



CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Providing perfect justice for the few does not equate with justice for all. Those of us who can afford legal representation must care about those who cannot if we care about our society.

*California Chief Justice Ronald M. George
Opening Remarks, Access to Justice Symposium
April 23, 2008.*



The California Commission on Access to Justice is a collaborative effort involving all three branches of government as well as judges, lawyers, professors, and business, labor, and other civic leaders. The Access Commission is dedicated to finding long-term solutions to the chronic lack of legal assistance available for low-income, vulnerable Californians. Its goals include increasing resources for legal services for the indigent, expanding pro bono and language assistance, and increasing the availability of self-help assistance and limited scope legal representation. It works closely with the State Bar, Judicial Council, and other agencies to implement its far-reaching recommendations.



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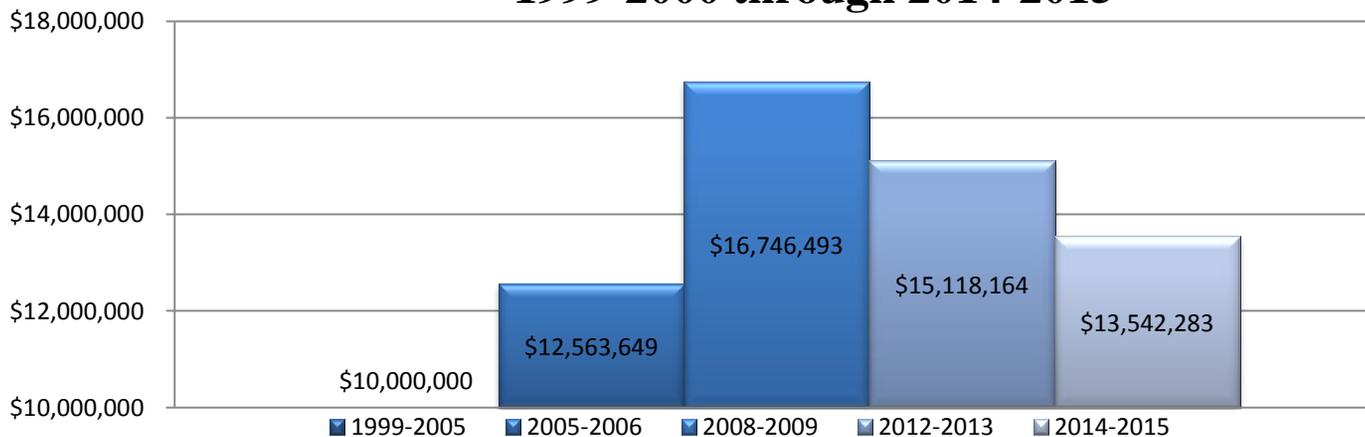
The California Commission on Access to Justice was established in 1997 to pursue long-term fundamental improvements in our civil justice system so that it is truly accessible for all, regardless of income or language ability. Establishment of the Access Commission was recommended in the 1996 report of the State Bar of California, *And Justice For All*.

- **Reports.** Published extensive reports on “access to justice” issues, including *The Path to Equal Justice* (2002), *Language Barriers to Justice in California* (2005), *Action Plan for Justice* (2007), *Improving Civil Justice in Rural California* (2010), and *Incubator Guide* (2014).
- **Equal Access Fund.** Worked with the Judicial Council to establish the \$10 million Equal Access Fund in 1999. The Fund now supports 100 legal services programs, offering legal help in every county in the state. Over \$170 million has been granted to legal service programs across the state.
- **Language Access.** Addressed language barriers in the courts, and published *Language Barriers to Justice*.
- **Self-Help Centers.** Worked closely with the Judicial Council to expand attorney-staffed self-help centers.
- **Aranda Award.** Established the Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award honoring California judges for their leadership and commitment to justice.
- **Limited Scope Representation (“Unbundling”).** Conducted innovative studies, published reports and risk management materials, offered dozens of training events, and helped develop new court rules and court forms with the goal of expanding the availability of Limited Scope Representation.
- **Minimum Access Standards.** Developed a set of defined minimum access standards for local courts in an attempt to clarify what services and procedures are necessary to truly make good on the commitment to “access to justice.”
- **Statewide Web Site.** Helped to develop LawHelpCalifornia, a statewide web site for legal services clients and lawyers, available through the Public Interest Clearinghouse and the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC).
- **National Efforts to Expand Access Commissions.** California’s Access Commission was one of the first in the country, and it has worked closely with the ABA and other national groups to ensure that similar commissions are available across the country.

We in the judicial branch have been most fortunate to have the Commission on Access to Justice as an active and innovative partner. All Californians are fortunate to have so many individuals dedicated to improving the administration of justice for all.

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Equal Access Fund 1999-2000 through 2014-2015



Number of Eligible Clients Per Legal Aid Lawyer in 2015

Number of Californians Living Below 125% Poverty	8,321,345
Number of Legal Aid Lawyers	1,024
Number of Eligible Clients Per Legal Aid Lawyer	8,126



COMMITTEES & TASK FORCE

- Administrative Agency Committee – addressing best practices and minimum standards by providing a comprehensive set of recommendations to assist administrative agencies in the U.S. Department of Justice’s recent report on Ferguson, Missouri.
- Court Fees and Fines Working Group – encouraging increased general fund support to stop relying on court fees and finds to fund the justice system.
- Language Access Committee – addressing language barriers in the courts – joint with representatives of the Judicial Council and the legal services community;
- Funding Committee – developing new resources for civil legal services in California and helping ensure continuation and expansion of the state’s Equal Access Fund.
- Pro Bono Coordinating Committee Task Force – encouraging increased pro bono in all areas of the state, particularly rural areas, and seeking to increase attorney giving of both time and financial support.
- Rural Task Force Committee – addressing “access” issues in rural areas of the state.
- Federal Courts Committee – coordinating information about services for self-represented litigants and model pro bono projects; collaboration is facilitated by the involvement of representatives from each federal district in California.

RECOGNITION OF THE COMMISSION’S WORK

The California Commission on Access to Justice received the ABA Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access in 2004 in recognition of the innovative work of its Limited Scope Representation Committee.

The Commission’s work was also the key reason the State Bar received the ABA’s prestigious Harrison Tweed award in 2001, “...for its collaborative efforts in obtaining the first state appropriation for legal services in the amount of \$10 million and seeking to increase it, for addressing the needs of unrepresented litigants and for supporting the important work of legal services programs in the state.”



MEMBERS, CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

At root, equal justice is simply the notion that law and the courts should be fair, even if life isn't.

Hon. Earl Johnson, Jr., Ret.
Associate Justice, California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District; Speech at Opening Ceremony, National Equal Justice Library, quoted in 17 Saint Louis University Law Review 265 (1998).

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