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Annual Report



**California Access to Justice
Commission**

CalATJ.org | info@CalATJ.org



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

The California Access to Justice Commission was established twenty-five years ago to address the needs of Californians who can't afford to pay for a lawyer, as well as people with unique legal needs, non-English speakers, immigrants, rural residents, BIPOC people -- and many others. All Californians deserve equal justice in our courts and an equal opportunity to reap the full benefits of our legal rights and protections. The Access Commission is dedicated to bringing this closer to a reality in California.

Twenty years ago, the Commission persuaded the Legislature to begin the Equal Access Fund; we steadfastly supported the increases and expanded eligibility rules. In 2021, the Legislature provided \$70 million to the Equal Access Fund to pay for legal aid to low-income people, seniors, veterans, and others. In addition, it expanded eligibility for State-supported legal aid, so now over 12 million Californians are eligible. While this represents an important and significant step, our work is far from done.

The Commission continues to be an active and vibrant leader in access for Californians. We welcomed four new Commissioners in 2021: Diego Cartagena, Executive Director of Bet Tzedek; Sandra Levin, Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Law Library; Angélica Millán, from Legal Services of Northern California and Crystal O'Brien Miller, from Intuit, Inc. All twenty-eight Commissioners are volunteers – we are made up of nine judges, of whom two are appellate justices, as well as private, government, and legal aid lawyers. The Commissioners represent a broad cross-section of California; we are appointed by government officials, bar associations, business and labor organizations, and faith communities. We bring our appointing bodies and other stakeholders together to enhance access to justice in many ways.

This report describes what we did in 2021. We are proud of our impact over the last 25 years and of what we will continue to do.

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FUNDING TO NARROW THE JUSTICE GAP

In 2021 the Access Commission took on the new role of grant-maker after obtaining funding to provide two separate grant programs to legal services organizations across the state in an effort to increase legal help to underserved Californians.

Infrastructure and Innovation Grants: This year, the Equal Access Appropriation included \$5 million for grants to nonprofit legal aid organizations for infrastructure improvements and innovative programs. The Access Commission was authorized to select, award, monitor, and report these grants. Forty-seven organizations of varying sizes were selected to receive grant funds. They are listed below.

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| AIDS Legal Referral Panel of the San Francisco Bay Area | Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability |
| Alameda County Homeless Action Center | Learning Rights Law Center |
| Alliance for Children's Rights | Legal Access Alameda |
| California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform | Legal Aid at Work |
| California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice | Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County |
| California Indian Legal Services | Legal Aid of Marin |
| California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Inc. | Legal Aid Society of San Diego |
| California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. | Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County |
| Center for Gender and Refugee Studies - California, Inc. | Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice |
| Central California Legal Services, Inc. | Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles |
| Centro Legal de la Raza | Oasis Legal Services |
| Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking | OneJustice |
| Contra Costa Senior Legal Services | Open Door Legal |
| Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund | Peoples College of Law |
| East Bay Community Law Center | Public Advocates, Inc. |
| East Bay Sanctuary | Public Interest Law Project |
| Elder Law & Advocacy | Public Law Center |
| Family & Children's Law Center | Root & Rebound |
| Family Violence Appellate Project | San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program |
| Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law | San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation |
| Inland Counties Legal Services, Inc. | Senior Citizens Legal Services |
| Inner City Law Center | The TransLatin@ Coalition |
| KIND, Inc | Veterans Legal Institute |
| Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (SF Bay Area) | |

Grants for Eviction Assistance: The California Endowment provided the Access Commission with \$750,000 to fund grants that were available for early response to the eviction and housing legal needs created by COVID-19 and the projected end of eviction moratoriums. Seven legal services organizations and their community partners were awarded these grants, listed below. [You can see those details on our website.](#)

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| Centro Legal de la Raza | Partnership for the Advancement of New America |
| Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto | Public Law Center |
| Legal Services of Northern California | Thai Community Development Center |
| Open Door Legal | |

2021 was a year of achievements for the Access Commission, and there is more to come.

The Access Commission has had a busy year, with publications released on access to justice issue areas from health equity for low-income Californians, to how to retain qualified legal aid staff. All our publications are available for download on our website, CaATJ.org, under the [Publications tab](#).



