

Annual Report 2023



**PARTNERING ON A SHARED
COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE FOR ALL**



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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The mission of the Colorado Access to Justice Commission is to expand access, quality, and fairness in the justice system for all Coloradans. The focus of this work is on civil matters, or everything that falls outside criminal law. These matters affect virtually every aspect of Coloradans' lives, including issues with housing, divorce, custody, consumer debt, employment, public benefits, and health access.

On any given day, thousands of Coloradans face unresolved civil legal issues. These can have devastating personal consequences when daunting barriers prevent them from being effectively, efficiently, and equitably resolved. For particularly marginalized populations, these barriers are especially destabilizing and compounding. The impacts can include lost housing, lost employment, food insecurity, lack of access to medical care, or lack of protection from domestic violence.

Founded in 2003, the Commission serves as a statewide hub where key stakeholders work together to create solutions and develop resources that help fill the justice gap. The Commission's goal is for every Coloradan to have the information, tools, and services necessary to resolve their civil legal problems fairly, quickly, and economically. Solutions range from local initiatives, like pro bono services and clinics, to statewide policies, like simplified rules and legislative appropriations for legal aid.

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR IMPACT

In 2021, the Commission conducted a statewide listening tour of each of the state's 22 judicial districts. After conversations with over 500 Coloradans and stakeholders, the Commission issued a report on Colorado's alarming justice gap. Building on that report, the Commission developed a set of four strategic objectives to achieve the vision of justice for all Coloradans.

1. STATEWIDE ONLINE LEGAL HELP PORTAL

- Develop an accessible online portal that is the “go-to” website for effectively connecting those needing legal help with the appropriate legal resources.

2. EXPANDING LEGAL SERVICES IN UNDERSERVED RURAL AREAS

- Encourage the continued, permanent use of remote proceedings by trial and appellate courts, when appropriate.
- Promote the practice of law in rural areas with few or no lawyers.
- Drive legal resources to underserved rural areas for those with little or no access to legal advice.

3. FUNDING

- Obtain sustained, reliable funding for the Commission and resources needed to carry out its mission.
- Substantially increase funding for free civil legal services for indigent Coloradans by the State of Colorado, localities, and foundations.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

- Draw attention to and foster understanding of the importance of access to justice and removing barriers to access.
- Promote recommended solutions among our access to justice partners, key constituencies, decisionmakers, and the public.
- Prioritize listening to the needs of communities across Colorado to ensure the solutions furthered by the Commission target the areas of greatest need on the ground.

“When our neighbors and businesses can resolve disputes fairly and efficiently, all Coloradans benefit.”

Senator
Robert Gardner

PARTNERING ON A SHARED COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

The Commission's work in 2023 turned on one key principle: partnership between stakeholders to advance more comprehensive solutions and an ecosystem of equal access work.

Policy

COLORADO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- The Colorado General Assembly codified the Commission during the 2023 legislative session, making it a policy-advising partner to the state's elected officials and creating a cash fund so it can fulfill its mission.
- The Office of the Colorado Attorney General signed on as an official supporter of the bill codifying the Commission, and Governor Jared Polis held a public signing of the bill on June 2, 2023.



“Every Coloradan deserves meaningful access to our courts, and [this] bill represents progress on this most fundamental goal of our democracy.”

Representative Junie Joseph

COLORADO JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

- The Commission submitted a report and recommendations on virtual proceedings to the **Colorado Supreme Court**. Justice Boatright issued a Chief Justice Directive effective August 1, 2023, enumerating case types where litigants should be allowed to choose whether they wish to appear virtually or in-person.



1,100

Estimated number of volunteer hours dedicated by local Access to Justice committee members across the state in 2023

Programs

RURAL LEGAL DESERTS GRANT

- October 1, 2023, marked the beginning of a two-year grant project designed to drive desperately needed legal resources to several of Colorado’s driest rural legal deserts. This was made possible by a \$627,000 Congressionally Directed Spending award. Congress approved funding for this project upon the urging of Colorado U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper, signaling their commitment to addressing the issue and supporting the Commission’s work.

