United States Territory have an active access to justice commission or comparable body."

To date, thirty-five (35) states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have achieved the goal of having ATJ Commissions. These commissions are blue-ribbon entities that bring together the courts, the bar, civil legal aid providers, and other stakeholders in a coordinated effort to identify and remove barriers to civil justice for low-income and disadvantaged people. They embody shared, ongoing institutional commitments to address access to justice issues in a coordinated and collaborative way, mobilizing the stature of the individual leaders and the highest levels of the courts and bar and other participating institutions to raise the visibility and credibility of these efforts.

From the inception of these state Commissions, the American Bar Association, Center for Court Access to Justice for All (launched in 2012 by the National Center for State Courts) and the national Conference of Chief Justices have offered broad support and provided resources for the Commissions. Grants from private foundations, including the Public Welfare Foundation, the Kresge Foundation and the Bauman Foundation, have provided financial support to promote the creation of new ATJ Commissions and to encourage existing commissions to expand the scope of their activities and undertake innovative initiatives.

Kentucky's Access to Justice Commission

When Chief Justice Minton introduced the Commission in October 2010, he challenged the newly formed Commission and Kentucky's legal community to remove impediments to access to the justice system, including physical, economical, psychological and language barriers; to develop effective plans for funding for civil legal services, who work on behalf of those who have no meaningful access to the justice system; and to expand assistance available for self-

represented litigants. During its early years, the Commission was ably led by Judge Roger L. Crittenden, a retired Franklin County circuit judge. Judge Crittenden brought years of judicial and administrative experience, as well as the leadership ability and diplomacy, to the newly formed Commission. Since its inception, the Commission's work has been facilitated by the Access to Justice Foundation.

In 2017, the Kentucky Supreme Court reaffirmed its commitment to increasing civil legal aid to low and moderate income Kentuckians and the ongoing work of the Commission. Chief Justice Minton named Justice Michelle Keller as the Chair of the Commission. "After my appointment by our Chief Justice, I began to study how Kentucky might better embody our Supreme Court's comprehensive vision regarding access to justice. It became apparent to me fairly early in the process that the jurisdictions where the most progress was being made maintained Commissions led by full-time staff. That allowed those commissions to focus attention and energy specifically on access to justice issues, while coordinating volunteer and stakeholder participation. Justice Keller went on to say, "The leadership of both the Kentucky Bar Association and the Access to Justice Foundation stepped up and assisted me in transforming Kentucky's Commission into the model I have described."

The mission of the Access to Justice Commission is to increase access to the court and high quality legal representation for people with low and moderate incomes living in Kentucky through innovative partnerships with the judiciary, the bar association and the private bar, law schools and business and community based organizations. Specific projects will be implemented to identify and ameliorate barriers impeding access to the courts; to increase opportunities for the private bar to provide pro bono representation for low income Kentuckians; to expand the delivery and support of Kentucky's civil legal aid programs; to increase public awareness of civil legal aid and the justice system and their positive impact on the state and local communities; and to partner with other service providers to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the statewide delivery system.

In December 2017, the Kentucky Bar Association provided a generous grant that allowed the Commission to hire staff. The Supreme Court provided office space on the second floor of the Capitol. Glenda Harrison is the Executive Director of the Commission. Ms. Harrison worked for Legal Aid of the Bluegrass for more than forty years and most recently served as Advocacy Director for that program. Nan Hanley is the Communications/Training Coordinator at the Commission. Ms. Hanley worked for the Access to Justice Foundation, a statewide resource center for civil legal aid programs, for over twenty years. The Commission's office is located at the State Capitol, 700 Capital Avenue, Suite 225, Frankfort, Kentucky. They can be contacted via phone at (502) 564-5493 or email at glenda.harrison@kyaccesstojusticecommission.org.