Late 2021 – **Legal Aid Recruitment, Retention, and Diversity: A Report to the State Bar of California**

The Access Commission prepared a report for the State Bar of California with recommendations supported by research and analysis. We recommend that legal aid organizations increase compensation to reduce the shortfall between their lawyers' pay and that of government lawyers of comparable experience. We recommend measures to expand student loan repayment assistance programs for legal aid lawyers and better ensure their eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness by the U.S. Department of Education. Finally, we provided several recommendations for improving the diversity of the legal aid workforce -- toward providing lawyers who mirror the diversity of the client communities they serve.



Fall 2021 – **Report and Recommendations on Public Communications and Education to Narrow the Justice Gap**

This report to the State Bar of California suggests recommendations on how to narrow the "knowledge gap" and increase media coverage of legal aid issues.



Spring 2021 – **Health Equity and Rural Attorney Deserts**

The Rural Access Committee has issued a series of policy papers on many aspects of legal challenges faced by rural people. In 2021, the Access Commission issued the seventh in that series, "Health Equity and Rural Attorney Deserts ." It examines the intersection of two critical and intertwined issues facing rural communities: the lack of access to healthcare and legal help.



Early 2021 – **Resources for Low-Cost Lawyering for Modest-Income Clients**

In 2021, we worked with the California Lawyers Association to broaden the distribution of guides for low-cost services by lawyers serving moderate-income clients, including our guide, "How to Grow Your Practice By Representing Moderate Income Clients in California."

2021 OVERVIEW

PROGRAMS

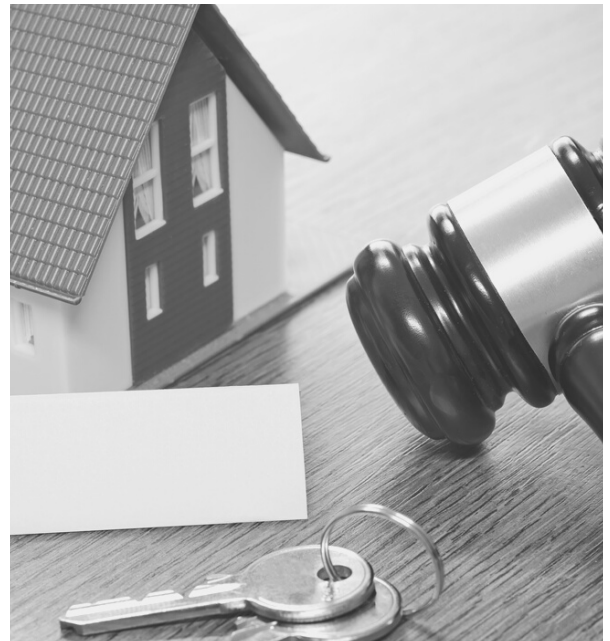


California Voices for Civil Justice

We published a report prepared for the State Bar of California on "Public Communications and Education to Narrow the Justice Gap." It addresses the need for coordination and expert advice to legal aid organizations about public communications and education. Our report recommends ways to narrow the "Knowledge Gap" on the part of people who do not realize they are facing a legal problem or how they can obtain help. In addition, we began California Voices for Civil Justice, which provides legal aid organizations in this state with expert help and a forum to work together on messages to serve these aims.

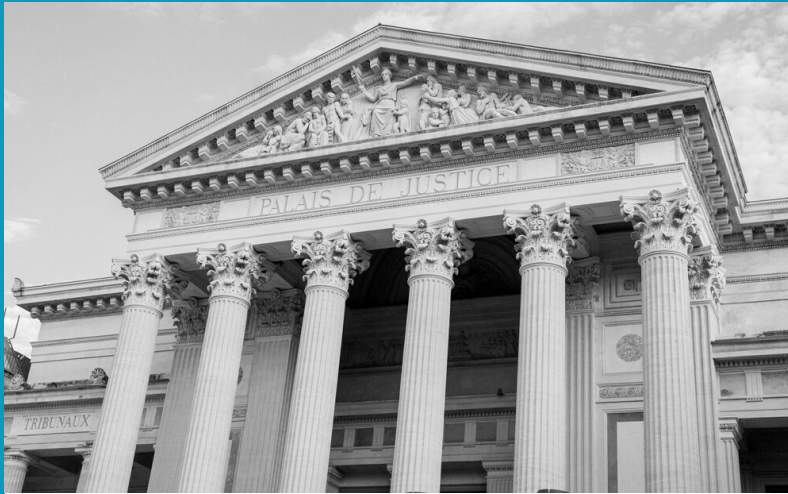
Unlawful Detainer Mediation Project

We planned and supported mediation programs in and for California superior courts to ensure that available rental assistance came into play to resolve unlawful detainer lawsuits before they required the investment of the courts' resources.



