



Annual Report 2025



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,



Across nearly every facet of our work, 2025 has been a year of grounding - of strengthening foundations so that new growth can emerge with resilience and permanence. Programs we launched or assumed in recent years have matured into durable infrastructure. New partnerships have deepened. Systems are being built not for a single season, but for long-term sustainability.

Many of the initiatives we have carefully developed are moving from vision to durable implementation. From expanding rural legal supports to building new pro bono infrastructure and advancing our statewide online legal help efforts, we are translating years of planning and listening into systems designed to serve Coloradans for the long term.

At the same time, the Commission's institutional roots have grown deeper. With ongoing legislative appropriations, sustained bar and foundation support, and the successful inaugural year of the Equal Justice Fund for legal aid, Colorado now has more stable and diversified access-to-justice funding than ever before. These structures will nourish innovation well into the future.

Importantly, this grounding work has not happened in isolation. Through our 2025 Listen & Learn Tour and ongoing community engagement, we remain guided by the lived experiences of Coloradans navigating the justice system. Taking root means embedding our efforts in community wisdom, so that what grows next truly belongs to and is shaped by the people it is designed to serve.

Thank you for tending this work alongside us. Because of your partnership, what began as seeds of possibility is becoming a resilient and interconnected ecosystem of justice - one that will continue to grow, adapt, and serve Colorado for generations to come.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elisa Overall'.

Elisa Overall
Executive Director
Colorado Access to Justice Commission

TAKING ROOT

STAFF



Elisa Overall
Executive Director

Brett Landis
Director of
Pro Bono Resources

Eileen Webster
Legal Facilitator,
Virtual Pro-Se Clinic

Elise Bechthold
Special Programs Manager

Jason Roberts
Director of
Rural Legal Services

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WHAT IS ACCESS TO JUSTICE?

Access to justice is achieved when the justice system works for everyone regardless of income, background, or circumstance.

THE JUSTICE GAP

Justice needs are common. 2 in 3 Americans will face a legal problem in the next four years. Most will get no legal help.



Unmet justice needs impact life-or-death human needs like housing, physical safety, social security, disability, health care coverage, custody, migratory status, and employment.

HOW WE ADDRESS THE JUSTICE GAP

No single solution is able to solve the justice gap. Instead, solutions range from direct legal representation that is free or affordable to self-help tools that can guide people to legal resolution.

The Access to Justice Commission (“ATJC”) addresses the justice gap by:





UNITING LEADERS ACROSS SECTORS TO EVALUATE NEEDS AND DRIVE SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

LISTEN AND LEARN REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We undertook a robust statewide Listen & Learn Tour, speaking in small group meetings with over 300 constituents in every region, to assess emerging civil legal needs and identify systemic solutions. The result was our Listen & Learn Report – one of the most extensive qualitative assessments of Colorado’s civil justice landscape to date – with recommendations for the General Assembly, law schools, judicial department, private bar, and access to justice advocates. Here we united communities and lifted voices to directly inform strategic advocacy, policy reform, and cross-sector collaboration statewide.

COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Communications - Chair, Brittany Kauffman - supported the ATJC’s reports, legislative testimony, Rule of Law Statement, and helped plan and promote the Listen & Learn Tour.

Courts - Chair, Hon. Timothy Schutz - produced and distributed “Guidance for Assisting Self-Represented Litigants,” surveyed court staff, and created guidance for judicial district websites.

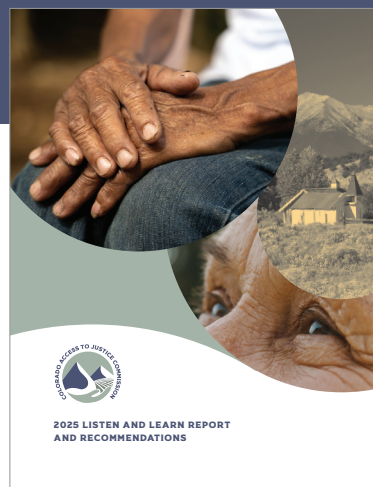
Delivery - Chair, David Stark - promoted pro bono participation, Licensed Legal Paraprofessional (LLP) practice, and rural service innovations, while exploring referral lists, AI in legal services, and regulatory sandboxes.

