

**Our Mission** is to overcome barriers to justice and empower North Carolinians to meet their legal needs through our leadership, collaboration, and problem-solving.

**Our Vision** is a North Carolina legal system that is fair, just, and open to everyone.

**Our Core Values** are:

- **Justice & Equity:** We believe every North Carolinian has a right to a fair and impartial legal system.
- **Leadership & Problem-Solving:** We identify, evaluate, and respond to unmet legal needs using our statewide perspective and network.
- **Collaboration & Inclusiveness:** We leverage the experience, influence, and diversity of our members and community partners to further our mission.
- **Innovation & Flexibility:** We explore novel strategies to address new or evolving legal needs and barriers to the administration of justice.
- **Efficiency & Accountability:** We prioritize data-driven solutions to steward our resources responsibly, operate with integrity, and are transparent with our partners and the people we serve.

*Learn more about us at [ncaccesstojustice.org](https://ncaccesstojustice.org) and [ncprobono.org](https://ncprobono.org).*

# 2020 IMPACT REPORT

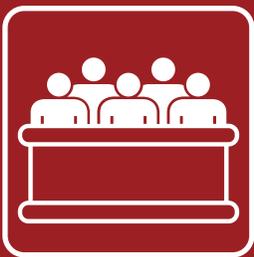
In 2020, the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission looked forward to celebrating its fifteenth anniversary by engaging in a comprehensive strategic planning process, managing a statewide legal needs assessment, launching the Faith and Justice Alliance, and expanding self-represented litigant and pro bono offerings. While COVID-19 affected how it was able to undertake its work, the Commission quickly pivoted with nimbleness and flexibility to accomplish all these goals remotely, while also responding to new and

urgent needs brought about by the pandemic.

Despite the limitations brought on by the coronavirus disease, the Commission began the year by embarking upon an in-depth strategic planning process to guide its initiatives for the coming years. This work included the voices of more than one hundred stakeholders across the state through interviews, surveys, listening sessions, and volunteer working groups. This effort, ably led by moss+ross consultants and an

eight-member steering committee chaired by Commission member Judge Richard Dietz, resulted in a new set of identity statements that more accurately reflect who the Commission is at this time, and who it hopes to be in the coming years. These statements were adopted unanimously by the Commission in June 2020, and they will guide Commission program evaluation and assessment in the years to come. They are printed above and are available on the Commission's website, [ncaccesstojustice.org](https://ncaccesstojustice.org).

## UNMET LEGAL NEEDS IN 2020



There is only 1 legal aid attorney for every 8,000 eligible North Carolinians.



More than 340,000 civil legal cases of 26 civil issue types are filed annually.



Approximately 86% of the civil legal needs of poor North Carolinians go unmet.



**DISASTER LEGAL SERVICES**

In lieu of planned in-person events, the Pro Bono Resource Center pivoted to online resources and services for North Carolinians affected by Hurricane Florence, offering substantive video presentations from partner organizations, connecting survivors in need of legal assistance with volunteer attorneys, and providing volunteer assistance with RebuildNC Homeowner Recovery Program applications.

**DRIVER'S LICENSE RESTORATION**

As of December 2020, District Attorneys in five counties have petitioned the court to remit traffic court costs and fees for people with long-term driver's license suspensions stemming from low-level traffic offenses. Through this program, 17,700 people have had court debt erased and indefinite suspensions terminated, enabling more North Carolinians to get safely back to work.

**ECOURTS GUIDE AND FILE**

eCourts Guide & File is a free online service from the NC Judicial Branch that launched in August 2020 to help users prepare court documents. As part of this new service, the Commission partnered with subject matter experts and the Administrative Office of the Courts to develop fourteen web-based interviews, which have been viewed more than 22,120 times with 2,970 interviews completed.

**FAITH AND JUSTICE ALLIANCE**

In June, the NC Faith and Justice Alliance's 25-member interfaith steering committee came together to discuss legal needs commonly identified by faith leaders. The Alliance then shared legal resources by establishing a monthly distribution list with nearly 200 contacts, creating timely legal issue summary videos, and hosting a public convening with substantive presentations.

**LEGAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Led by the UNCG Center for Housing and Community Studies and an eleven-member steering committee chaired by Justice Anita Earls, the access to justice community began conducting a civil legal needs assessment in early 2020. The assessment will provide an accurate picture of unmet legal needs in NC, informed by more than 1,300 surveys, client focus groups, and stakeholder interviews.

