

2018 IMPACT REPORT

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission was established in November 2005 by order of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. The mission of the Commission is to expand access to the civil justice system for people of low income and modest means in North Carolina.

COMMISSION PRIORITIES

Establish the right to counsel in civil matters affecting basic human needs

Increase legislative funding of civil legal services at the state and federal levels

Encourage & support pro bono attorney participation

Help pro se litigants navigate the court system successfully

Educate the public

Increase the role of the business community

Include people with limited English proficiency in the justice system

Increase loan repayment assistance



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

One of the great joys that comes from serving as Chief Justice is the chance to see the many ways our legal community comes together in support of access to justice for all. This commitment is especially apparent in the work of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission. I am honored and pleased to have become the fourth Chief Justice to support its work as chair, and I am grateful to my predecessors for their leadership and vision in furthering its worthy mission of access to the civil justice system for all North Carolinians, regardless of ability to pay.

This is an exciting time for the Commission – in 2018, the Commission’s staff doubled in size, thanks to increased support from grantmakers and the private bar. This expansion has allowed the Commission an increased presence in pursuing equal access to justice: in resource development for civil legal aid, in encouraging and facilitating pro bono legal service through the North Carolina Pro Bono Resource Center, in convening groups to develop substantive policy recommendations, and in creating materials to assist North Carolinians who have to navigate the court system alone. Having served as member and Vice-Chair of the Commission for the past four years, I have seen the impact of this organization grow, and I could not be more proud.

Last year was a great one for the Commission, but there is still much more work to be done. According to a 2017 ABA Report, 86% of the civil legal needs of people in poverty went unmet in the prior year, and 71% of all low-income households experienced a civil legal problem. These staggering statistics are compounded by the fact that more than half of North Carolinians who ask for free legal assistance from civil legal aid providers must be turned away due to lack of capacity.

Please join me in supporting the work of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission as it works to address this gap in access to justice. The work of the Commission is robust and meaningful, and I look forward to seeing all that our legal community accomplishes together.

In Service,

Cheri Beasley
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of North Carolina

NC PRO BONO RESOURCE CENTER

The NC Pro Bono Resource Center (PBRC) launched in April 2016 with the goal of increasing pro bono legal services provided by North Carolina attorneys. In 2018, the PBRC expanded its capacity to pursue this goal with the hiring of two new staff attorneys, Katherine Asaro and Leigh Wicclair.

The PBRC also saw its base of volunteer supporters grow in 2018 through the creation of the Resource Center Advisory Board, a group of eighteen leaders of the North Carolina legal community who serve as a focus group to inform the PBRC's perspective on both the substance and process of pro bono legal service and to increase pro bono volunteerism among attorneys across the state.

The PBRC expanded its pro bono programming in 2018, supported by a pro bono malpractice insurance policy through its ongoing partnership with Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company. This policy, established in August 2018, allowed the PBRC to directly coordinate eight pro bono projects.

Voluntary pro bono reporting efforts also increased in 2018, with more than double the number of attorneys recognized as part of the North Carolina Pro Bono Honor Society for providing more than fifty hours of pro bono legal services compared to the prior year. North Carolina attorneys who reported their pro bono information provided more than 50,000 hours of free legal services in 2018 to North Carolinians unable to afford legal help.

Photo Upper: The Hon. Valerie Zachary and Michelle Connell discuss appellate brief writing at an Appellate Pro Bono Program CLE; Photo Lower: Leigh Wicclair and Rick Zechini screen records for driver's license restoration eligibility.

DISASTER RELIEF LEGAL SERVICES

On September 14, 2018, Hurricane Florence made landfall in the Carolinas, bringing winds over ninety miles per hour, three feet of rain, and more than \$44 billion in estimated damages and lost output. To address the myriad civil legal issues that the storm left in its wake, the NC Pro Bono Resource Center received funding from NC IOLTA to hire staff attorney Katherine Asaro to lead hurricane legal assistance pro bono efforts. One of Katherine's first priorities was coordinating thirty-five pro bono attorneys to provide legal information weekly to hurricane survivors at FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) in New Bern and Fayetteville until the end of the year.

Photo: Paralegal volunteers checking in hurricane survivors at a Pro Bono Resource Center event in Carteret County.

BY THE NUMBERS

116 pro bono attorneys who volunteered with the PBRC in 2018

148 total PBRC volunteers in 2018

734 clients served by PBRC volunteers in 2018

8 pro bono projects coordinated by the PBRC in 2018: Appellate, Business Formation, Disaster Relief, Driver's License Restoration, Earned Jail Credit, Expunction, Safer Prisons, and Veterans

877 attorneys who reported their 2017 pro bono information

345 members of the 2017 North Carolina Pro Bono Honor Society

49 clients interviewed at DRCs in New Bern and Fayetteville

115 volunteer hours provided to clients at DRCs in 2018

12 days spent at DRCs in New Bern and Fayetteville by the PBRC in 2018

152 attendees present at the Summit

194 total hours of attorney Ethics CLE credit earned by attendees

6 speakers who shared strategies to bridge the access to justice gap in North Carolina

25 design sprint attendees, including self-represented litigants, judges, legal aid providers, court administrators, and other stakeholders

9 prototype solutions evaluated to address challenges in the divorce process, such as resource guides, concierge services, apps, and smart forms

208 attendees from legal service providers

31 substantive trainings, resulting in 1,044 hours of CLE

3 award recipients honored: E. Maccene Brown, Sharon Council, and Mary Hedgepeth

NC ACCESS TO JUSTICE SUMMIT

The NC Access to Justice Summit brought together the access to justice community to consider strategies to bridge the justice gap in North Carolina. The Summit featured a keynote by Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht of the Supreme Court of Texas and a panel discussion of ideas to adequately fund programs serving low-income North Carolinians using lessons learned in Texas. The panel, moderated by Dean Rich Leonard and featuring Chief Justice Hecht, George Hanna, Jennifer Lechner, and McKinley Wooten, discussed how lack of access to justice, particularly in civil cases, influences the practice of law, professionalism, and ethical obligations of attorneys.

