

# National Center for Access to Justice

*at Cardozo Law School*

“Thou Shalt Not Ration Justice”  
– Hon. Learned Hand

## Mission

Our courts are overwhelmed! And the consequences affect us all. The wealthiest corporations cannot resolve their legal problems and the poor struggle to protect their most basic rights. The “justice gap” widens in hard times and is serious at all times. In civil cases, 80% of the legal needs of the poor are unmet, including assistance of counsel. In some states, courthouses have closed and civil trials have been suspended. We cannot stand idly by as access to our courts diminishes by the day. The mission of the National Center for Access to Justice is to be a front line of defense making sure that our courts remain open and accessible to all.

## Approach

The [National Center for Access to Justice](#) is the single academically affiliated non-partisan law and policy organization dedicated exclusively to assuring access to our civil and criminal justice systems. In carrying out its reform initiatives, the Center partners with the bar, judiciary, law schools, the legal services community, and other stakeholders. At the same time, its independence as a free-standing non-profit organization can help its allies to see the world through the eyes of those who rely upon them. The Center’s tools include litigation, books and reports, public education and public advocacy, conferences, and legislative drafting. The Center is located at Cardozo Law School where each spring its attorneys teach the Access to Justice Clinic.

## Signature Projects

[Access to Justice Index](#). The *Access to Justice Index* is a new web-based system, currently under development, in which the Center will gather and present data showing the extent to which our 50 state justice systems are able to assure access to justice for all. This project assumes public institutions function best when people understand how they operate, when performance can be evaluated, and when analogous institutions are compared. Transparency is especially important for courts, which rely on the public’s faith for their existence. By setting benchmarks, identifying best practices, and publishing policies and data, the Access to Justice Index will empower judges, court administrators, other government officials, journalists, academics and activists in their respective efforts to improve our justice system.

[Law Student Pro Bono](#). Across the country, law students are carrying out a broad range of activities as volunteers – engaging in advocacy, conducting know your rights trainings, solving legal questions through research, capturing information through court-watching projects, and helping in additional ways too. Law student pro bono is having a substantial impact, whether supervised by courts, legal services provider organizations, law schools, access to justice commissions, or the private bar, and whether done through mandatory or voluntary programs. We are writing a *National Guide to Strengthening Law Student Pro Bono to Increase Access to Justice*. We are developing recommendations for reform, and gathering innovative projects and structures that can be replicated to increase the power of law students to make a difference.

[New Models of Support](#). The justice gap is prompting communities to consider new models for helping litigants who are unable to afford private lawyers and unsuccessful in qualifying for free civil legal representation. Communities are experimenting with help desks, pro se clerk's offices, computer kiosks, forms, call centers and many other approaches. In some places, authorities are considering whether non-lawyers might have a useful role to play in providing advice and information to litigants. Some of the new models are drawn from the medical profession, where “medical technicians” and “nurse practitioners” have increasing responsibilities. In consultation with the private bar, the Center is developing recommendations in this area for the field of law.

## **Leadership**

The Center is led by [David Udell](#), its founder and executive director, and [Laura Abel](#), its deputy director. Each held leadership roles at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School before leaving to create this new Center, with its more exclusive focus on access to the courts. The Center's board of directors is chaired by [Stephen Zack](#), administrative partner for Boies, Schiller & Flexner's Miami office and a past president of the American Bar Association.

## **Partnership**

We would love to hear from you if you are interested in partnering with us in any capacity. Reach us at [info@ncforaj.org](mailto:info@ncforaj.org). Visit us at [www.ncforaj.org](http://www.ncforaj.org).

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