GREATER COLORADO LAW STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- The Commission is directing the Greater Colorado Law Student Experience—now in its third year of existence—sending law students to underserved rural legal communities to promote and raise the profile of rural legal practice. Central to this program’s success is the partnership of the Colorado Bar Association (CBA); the Wyoming, DU, and Colorado Law Schools; the Judicial Department; the Office of Alternate Defense Counsel (OADC); and dozens of rural attorneys and organizations that host participating students. The scholarships that allow students to participate in this program come from the Colorado Bar Foundation, a number of CBA Sections, and the law schools.

“For the last twenty years, the CBA has been pleased to partner with the Commission by providing assistance and leadership to increase the capacities of legal service providers to deliver stronger programs, build connections, and innovate statewide programming. The CBA looks forward to continuing our strong collaboration with the Commission, moving forward together to provide every Coloradan equal justice under law because every person deserves that right.”

Ryann Peyton, Colorado Bar Association Past President

STATEWIDE LEGAL INFORMATION & HELP WEBSITE

- The Commission teamed up with Colorado Legal Services (CLS) and was awarded a \$283,600 grant to develop Colorado’s statewide legal help website. The project began in November 2023, with research, discovery, and robust user testing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A SNAPSHOT BY NUMBERS



4000

Number of hours law students spent learning about access to justice as interns with the Commission in 2023



2.5k

Estimated number of people helped by local Access to Justice Committees' legal clinics across the state in 2023

COMMISSONERS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

180

Number of attendees for a panel on the role of AI in Access to Justice, co-sponsored by the Commission, Silicon Flatirons, and the Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative

1.7k

Estimated number of hours Commissioners and members of its eight separate committees collectively volunteered for the Commission in 2023

52

Number of partner organizations and entities that officially signed on in support of the Commission's codification during the 2023 legislative session

460

Number of lawyers and allies to whom the Commission presented about the crisis in access to justice and the importance of this work

IMPACT GOING FORWARD

Goals for 2024

- **Undertake Phase One of Legal Help Website Development:** In 2024, the Commission is excited to work closely with Colorado Legal Services on a robust research and development phase of what will ultimately become Colorado's statewide legal help portal. This phase will involve extensive user testing to develop informative, intuitive, and usable self-help resources and tools to assist Coloradans with little or no access to legal advice.
- **Launch Underserved Rural Communities Project:** The Commission is launching a substantial two-year grant project to identify data-based solutions that will bring desperately needed legal resources to some of Colorado's driest legal deserts. 2024 will mark the first year of the grant and will hinge upon forming close relationships with the communities experiencing shortages and developing solutions with those most impacted.
- **Grow Capacity of Commission:** The Commission is excited to enter into a period of growth in its staff and capacity to meaningfully impact access to justice in Colorado. The Commission is committed to building and fortifying sound organizational infrastructure, ensuring its operations are rooted in best practices and are in alignment with its mission and values.
- **Advance Policy Impact:** 2024 will mark the first year the Commission has an official role as a policy-making partner to the General Assembly and the Governor's office. The Commission's newly formed Legislative Policy Committee will collaborate with bill sponsors and coalitions to advance thoughtful, well-informed policies that further the Commission's mission.



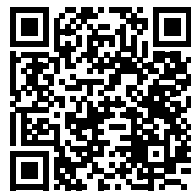
“Working with the Commission has opened my eyes to the daily injustices Coloradans face. It has also taught me that solutions must be drafted collaboratively and creatively.”

Hannah Borowski, 3L at Colorado Law School



PARTNER WITH US

<https://www.coloradoaccesstojustice.org/engage-with-us>



We are deeply grateful for the many volunteers and partner organizations that have worked with the Commission to advance access to justice in 2023. In addition to the partners listed above, we wish to acknowledge the Office of the Alternate Defense Counsel, Office of Respondent Parent's Counsel, Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, Metro Volunteer Lawyers, Virtual Pro Se Clinic, Colorado Poverty Law Project, Community Economic Defense Project, Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network, Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center, Mediation Association of Colorado, Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center, and the many advocates serving on local access to justice committees across the state.