Photo: Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht of the Supreme Court of Texas addresses attendees of the NC Access to Justice Summit.

COURT COMPASS PROJECT

In May 2018, the NC Equal Access to Justice Commission, in partnership with the NC Judicial Branch and the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, brought the Court Compass project to North Carolina. This project directly incorporates court users in the process of designing family justice system solutions through in-person, interactive, user-centric design sprints in which participants identify opportunities for improving court services around divorce and separation. North Carolina's design sprint was held on August 11, 2018 in Raleigh and was facilitated by Margaret Hagan (Legal Design Lab, Stanford Law School) and Dan Jackson (NuLawLab, Northeastern University School of Law).

Photo: Darwin Rice, Mecklenburg County Family Court Administrator, discussing NC's divorce process at the design sprint.

NC LEGAL SERVICES CONFERENCE

The 2018 NC Legal Services Conference brought the state's legal aid community together in September 2018 to discuss "Justice for All in Times of Transition." The conference offered attendees CLE credit as well as opportunities for networking and substantive discussions. Three plenary sessions were offered: a panel on Racial Equity in the Justice System moderated by the Hon. Cheri Beasley of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, a keynote address by José Padilla of California Rural Legal Assistance, and a keynote address by Mo Green of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. The Julian T. Pierce, John Lea Support Staff, and Willis E. Williams Client Community Service awards were also presented.

Photo: LANC Managing Attorney E. Maccene Brown accepting the Julian T. Pierce Award at the NC Legal Services Conference.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Honorable Mark D. Martin,
Chair

The Honorable Cheri Beasley,
Vice-Chair

James A. Barrett

Ashley H. Campbell

Justin Clayton

Christin Coan

J. Samuel Cone

The Honorable J. Carlton
"J.C." Cole

Collin Cook

Barbara Degen

The Honorable Richard Dietz

William P. Farthing, Jr.

Ronald L. Gibson

Rick Glazier

Joy Vermillion Heinsohn

Charles Holton

David W. Hood

Gabriel Jiménez

Afi Johnson-Parris

The Honorable Lisa Y.
Johnson-Tonkins

Robert C. Kemp, III

Dean J. Rich Leonard

The Honorable Michael R. Morgan
Alan Parry

Representative David Rogers

The Honorable Jan H. Samet

Elizabeth D. Scott

The Honorable Linda Stephens

McKinley Wooten

Julian H. Wright, Jr.

Marion Cowell, Special Advisor

The Honorable Anita S. Earls,
Special Advisor

George V. Hanna III, Special
Advisor

George Hausen, Special Advisor

John B. McMillan, Special Advisor

Kenneth Schorr, Special Advisor

OTHER COMMISSION ACTIVITIES



In 2018, the Commission continued its work to educate potential supporters about access to the civil justice system by facilitating more than 20 in-district meetings with legislators during the 2018 short session about the value of civil legal aid to constituents and nearly 50 meetings with legislators to discuss legal needs created by Hurricane Florence. These conversations were supported by a series of story maps created in partnership with the Self-Represented Litigation Network, available at ncprobono.org/story. The Commission further supported pro se litigants through the creation of substantive materials, including a Self-Service Divorce Packet.



Photos: Chief Justice Martin thanks Ronald Gibson, the Hon. Lisa Johnson-Tonkins, Alan Parry (not pictured), and the Hon. Jan Samet for their service on the Commission.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS:

Alston & Bird, DLA Piper, Ellis & Winters, Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company, NC IOLTA, Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, Troutman Sanders, Winston & Strawn, Womble Bond Dickinson, and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

2018 Support and Revenue

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| CLE Fee–NC State Bar | 368,095 |
| Pro Bono Support | 51,012 |
| Disaster Relief Funding | 63,775 |
| NC AOC Support | 119,659 |
| Total Revenue | \$602,541 |

2018 Expenses

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| General Operations–Administrative | 46,634 |
| General Operations–Programming | 264,258 |
| PBRC–Administrative | 38,045 |
| PBRC–Programming | 215,588 |
| Disaster Relief–Programming | 27,679 |
| Total Expenses | \$592,204 |

COMMISSION STAFF



Jennifer M. Lechner, Executive Director
Sylvia K. Novinsky, Director, NC Pro Bono Resource Center
Katherine Asaro, Staff Attorney
Emily Monnett, Social Media Manager and Research Assistant
Jennifer Simmons, Senior Project Manager
Jared S. Smith, Programming and Engagement Associate
B. Leigh Wicclair, Staff Attorney



Photo Upper: 2018 Commission Staff; Photo Lower: Texas Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht with North Carolina Supreme Court Justices at the NC Access to Justice Summit.