

SRLN Brief: Envisioning 100% Access (SRLN 2015)



National Initiative: [JUSTICE FOR ALL PROJECT](#)

Over the last fifteen years, leaders from the courts, legal aid programs, private bar associations, and allied professionals have actively pursued innovations to reimagine and redesign the civil legal system so that access to justice is a reality for the millions of people without lawyers who pass through the more than 15,000 state and local courts in America.

It is estimated that at least 3 out of every 5 people in the civil cases involving private individuals have no legal representation. Called self-represented litigants (SRLs), these people come from all walks of life. SRLs are filing for divorce or custody, seeking child support, defending against corporate creditors, seeking domestic violence protective orders, probating their loved one's estates, and seeking guardianship for an incapacitated child or aging parent. Nearly 10% of

Americans seek relief from the courts every year. Almost all of them do so without the assistance of an attorney while facing an often complex and opaque system. (See [SRLN Brief: How Many SRLs \(2019\)](#).)

With the leadership of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) a blueprint for change has emerged. In 2002 the Conferences passed their first resolution to inspire leaders to take action: [In Support of a Leadership Role for CCJ and COSCA in the Development, Implementation and Coordination of Assistance Programs for the Self-Represented](#).

After the publication of the white papers, CCJ/COSCA continued to support exploration into how best to meet the self-represented challenge, and in 2005 the Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN) was established. See [SRLN Founding Document and inaugural participating organizations](#). With the creation of SRLN, the State Justice Institute then funded a number of SRLN initiatives, including the creation of a [Judicial Bench Guide \(opens PDF\)](#) and [the national leadership package](#).

Thanks to CCJ and COSCA leadership and the tireless efforts and spirit of innovation of the many SRLN participants, more than 500 self-help centers have been created across the country (see [ABA Self-Help Center Census \(2014\)](#)). [Best practices](#) emerged as millions of people used these services and judges, administrators, researchers, and the people themselves learned what a difference self-help centers and related innovations could make in access to justice. In addition, [Access to Justice Commissions](#) have been established in a majority of states to bring together local leaders in the courts, bar and legal aid to develop local strategies and solutions.

Another significant development occurred in 2012 and 2013, when the [Legal Services Corporation](#) convened a national [Technology Summit](#) that brought together more than 75 representatives of legal aid programs, courts, government, and business as well as technology experts, academics, and private practitioners to explore the role of technology in expanding access to justice. The [Report of The Summit on the Use of Technology to Expand Access to Justice \(opens PDF\)](#) focuses on ways to use technology to provide all Americans some form of effective assistance with essential civil legal needs. It also presents a number of concrete recommendations to broaden and improve civil legal assistance through an integrated service-delivery system that brings the knowledge and wisdom of legal experts to the public through computers and mobile devices.

The impact of this summit and its report is strongly felt today with numerous states exploring the possibility of creating an online legal portal that would provide consumers with a one-stop tool to explore legal information, tools and calculators to assess their options and integrated referral systems to legal providers and the courts. This is considered by many to be critical in developing an ecosystem that will support 100% access to effective legal assistance.

With momentum behind access to justice building the Conference of Chief Justices, and perhaps sensing a tipping point, passed two companion resolutions in July 2015 that provide this sector extraordinary leadership from the top, and continue to inspire us. The first, In the [Support of the Statement of Best Practices for State Funding of Civil Legal Aid \(opens PDF\)](#), focuses on best practices in the funding of legal aid services, while the second, [Reaffirming the Commitment to Meaningful Access to Justice for All](#), encourages colleagues to set an aspirational goal of 100% access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs.

Only two months later, in September 2015, the President of the United States issued a [Presidential Memorandum -- Establishment of the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable](#) (LAIR), which assures that the informal work going on since 2012 under the leadership of the [Department of Justice's Office for Access to Justice](#) will continue. Included in its many achievements is the creation of the [LAIR Toolkit \(opens PDF\)](#), designed to provide a roadmap to the ways in which legal services can enhance federal strategies for serving vulnerable and underserved populations. As [Richard Zorza commented in his blog](#), these documents are a major milestone in creating the national access to justice mosaic.

Since its inception shortly after the 2002 CCJ Resolution, SRLN has served as a research, training, communication and innovation hub for the lawyers, judges and allied professionals seeking to create the infrastructure necessary to support true 100% access to effective legal assistance. The resources and information collected on our website have been selected to support the theoretical, policy, and practical needs of those working to advance the innovations recommended by the CCJ 100% Access Resolution from 2015. Echoing the call of the Resolution, the materials are designed to help participants:

- expand self-help services to litigants
- simplify court rules and processes to facilitate access

- develop triage models to match need to services across the continuum of need from legal information to full representation
- integrate legal advice through unbundled private counsel, pro bono and legal aid
- optimize the integration of technology
- identify and engage allied professionals who improve the delivery system

Please don't hesitate to contact us at info@srln.org with your ideas of how to enhance our collection or information about promising innovations.

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