

# CO Access to Justice Commission Connection



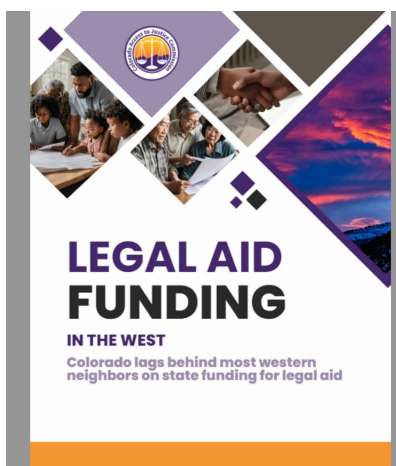
## 2024 Summer

The Commission's quarterly update sharing highlights of access to justice work, news, and opportunities for engagement.

---

## Highlights

- Our special report on Legal Aid Funding In The West
- New law creates Equal Justice Fund and millions per year for legal aid
- Meet Whit Garling Project Director for a new legal help website
- This summer's Greater Colorado Law Student Experience hosts 10 law students in rural Colorado
- First ever class of Licensed Legal Paraprofessionals in Colorado
- Judge Olafson issues a civil order addressing bias in the courtroom
- New Above the Line Network addresses the justice gap for middle class
- Why there is an access to justice gap and what there is to do about it



### LEGAL AID FUNDING IN THE WEST

A report from the Colorado Access to Justice Commission reveals that Colorado ranks 10th among 14 western states in per capita state funding for legal aid. Colorado provides \$0.73 in state funding per capita, significantly less than states like Nevada and Wyoming. The report highlights major funding gaps, which leave low-income individuals without legal representation. Through this report the Commission

helped support the Equal Justice Fund, enacted to increase funding for civil legal aid.

The report was featured in the [Denver Post](#) and referenced in this [Colorado Sun](#) opinion piece penned by Matt Baca, Executive Director of Colorado Legal Services.

Colorado ATCJ Special Report



## NEW LAW CREATES COLORADO EQUAL JUSTICE FUND

HB 24-1286, the Equal Justice Fund Authority was signed into law on June 4, 2024. This law creates a new sustainable fund for legal aid, giving an estimated \$2 million a year to organizations who offer free civil legal aid to low-income Coloradans. The initiative aims to enhance legal aid accessibility, addressing the state's lag in funding compared to neighboring states, and ensuring vulnerable Coloradans receive necessary legal support.

Denver Post Article



### Meet Whit Garling

Project Director for the new statewide legal help website.

Whit is a University of Colorado graduate experienced in project management and tech. He started out by working live events in the music industry in New York City, toured with Bo Burnum, and became interested in project management while on tour with the RuPaul Drag Race. His first project management position was

with Sounds True Publishing, working on their audio products and online courses.

Whit explains, "the project is a collaborative effort between Colorado Legal Services, the Colorado Access to Justice Commission, and the Legal Services Corporation. We are also eager to collaborate with other organizations who seek to improve access to justice for all Coloradans and continue building this coalition throughout the project.

As a byproduct of this effort, we will create a free informational database of thoroughly vetted and accessible legal information that can be leveraged by any organization that wishes to use it for their purposes.”

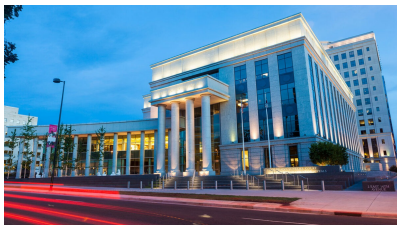
Whit came to the project because the idea of removing money as a barrier to the access of justice deeply resonates with him. He comes from a family of organizers. In fact, his dad was a member of the small team of college kids who helped organize Earth Day in 1970. He is inspired by the original premise of Earth Day, which is that collective action is best achieved when individuals focus on their own personal responsibility to contribute to a better future. For Whit, working on the statewide legal help website is doing his small part.

[Learn More](#)



## **THE GREATER COLORADO LAW STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

The Colorado Access to Justice Commission oversees paid summer internships for law students in rural communities across Colorado. The Greater Colorado Law Student Experience (GCLSE) started Jun 3, 2024. Ten law students are spending two months this summer experiencing what it is like to practice law in Colorado’s incredible rural communities. Places like Cortez, Alamosa, and Pueblo will be hosting pairs of law students and exposing them to the many perks of lawyering in greater Colorado.



## **FIRST EVER CLASS OF LICENSED LEGAL PARAPROFESSIONALS IN COLORADO**

June 20th marked the first ever class of Licensed Legal Paraprofessionals (LLPs) in Colorado. Sixty-two new LLPS were sworn in and are credentialed to represent clients in most domestic relations cases without a law license. Learn more about the program on the [Judicial Department's website](#) or the [Colorado Bar Association's FAQs](#).

[Read Opinion Piece](#)



## JUDGE OLAFSON ADDRESSES BIAS IN THE COURTROOM

On the journey to the bench, Judge Jon Olafson wanted to bring his identity with him. "Back in 2001 after I finished law school, I came out," said Olafson. Olafson is the only district court judge in Denver with his pronouns (he/him/his) displayed prominently on the front door of his courtroom. Olafson has been Colorado's 2nd Judicial District Court judge for about seven months. One of his first moves under that title was to introduce a [civility order](#).

[Denver 7 News Article](#)



## RECORD HIGH NUMBER OF EVICTIONS

Denver is seeing a record number of eviction cases, with 5,613 filed in 2024, a 75% increase from pre-pandemic levels. Despite millions invested in prevention, rising costs and housing shortages persist. Over 8,000 people have applied for assistance, stretching the city's resources thin. The [Community Economic Defense Project](#) is one organization working on eviction prevention and legal assistance.

[Denverite News Article](#)



## THE ABOVE THE LINE NETWORK (ATLN)

The Above the Line Network is a joint initiative of IAALS and The Chicago Bar Foundation. It addresses the legal services gap for middle-class Americans, who earn too much for free aid but struggle to afford quality legal help. By uniting various legal service models and advocating for systemic changes, ATLN aims to improve access to justice for the middle class.

[Read More](#)



## Justice for All? Why We Have an Access to Justice Gap in America- and What Can We Do About It? | Stanford Law School

Stanford Professors David and Nora Freeman Engstrom discuss the U.S. access to justice crisis, noting that in three-quarters of state court civil cases, at least one party lacks legal representation. They highlight economic precarity, restrictive legal service rules, and explore innovative solutions like non-lawyer legal providers and generative AI to address the issue.

[Full Article](#)

## PRO BONO CORNER



**Lawyers: you went to law school to help people. Here are some ways:**

- We're re-launching the Virtual Pro-Se Clinic, in partnership with the [Colorado Lawyers Committee](#)! The clinic was originally run by the late Ric Morgan. You can help without ever leaving your couch. Click [HERE](#) to get involved.
- [Metro Volunteer Lawyers](#) (Denver metro area opportunities)
- [Colorado Lawyers Committee](#) (join a task force of peers & mentors)
- [Colorado Bar Association's Appellate Pro Bono Program](#) (join a list of lawyers willing to take a pre-screened case)

---

[Stay informed about the Commission.](#) Join our listserv to get periodic updates about our work and related news.

[Support our work.](#) Make a one-time or monthly donation today.

**Ideas for upcoming newsletters?** We want to hear them!  
Please email tips and ideas to [elisa@coloradoaccesstojustice.org](mailto:elisa@coloradoaccesstojustice.org).



Colorado Access to Justice Commission | 1290 N Broadway Ste 1700 | Denver, CO 80203  
US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!