2021 OVERVIEW

ADVOCACY



- **Continued Advocacy for Public Funding for Legal Aid:** We participated in legislative advocacy for the increase in continuing and one-time funding of the Equal Access Fund. The result was a \$70 million appropriation for the current fiscal year, of which \$20 million is described as continuing.
- **Amicus Submission Supporting Remote Access to Appellate Hearing:** The Amicus Curiae Committee submitted a letter brief in the California Supreme Court arguing that remote access to an appellate hearing should be provided for the prison inmate whose case was being heard. After submissions, including our letter, the Court of Appeals granted the requested remote access.
- **Comment on the Paraprofessionals Program:** The Access Commission prepared and submitted a letter of comments on the report and recommendations of the State Bar's Paraprofessionals Working Group. Our letter argues that California has not achieved full and equal access to justice and that doing so will require a continuum of services for people not served by lawyers who charge market rates for their work.
- **Continued Supporting Language Access in the Courts:** The Language Access Committee continued its monitoring of and support for the implementation of the Judicial Council's Language Access Plan.
- **Worked with LAAC Toward a California Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable:** We continued planning and preparation, with the Legal Aid Association of California, for a California Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable based on the model of the LAIR that the United States Department of Justice has revived at the federal level.



PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON

STUDENT LOAN TRAINING & ADVICE

With support from the State Bar of California, we will be offering training, assessments, and consultations on two ways to mitigate the burdens of student loans on lawyers serving low-income people, immigrants, seniors, and other disadvantaged communities.

Project for Legal Aid Organization Leadership and Managers: Heather Jarvis, a nationally recognized expert on student loan problems, is preparing training and a questionnaire on Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAP) to assist leaders and managers of nonprofit organizations, including but not limited to IOLTA recipients, who employ lawyers to provide legal help. The training will be followed by individual assessments of existing or potential LRAP programs to ease the financial burdens on legal aid lawyers, improving recruitment and retention at a time of critical need. Finally, we will survey California law schools and, if there is interest, prepare a program for them on LRAPs.

Project for Legal Aid Lawyers Seeking Public Service Loan Forgiveness: Heather Jarvis will also prepare and oversee training and consultations for legal aid lawyers and advise organizations on ways to improve the likelihood of obtaining Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) from the Department of Education. This comes at precisely the right time during a period until October 2022 in which retroactive PSLF eligibility can be established for past payments.



PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS TO NARROW THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

We will work with experts who develop and market-test public communications. The objective will be to determine whether well-designed communications can raise awareness of some key problems or opportunities that many people encounter but do not recognize as legal and do not know where to go for help. If there are positive results, we will present the State Bar with a proposal to implement a communications campaign to use the messages to narrow the Knowledge Gap on these issues.



PILOT PROJECT FOR URBAN PRO BONO HELP TO RURAL SMALL BUSINESSES



California Lawyers Foundation has decided to fund a pilot project that we will organize. It will use remote technology to connect urban pro bono lawyers with small business clients in rural areas. Such legal help can open critical doors for aspiring entrepreneurs, including people of color and low and moderate-income people who have a business they want to start or expand.

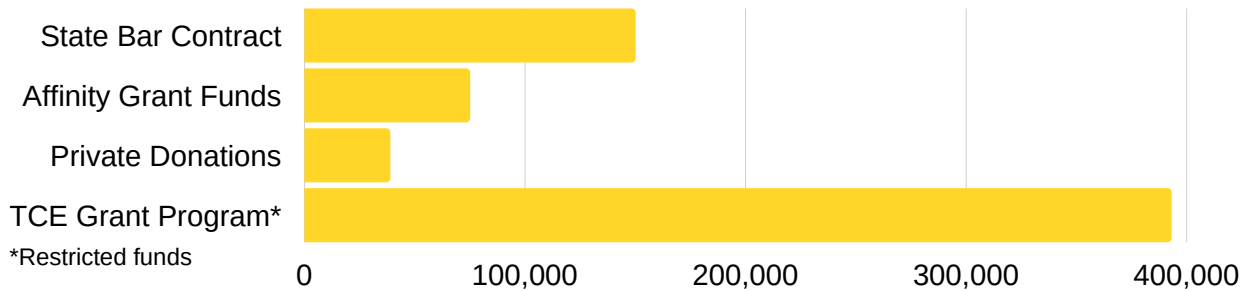
MCLE PROGRAMS WITH CALIFORNIA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE ISSUES

The Access Commission will prepare and co-sponsor, with California Lawyers Association, MCLE programs on topics including Pro Bono work for Small Businesses (related to the pilot project for CLF), Limited Scope Family Law Services for Moderate Income Clients; and What Incubator Programs Can Teach You about Representing Moderate Income Clients.



