

MAINE JUSTICE ACTION GROUP

The Justice Action Group is a coalition of individuals and organizations established in 1995 to provide leadership and coordination in planning for the provision of civil legal aid to low-income and elderly Mainers.

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ACCESS TO JUSTICE UPDATE

Maine State Library Awarded \$1.36 Million Federal Technology Funding Grant

On July 2, 2010 the Maine State Library was awarded a \$1.36 million Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant for the Maine Public Library Information Commons Project. Members of the access to justice community, including JAG, supported the grant application.

The Maine Public Library Information Commons Project establishes or enhances public computer centers in more than 100 public libraries in Maine. The centers will serve as access points to free high speed Internet service, and will provide assistance to vulnerable populations both in the use of technology and in finding and using needed information in the areas of employment, civil law, health, government services, small business information, and workforce development. This project also establishes 11 additional video conferencing regional hubs to enhance training for patrons and librarians.

This technological expansion within the libraries is a key building block for JAG's Collaboration on Innovation, Technology and Equal Access to Justice (the Collaboration) in that it will provide a technological infrastructure upon which a web-based legal referral network can be built.

The full executive summary may be found at:

<http://www.maine.gov/msl/recovery/>

The full grant may be viewed at:

<http://www.maine.gov/msl/btop.htm>

"This very competitive federal grant will serve the people of Maine more effectively through advanced technology in its public libraries. It is no secret that libraries are serving more and more citizens in the face of severe budget challenges. This grant is very timely.

"When I received the call from the Department of Commerce it was made very clear to me that our partnerships were the key factors in the grant award. It is obvious that your letters regarding Access to Justice were critical to our success.

**Linda H. Lord
State Librarian
Maine State Library**

THE COLLABORATION

The Collaboration on Innovation, Technology and Equal Access to Justice is Up and Running

On June 17th, Associate Justice Andrew Mead, Chair of the Collaboration and VLP Director Juliet Holmes-Smith, Vice-Chair, met at the 14th Annual Public Library Directors' Institute in Waterville to launch Maine's first access to justice trainings for librarians.

This meeting is held annually to provide an opportunity for public library directors from throughout the state to meet to discuss issues with their peers. First on the agenda this year was Access to Justice.

Maine's librarians are enthusiastically embracing a collaboration with the legal community, coordinated by the Collaboration, because they are often first responders for individuals in their communities facing legal troubles. Barbara McDade, Director of the Bangor Public Library, has been a key member of the Collaboration.

Trainings for the librarians will address issues such as where to find legal information on the web, how to direct individuals to appropriate legal support and the ethical line between information and advice. The trainings will begin on July 15th in Bangor followed by a July 22nd training in Portland, an August 12th training in Lewiston, and an August 19th training in Presque Isle.

The Collaboration acquired grant funds to create the training modules and facilitate participation by librarians who are not close to the training locations.

Following the training, two pilot projects (one rural and one urban) will be launched within the libraries. The scope of the projects is still being developed, but plans include the presence of pro bono attorneys at the libraries on specified dates to provide more substantive support to community members.

**For more information about the Justice Action Group please contact:
Caroline Wilshusen, JAG Executive Coordinator at cwilshusen@mbf.org**

JAG Highlights:

- The Next JAG Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday October 19th at 2 p.m. We will be using a new meeting format with the goal of utilizing the board meetings as a forum for robust discussion on potential JAG initiatives and national access to justice trends. Most reporting will be done by written communications distributed prior to the meeting. Our focus for the October 19th meeting will be the use of limited representation in forwarding access to justice.
- In preparation for the October 19th meeting, a Limited Representation Planning Committee was assembled chaired by Juliet Holmes-Smith. Members include Dennis Culley of Legal Services for the Elderly, Martica Douglas, Margaret Minister O'Keefe, Liz Scheffee, Ginger Davis and Carrie Wilshusen.
- Justice Levy and Judge Rich met with the ACP on July 1st to discuss upstream intervention and Judge Rich's survey of JAG's Board pertaining to JAG's structure and procedures.
- On June 23, the 2nd Biennial Access to Justice Symposium Planning Committee met to discuss possible themes. Planning committee members include, Deirdre Smith, Calien Lewis, Julie Deacon, Victoria Powers, Ginger Davis and Carrie Wilshusen. A tentative theme for the next symposium is *Serving the Legal Needs of Maine's Changing Population*.
- The JAG Executive Committee is exploring a possible conference on access to justice for the incoming Legislature, new Governor, and Executive agencies.

Legal Services for the Elderly Assessing Needs and Coordinating Services

In the face
of diminishing
resources and

increasing demand, Legal Services for the Elderly ("LSE") is pursuing several new initiatives aimed at meeting the legal needs of Maine's growing aging population. This work is being supported by a three year federal grant from the Administration on Aging (AoA) under its Model Approaches to Statewide Legal Services program. The goal of the AoA program is to support states in identifying the legal needs of the elderly, assessing the resources available to them, and coordinating and expanding upon the available resources. An emphasis is being placed on the creation of new low cost service mechanisms through collaborations with the private bar, law schools, area agencies on aging and other agencies and organizations. As a part of these ongoing efforts to create an efficient system to meet the legal needs of Maine's elderly, LSE has retained the University of Maine Center on Aging to conduct a study of the legal needs of Maine's elderly. This study is being conducted in two phases.

Phase one is nearly complete and involves the Center on Aging comparing the results obtained in legal needs studies conducted in six other states that are very similar to Maine to service data compiled by LSE. This approach was selected as it is a very cost effective way for the Center to complete an initial statewide study. This initial needs assessment is nearly final and will be published in July, 2010. The study identifies a significant and growing unmet need for legal services in Maine. The primary areas of need identified in the study include access to healthcare, consumer debt, housing (including foreclosure), and elder abuse and financial exploitation.

Phase Two of the study will occur in 2011 and will involve the Center on Aging conducting focus groups that attempt to identify emerging or unmet needs for services. The focus groups will also attempt to identify the barriers that might keep an elder from seeking help when it is needed, in particular in the elder abuse area. The focus groups will include diverse populations of seniors as well as seniors that may face unique barriers to receiving services.



JAG welcomes Lori Londis Dwyer, Esq. to the JAG Board of Directors

Lori is a member of Bernstein Shur's Labor and Employment Practice Group and the Litigation Practice Group. Her practice focuses on public and private employment and labor law issues. She comes to the JAG Board by recommendation of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project for whom she has donated countless hours.



The 2010 Campaign for Justice is pleased to report that members of the Maine Bar continue to demonstrate their unequivocal commitment to increasing access to justice for all Maine people through generous support of the Campaign. Chair Colleen Khoury presented an interim Campaign update at the MSBA Summer Bar meeting held recently in Bar Harbor and reported that as of June 16th, more than 800 attorneys and judges have committed over \$250,000 in gifts and pledges. Included in that total are 105 "Leaders for Justice" who have made contributions of \$1,000 or more to this year's Campaign. These impressive results would not be possible without a dedicated team of nearly 100 state-wide volunteers who work tirelessly to achieve these results.

Hard times are especially challenging to the six legal aid providers the Campaign supports, but the problems their clients face – housing, healthcare, financial exploitation, and family abuse among others – continue unrelentingly. Because of the support of the Maine Bar, the providers will continue to help Maine people meet the increased challenges many are facing today. The 2010 Campaign for Justice will continue to receive gifts and pledges until December 31st.

For more information on the work of the Campaign for Justice please visit: www.campaignforjustice.org.