ARKANSAS ACCESS TO JUSTICE
REPRESENTING HOPE

Access to Justice Commission Foundation Joint Meeting
March 04, 2022 / 9 a.m. via Zoom

Commission Members in Attendance:
Mark Mayfield-Chair, Judge Kim Bridgforth-Vice Chair, Judge Carlton Jones-Secretary, Kendall Lewellen, Senator James Sturch, Rachael Borné, Justice Robin Wynne, Professor Tiffany Murphy, Skye Martin, Representative Andrew Collins, Kerri Michael, Jean Carter-ex officio, Lee Richardson, ex officio, and Prof. Kelly Browe Olson-ex officio,

Unavailable: Dequeshia Prude-Wheeler, Dr. Chad Rodgers, Samantha Blassingame, Professor Tim Tarvin-ex officio, and Cliff McKinney-ex officio

Guests:
Courtney Nosari-Wall

Staff:
Jordan Bates-Rogers, Tameka Parker, Abby Brenneman, and Desirae' Walker

1. **Welcome and Introductions – Mr. Mayfield:** Introduced Rachael Borné, Director of Career Services at Our House who was appointed by the Arkansas Bar Association to fill the role of a non-attorney advocate for low-income Arkansans. Ms. Borné has experience with helping low-income folks navigate challenges in the justice system. Ms. Borné stated that she was very thankful to be a part of this commission and gave a quick note about Our House. They're a social service campus in downtown Little Rock. Serving homeless, near homeless, and low-income adults and families. They serve about 2,600 people a year. Mr. Mayfield also introduced Abby Brenneman who was hired as a Program Coordinator in December. She's handling Arkansas Free Legal Answers, as well as pro bono CLEs and policy work. Abby previously worked with the Center for Arkansas Legal Services in Hot Springs. Everyone else was asked to introduce themselves and Mr. Mayfield thanked everyone for attending.

2. **Approval of Minutes – Mr. Mayfield:** After discussion, Professor Murphy made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, motion was seconded by Judge Jones, hearing no further discussion the motion passed unanimously.

3. **Election of Officers – Mr. Mayfield:** The current officers have agree to serve again in their current positions: Mark Mayfield-Chair, Judge Kim Bridgforth-Vice Chair and Judge Carlton Jones-Secretary. After discussion, Professor Murphy made a motion to accept the election of officers as presented, motion was seconded by Justice Wynne, hearing no further discussion the motion passed unanimously.
   Mr. Bates-Rogers stated that we appreciate them being willing to take on this work again. Between conferences, meetings and the fundraising, Mr.

Mayfield did a lot for us last year and we're really grateful for all of our officers' work.

4. **Executive Director's Report - Jordan Bates-Rogers:** The report started with the Campaign for Legal Aid. Last year, our donations were down from 2020. $72,000 in 2021 compared to $80,000 2020. This is likely due to a combination of less government stimulus and a continued lack of in person activities due to the pandemic.. We're still looking at some other ways that we can improve those numbers this year. The resumption of our in person fundraiser may help.

   The number of donors in 2021 did increase slightly at 306 compared to 291, which indicates that the average gift was going down. We really focused on cultivating new monthly donors in 2021. We're currently at 38 monthly donors, and we're working hard to try to get that up to a goal of 100. If we can get about 100 monthly donors and assuming they all give roughly what our current donors give, that would be just about enough to support one full-time legal aid attorney salary. So that's why we're shooting for 100 monthly donors.

   As part of our efforts to improve our fundraising, we rebranded our monthly donor program. Thank you all for your input on that at our last meeting, it was really helpful. We have abandoned the 6.1 Society name in favor of Justice for All Partners. Some of the feedback we had gotten was that the 6.1 Society wasn't really something that resonated with folks. It's a reference to Arkansas Rule of Professional Conduct 6.1. Even a lot of attorneys didn't know what that meant, much less folks who are not attorneys. We wanted something that was more inclusive of everyone who supports Justice for All and not just lawyers. We are really excited that Sherry Williamson, a local artist here in Little Rock was willing to donate her talent to develop a new logo, which is on the website.

   The next thing item was an update from a presentation to the district court clerks. Several district courts in Arkansas, and some circuit courts as well have started adopting text notification systems to help remind folks of court dates, and not only of their court dates, but also of their court obligations. So that could mean things like meeting with a probation officer or notifying folks by text that they have a fine payment that's due or overdue. That's the best practice we talked about last year. It is recommended by the Justice Index, which is really how we're trying to focus our work.

   A discussion took place regarding the potential benefits and logistical challenges of implementing text notification systems for court obligations. Ms. Borné and Prof. Murphy discussed the potential benefits for criminal

defendants who might get better notice of court dates. Judge Jones and Judge Bridforth offered to meet with the Circuit Court Clerks Association to discuss the idea. The group discussed potentially referring this issue to a committee for additional discussion and input from more stakeholders.