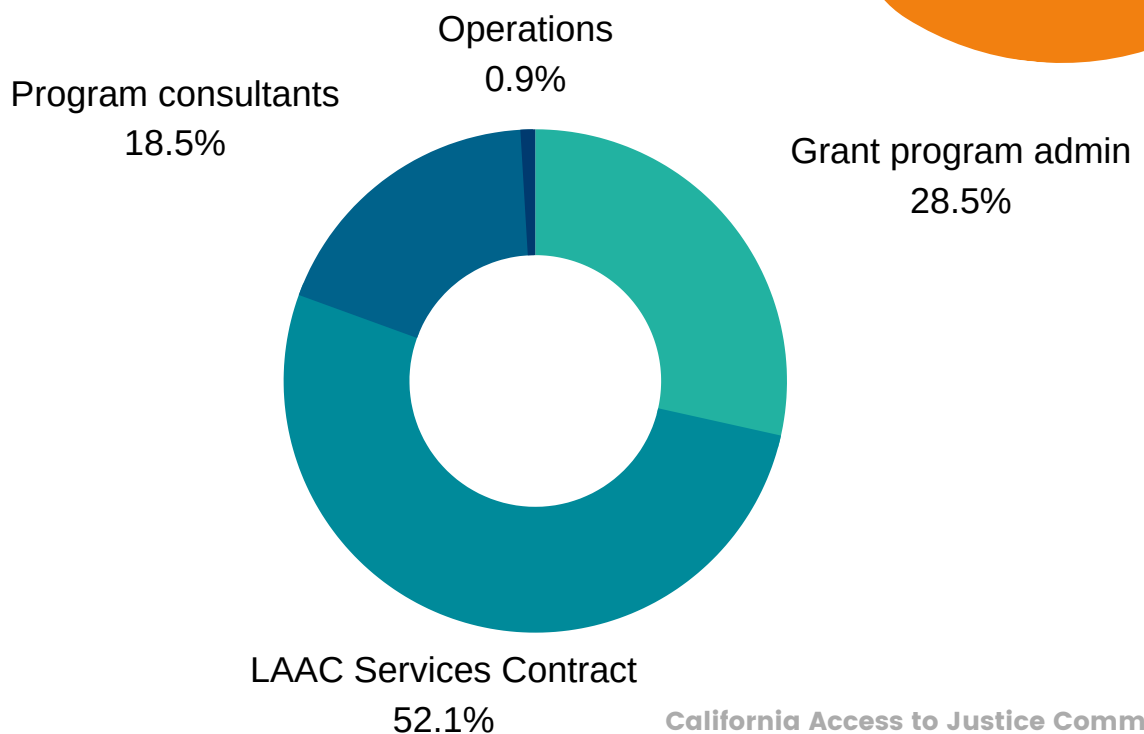
CalATJ's current fiscal year ends on June 30, 2022. This summary was prepared by the staff (unaudited) to report on calendar year 2021 revenue and expenses. This summary combines actual cash received and expenses paid in 2021, plus revenue expenses accrued in 2021 and received or paid in 2022. Amounts in the hundreds are rounded.

REVENUE



EXPENDITURE

CalATJ's 2021 expenses totaled \$772,800, which includes 1/2 of the total funds awarded to our seven TCE grantees to address the pending eviction tsunami. The breakdown below excludes the \$318,800 in grant funds.



THANK YOU!

This past year brought opportunities and challenges for the Access to Justice Commission. We launched ambitious new projects while also pivoting to address emerging needs and the still-unfolding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and other disasters, and calls for racial justice. In 2022 we will broaden our efforts by creating new initiatives, building on our previous work, and starting new projects with partners such as the California Lawyers Association and the California Bar Foundation. The needs are more significant than ever in our areas of focus, including legal assistance for rural Californians, increasing funding for legal aid, and legal representation for modest means clients. We need your support to address these needs.

Please consider making a donation to help us create a future in which our civil justice system in California is genuinely accessible to all.

*Thank you for your continued support in our efforts to increase **access to justice** for **ALL Californians**.*



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COMMISSIONERS & STAFF