Executive - Chair, Kimberly Gent - performed governance and oversight, amended bylaws to clarify fiduciary responsibilities, and conducted Commissioner interviews to identify areas of improvement.

Local ATJ Support - Chair, Hon. Melissa Hart - statewide access to justice leaders supported the Listen & Learn Tour, strengthened cross-district partnerships with non-legal partners, and advanced collaboration on successful initiatives.

Strategic Action - Chair, Dick Gast - aligned strategic initiatives, connected priorities to program implementation, and produced a three-year progress report on the ATJC’s strategic goals.

Technology - Chair, Jason Lynch - monitored regulatory updates to legal tech for self-represented litigants and AI modernization’s impact on access to justice.



22



live virtual
Listen & Learn sessions
between March 2025
and July 2025

we heard from

317 stakeholders
including

128 community organizations
and government providers

63 attorneys and legal
service providers

126 Judicial Department staff



SUPPORTING LEGAL AID THROUGH FUNDING AND ADVOCACY

In its first year, the **Colorado Equal Justice Authority (EJA)** – created by HB24-1286 and staffed by the ATJC – established governance systems, collected Equal Justice Fee revenue, and awarded its first grants to qualifying legal aid organizations. In just six months, we helped the EJA distribute \$1.7M to 27 organizations, 12 of which are rural-focused. Learn more at coloradoeja.org.

\$1.7 million
Awarded in first six months

\$4 million
Collected in 2025



We have helped defend against state budget cuts: Eviction Legal Defense Fund, Family Violence Justice Fund, and Immigrant Legal Defense Fund. We also advocated for Legal Services Corporation funding in Washington D.C.



CHAMPIONING PRO BONO WORK THROUGH COORDINATION, EDUCATION, AND SUPPORT

Our statewide Pro Bono Resource Center, established at the end of 2024, helped host Colorado's first statewide **Pro Bono Summit**, bringing together over one hundred pro bono leaders to collaborate and learn from one another.

We built Colorado's single clearinghouse for legal volunteer opportunities for lawyers, law students, and Licensed Legal Paraprofessionals alike - **ProBonoCO.org**. ATJC hosts the site and its many stakeholders, making sure opportunities are current and volunteers are easily connecting with meaningful opportunities and returning for more.





EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH LEGAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND LEGAL INFORMATION

The **Virtual Pro-Se Clinic (VPC)** has been transformational for rural Coloradans with limited access to legal help of any kind. We connect high-quality attorneys with rural Coloradans through an expansive network of 24 monthly virtual clinics. Through dynamic partnerships with the Colorado Lawyers Committee, local libraries, and community providers, the VPC provides direct multilingual legal advice to rural residents, with the goal of empowering them to make informed decisions and successfully navigate their legal issues without a lawyer.

783 rural
clients

24 monthly
clinics

34 rural
libraries



Statewide Online Legal Help Site - Colorado Legal Services and the ATJC built the state's centralized free law help website, Law Help Colorado, and readied it for user testing, with a soft launch expected in mid-to late 2026.



INVESTING IN RURAL SOLUTIONS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATION

Increasing the rural legal workforce: Our **Rural Justice Internships** program places pairs of law students in six rural Colorado communities for eight-week immersive experiences in local courts and with nonprofit partners, building a pipeline from law school to rural legal careers. In 2025, twelve students were selected from a pool of seventy-seven applicants from twenty-one law schools across eleven states.

12 law
students

6 rural
communities

2880 hours of service
and training

Community-based legal navigation: We are also building a training program for existing rural professionals in “**Legal First Aid**,” credentialing trusted community members to help neighbors navigate legal issues without engaging in unauthorized practice of law. Guided by community organizations in southeastern Colorado, this pilot is intended to create scalable, community-embedded legal support where attorneys are scarce.





Colorado attendees at 2025 Equal Justice Conference in San Francisco, California.



ENGAGE WITH US

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



We are deeply grateful for the many volunteers, partner organizations, and funders without whom our work would not be possible. These include individual donors; the Colorado Bar Association and many Sections such as Business Law, Family Law, Real Estate, and Trusts & Estates; the Colorado Bar Foundation; Colorado Lawyer Trust Account Foundation; Colorado Legal Services; Larimer County Bar Association; University of Colorado Law School; Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver; and the United States Department of Justice.