5. **Project Reports - Abby Brennaman:** Ms. Brenneman discussed the AR Free Legal Answers question report. The majority of questions is family law like usual and then either the miscellaneous category or housing is second. We've gotten a total of 109 questions this year, and we've been successful in getting about 63% of those answered. We have Free Legal Answer clinics every other Friday via Zoom. We usually have about three volunteer attorneys who do that, and we'll split up the law students. I would like to get more attorneys involved in this and get a variety of attorneys volunteering for these clinics so that our law students who volunteer can be exposed to different attorneys who practice in different areas.

Upcoming CLEs:

March 18 at 12-1	Record Sealing Updates and Nuances Presented by Ryan Hill, Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Abby Brenneman
April 1 at 12-1	Wrongful Car Repossessions Presented by Cory McGaha
May 6 at 12-1	Defending Against Guardianship Petitions Presented by Thomas Nichols, Disability Rights Arkansas
July 15 at 12-1	Taking Your First Pro Bono Case Presented by Abby Brenneman
August 19	Power Act
September 2	Education Law Presented by Jay Coleman

Something else we've been working on is eviction forms. Gwendolyn Rucker from the Foundation Board has been helping with a 50-state survey. Many states have had resource-rich forms banks. Kendall Lewellen has also given us some input, she's head of the Housing Work Group at the Center for Arkansas legal Services. Ms. Lewellen stated that this is a good project, and thinks that this will make this aspect of the justice system more accessible for both landlords and tenants. Mr. Bates-Rogers stated that this is part of a larger push that again is based in the Justice Index recommendations that states adopt uniform forms for common actions that low-income folks encounter in Arkansas.

6. Project and Partner Organization Update

Legal Aid of Arkansas - Lee Richardson: Mr. Richardson reported on challenges with the current platform that hosts the legal aid interactive forms. They are working with the Center for Arkansas Legal Services to secure grant funding for an updated interactive forms platform.

Legal Aid of Arkansas (LAA) had a record year with revenue at $4.2 million from 28 different funding sources. LAA spent over $4.3 million and had $126,000 negative cash flow, which is fine given the pandemic. LAA needed to provide additional services, and they still have 1.4 million in reserve.

Mr. Richardson reported that the Legal Services Corporation has received funding increases in bills in the Senate and House, with the House passing the larger increase. The bills have not yet gone through reconciliation, but he expected either the Senate increase or level funding. Mr. Richardson also said that LAA is monitoring opioid settlements as a potential source of funding. ance use disorder crisis in this country. Hopefully, we can keep that in mind as we move forward. Over 2000 of our cases also had domestic violence.

Mr. Richardson provided the Commission with a case report. Divorce is still the top request for help, then domestic violence and/or order of protection number two. Last year, landlord/tenant became number three because of the situation we found ourselves in with the pandemic. But there are 70 different types of legal problems handled by LAA. Some on a routine basis, some more sporadically.

Center for Arkansas Legal Services - Jean Carter: In terms of revenue and expenses the Center for Arkansas Legal Services (CALS) had a roughly break-even year. CALS actually finished the year about $36,000 up. CALS is hopeful regarding additional funding that may come that will help add some staff positions. Like many other employers, CALS has experienced challenges hiring in the current, very competitive hiring market.

CALS closed over 6,000 cases last year and participated in or hosted over 190 outreach events. That works out to be almost four events per week in addition to handling cases. CALS is trying to get out there in the community and work with other community partners with an emphasis on rural areas. Pro bono numbers are flat and CALS would appreciate support from the Commission in increasing pro bono engagement.

Ms. Carter shared that she plans to retire as Executive Director of Center for Arkansas Legal Services this year. She has been Executive Director for 25

years and before that she had served 11 years as the Executive Director of another legal aid organization. So, after 42 years of working for legal aid programs, she decided it's time for a transition. She is going to remain in a transitional council role to help train the new director.

Mr. Mayfield thanked Ms. Carter for the time that she's spent and continues to spend. Lots of folks have benefited from that. And she's had a lot of great folks to work with over the years and to lead and mentor. Are there any comments or questions?

Justice Wynne thanked members of the Commission for their service and stated the importance of this work. He also thanked the legal aid providers for making the most of limited resources.

Mr. Bates-Rogers informed the group that we have a joint board retreat with the Foundation coming up in June. We'd like to get your thoughts on what sort of panels and presentations you'd like to hear from when we have that meeting. So let us know what's of interest to you. There are also some questions about your comfort level with COVID precautions. What you think we should do about that. And then also location. Would you prefer to be in central Arkansas, one of the more scenic areas we've gone before for more of an actual retreat. Just let us know what you would like. We'll be surveying the Foundation Board members as well.

7. **Next Meeting Date:** Our next meeting will be June 3, 2022, Location TBD.

8. Meeting adjourned