

Opportunities to Improve Civil Justice in North Carolina



RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EQUAL JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Recommendations require varying levels of time and financial resources and may involve institutional commitment from a number of stakeholders.

Principal recommendation: restore and increase state funding for civil legal aid

Short term



- Consolidate domestic violence court cases on a particular day, especially when multiple counties are within a judicial district, to improve scheduling.
- Provide legal aid organizations free access to ACIS, criminal records database.
- Clarify orders of indigency apply throughout the life of a case, including mediation.

Intermediate



- Develop and improve pro se forms and instructions, for example, a form complaint for unpaid wages for use in small claims court.
- Conduct a comprehensive independent study of civil legal needs in North Carolina.
- Train magistrates, judges and clerks on an annual basis on frequent topics that disproportionately affect low income residents.
- Continue to improve language access and to make the courts more accessible to people with disabilities.

Long term



- Allow video conferencing in limited proceedings, for example, domestic violence cases, arbitrations, and custody mediations.
- Develop system for electronic filing of pleadings.
- Restore funding for NC Legal Education Assistance Foundation (NC LEAF) that provides loan repayment assistance to public interest lawyers.
- Restore civil legal aid funding that has been cut drastically since 2008.



Final Thoughts

- Improving the civil justice system in North Carolina for all, regardless of ability to pay, requires an investment of financial resources.
- Increasing the staffing capacity of legal aid to serve those in need is critical to improved efficiency of and access to the judicial system.

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