**LEGAL SERVICES CONFERENCE**

Nearly 400 attendees registered for *Remotely Together: A Virtual Conference for Real-World Justice* held in September. The conference offered over 1,000 hours of CLE credit to attendees through eighteen different CLE sessions, two plenary addresses, and a Supreme Court of North Carolina Candidate Forum. The Equal Justice Alliance also presented the Pillars of Justice awards.

**NC FAIR CHANCE**

In partnership with District Attorneys across North Carolina, the Pro Bono Resource Center launched [ncfairchance.org](http://ncfairchance.org) in April. This webtool will allow North Carolinians to view their eligibility for expunction or driver's license restoration relief. More than 250 people have already requested and received pro bono attorney advice about their individual situations using the website.

**PRO BONO GO**

In August, the Pro Bono Resource Center launched Pro Bono Go, a constantly updated catalogue that offers attorneys the chance to volunteer for specific cases, legal clinics, and hotlines with an immediate need. This new online tool enables attorneys to search by keyword for timely pro bono cases and projects that suit their interests and to claim them by submitting a brief interest form.

**PRO BONO HONOR SOCIETY**

More than 1,700 of North Carolina's practicing attorneys participated in 2020's Voluntary Pro Bono Reporting process, sharing information about nearly 50,000 hours of pro bono legal services provided in 2019. Of these reporters, 522 received recognition from the Supreme Court of North Carolina for their service and were inducted into the 2019 NC Pro Bono Honor Society.

**RESPONDING TO COVID-19**

While the COVID-19 global pandemic kept the Commission from pursuing equal access to justice in person, the organization quickly and nimbly pivoted to provide services and resources in new, virtual ways.

In 2020, the Pro Bono Resource Center and its volunteers served 18,633 clients through its diverse remote projects, including seven virtual clinics. Thousands more self-represented litigants were able to access self-help materials online. Also, some programs were developed specifically to meet the needs brought about or exacerbated by the pandemic.

The **COVID-19 Small Business/Nonprofit Initiative**, supported by a host of private law firms in North Carolina, provided more than 190 organizations with pro bono advice on legal issues related to the pandemic.

In partnership with the NC Bar Foundation, the **Frontline Health Planning Project** supported thirty-two essential workers with advance directives prepared using a newly developed document production app.

The **COVID-19 Caring for Incarcerated People Project** helped Prisoner Legal Services coordinate volunteers who reviewed 400 cases for Extending the Limits of Confinement (ELC) eligibility.



# 2020 COMMISSION MEMBERS

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Julian H. Wright, Jr., Vice Chair

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Marion Cowell, Special Advisor

The Honorable Anita S. Earls,  
Special Advisor

George V. Hanna III, Special Advisor

George Hausen, Special Advisor

Kenneth Schorr, Special Advisor

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### 2020 Support and Revenue

CLE Fee–NC State Bar	337,838
Grantmaking Support	330,435
Private Support	54,447
NC AOC Support	136,339
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$859,059</b>

### 2020 Expenses

General Operations–Administrative	67,402
General Operations–Programming	383,405
PBRC–Administrative	71,097
PBRC Programming:	
General	156,050
Disaster Relief	67,733
Driver's License Restoration	127,376
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$873,063</b>

## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

*Alston & Bird*

*American Bar  
Endowment*

*Cisco Systems*

*Credit Suisse*

*Kilpatrick Townsend*

*Lawyers Mutual  
Insurance Company*

*McGuireWoods*

*North Carolina  
Bar Foundation*

*North Carolina  
Community Foundation*

*NC IOLTA*

*North Carolina  
Justice Center*

*Seyfarth Shaw*

*Troutman Pepper*

*Womble Bond Dickinson*

*Z. Smith Reynolds  
Foundation*

## COMMISSION STAFF

Jennifer M. Lechner, Executive Director

Sylvia K. Novinsky, Director, NC Pro Bono  
Resource Center

Katherine Asaro, Senior Staff Attorney & Disaster  
Legal Services Program Director

Pat McAlexander, Office Administrator

Jennifer Simmons, Senior Project Manager

Jared S. Smith, Foundation & Development Manager

B. Leigh Wicclair, Senior Staff Attorney &  
Restorative Justice Program Director

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you would like to donate to support the work of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission and Pro Bono Resource Center, please visit

[ncprobono.org/support](https://ncprobono.org/support).