



2025 LISTEN AND LEARN REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY WITH KEY TAKEAWAYS

OVERVIEW

The 2025 Listen & Learn Tour engaged 317 stakeholders statewide in 23 live focus group sessions to understand the current civil legal needs, barriers to justice, and promising solutions. Community concerns were remarkably consistent across Colorado: the justice gap persists, particularly in housing and family law, for low-income and rural Coloradans, immigrants, people with disabilities, and those navigating complex systems without legal help. While some advances have been made since 2021, major structural challenges remain.

TOP CIVIL LEGAL NEEDS



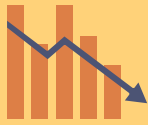
HOUSING

- Evictions dominate statewide, driven by high housing costs, rapid court timelines, and confusing procedures and terminology
- Tenants are almost always unrepresented, leading to high default judgments and great disadvantage in eviction proceedings
- Rural and resort communities reported extreme rents and absence of local legal support
- Vulnerable groups—especially people with disabilities and LEP litigants—struggle the most



FAMILY LAW

- Divorce, custody, and child support cases are overwhelming courts and families
- Self-representation is the norm, producing prolonged legal disputes and inequitable results
- Survivors of domestic violence face retraumatizing processes, inadequate trauma-informed practice, and loss of supportive services mid-case



FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC STABILITY

- Debt collection, wage theft, consumer scams, and public-benefit access problems are widespread
- Lack of financial literacy and aggressive creditor tactics leave many unprotected



IMMIGRATION

- Undocumented immigrants often fear any form of court involvement
- Language accessibility barriers keep many from reaching any help at all
- Rural areas in particular lack immigration law and other legal resources

POPULATIONS FACING THE GREATEST BARRIERS

Youth in family and juvenile legal matters and seniors managing probate and benefits face significant and unique challenges. People with disabilities encounter fragmented services and cost barriers. Veterans often have multiple overlapping civil and disability-related needs. People experiencing homelessness and limited-English speakers face barriers sometimes so steep that they never make it to the justice system at all. Many immigrants face such language barriers plus critical immigration attorney shortages in a field of law too complex for most to navigate without professional help.



SYSTEMIC & STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES



Inadequate Access to Legal Services

- Legal aid organizations are under-resourced
- Private attorneys in rural areas are aging; legal deserts persist
- Affordable representation options are rare



Court System Strain

- Courts are understaffed, overburdened, and slow to issue orders
- Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators—courthouse staff that help people find forms and resources—are effective but too few
- Physical access barriers to courthouses, outdated or inaccessible technology



Procedural & Forms Complexity

- Unrepresented litigants are legally held to attorney-level standards
- Forms are confusing and not in plain language
- Local variation in legal processes creates inconsistency and confusion



Technology Barriers

- Limited public technology (printers, Wi-Fi, devices)
- Virtual hearings are difficult for low-tech users
- Judicial Department website is hard to navigate even for legal professionals; electronic filing is inaccessible and unaffordable to many



Language Barriers

- Forms, notices, and orders are in English only
- Interpreter access is limited outside courtrooms
- Less common languages remain unsupported



Social Challenges

- Poverty, housing instability, transportation, childcare burdens
- Fear and mistrust cause some individuals to never seek help

WHAT'S WORKING: PROMISING SOLUTIONS



Expanded access to free or affordable professional legal help and curated legal information

- State funding for legal aid
- Self-represented Litigant Coordinators (“Sherlocks”) provided by the Judicial Department in courthouses
- Right-to-counsel eviction models and dedicated eviction docket days
- Early mediation
- New Licensed Legal Paraprofessionals (LLPs)—accredited non-attorneys that can legally represent clients in certain circumstances



Community-anchored services

- Library-based programs, legal clinics, Virtual Pro Se Clinic in rural communities
- Interest in creating community justice workers program to train existing professionals on providing legal guidance to their clients and patients



Coordination & Wraparound Support

- Housing navigators, social workers, human services providers, integrated into legal settings
- Holistic partnerships helping with long-term outcomes



Housing & Procedural Reforms

- Improved eviction summonses and language access
- Longer cure periods for nonpayment
- Expanded e-filing access



Technology Improvements

- Remote hearings eliminate many barriers
- Ideas: courthouse printers and public Wi-Fi, short instructional videos, text reminders
- AI assisted legal help tools with consumer protections



Policy & Legislative Ideas

- Increased legal aid funding
- Rural-practice incentives like loan forgiveness programs
- Probate and eviction statute updates

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- Maintain/increase legal aid funding
- Fund more judges, Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators, and Family Court Facilitators
- Incentivize rural practice (e.g. loan forgiveness programs)
- Invest in statewide legal help website and tech tools

TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Improve transportation to courthouses
- Ensure ADA access in and around courthouses
- Support and coordinate collaboration among service providers

TO THE JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

- Add more Judicial Officers, Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators, and Family Court Facilitators; initiate court navigators program
- Redesign the Judicial Department website for usability
- Expand e-filing access to all case types and eliminate e-filing fees for low-income filers
- Simplify and standardize forms and processes
- Expand Licensed Legal Paraprofessionals to other areas of law beyond family law



TO LAW SCHOOLS

- Expand rural pipelines and clinics
- Increase stipends for rural/public interest work
- Integrate access to justice into core curricula
- Teach legal tech and cultural competency skills

TO LAWYERS & FIRMS

- Increase pro bono and modest-means work
- Integrate modest means clients into your business model through limited scope and sliding fee scales
- Join pro bono recognition programs

TO ACCESS-TO-JUSTICE ADVOCATES

- Pursue community justice worker programming in Colorado
- Support policy reforms that expand access to legal help beyond traditional lawyer-client legal services
- Support your local Access to Justice Committee



CONCLUSION

Colorado's 2025 Listen & Learn Tour confirms that, despite meaningful progress since 2021, the justice gap remains a defining barrier for communities across the state. Housing instability, family law challenges, language and technology barriers, and scarce legal help—especially in rural and low-income communities—continue to shape people's experiences with the civil legal system. At the same time, Coloradans are innovating. New paraprofessionals, expanded community-based support, coordinated service models, and technology-enabled solutions show real promise.

The needs identified are clear, and so is the path forward—strengthen coordination, expand affordable legal assistance, prioritize language justice, modernize court processes, and invest in the workforce and tools that make access possible. With sustained commitment from policymakers, courts, service providers, and communities, Colorado can continue closing the justice gap and build a civil justice system that more people can navigate and trust.

For the full report visit www.coloradoaccesstojustice.org/atjc-reports





The Colorado Access to Justice Commission is a statewide, nonpartisan entity dedicated to expanding access, quality, and fairness in the justice system for all Coloradans.

www.coloradoaccesstojustice.org