



National Center *for* Access to Justice

AT FORDHAM LAW SCHOOL

Our Mission:

The National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) is the national organization that relies on data to accomplish change that helps people obtain access to justice in the civil and criminal justice systems.

What is Access to Justice?

Access to justice is the meaningful opportunity to be heard. It means that people can learn about and protect their rights in a neutral and nondiscriminatory process that determines the facts, applies the rule of law, and enforces the result. Everyone values access to justice, but it is unavailable to millions of people in disputes involving even the most basic and important human needs including: eviction, foreclosure, domestic violence, and child neglect. It is often compromised, even in criminal cases. And, it can be elusive for people marginalized in our society, including people in racial, ethnic, and religious communities; people in rural areas; women; LGBT people; and people in poverty. Access to justice is often out of reach because people are unable to afford private counsel, unable to qualify for free legal aid, and unaware that their concerns have remedies in law. We all have a stake in access to justice, not only because at key moments in our lives we (and those we love) may face urgent legal challenges, but also because the basic stability of our society – of our rule of law and of our democratic institutions – requires our justice system to be accessible to all.

Our Flagship Project - The Justice Index:

Our flagship project at NCAJ is the Justice Index, www.justiceindex.org, the online resource we created that sets up carrots and sticks incentives to improve the justice system by ranking the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. on the degree to which they have adopted best policies for access to justice. With 120 “indicators” and 5000 data points, the Justice Index makes it easy for everyone to see and understand these policies by sorting its findings into four categories: i) the ratio of the number of civil legal aid attorneys to the number of people who are poor, ii) policies for self-represented litigants, iii) policies for people with limited English proficiency, and iv) policies for people with disabilities. Online since March 2014, the Justice Index is in its third year of increasing public understanding of American courts, facilitating social science research and supporting justice system reform. It is [widely covered in the media](#), and used by countries seeking developing justice indexes of their own. In an era when facts are questioned with “alternative facts”, it offers an objective measure of whether efforts to increase access to justice are undermined.

NCAJ’s Leadership in the Year Ahead:

In 2017, NCAJ will be working on these projects: **i) The Justice Index** – We will be carrying out a new national research initiative; developing and using new data analytics to reveal patterns; and relying on Justice Index findings to improve state justice systems; **ii) Outcome Indicators** – We will be writing a guide for civil legal aid programs on how to rely on data to illuminate the effects of civil legal aid in people’s lives; **iii) Global Goal 16** – We will be helping to implement the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., focusing on Global Goal 16’s specific call on all countries to use “data and indicators” to increase access to justice as a means of ending extreme poverty by 2030; and, **iv) Research initiatives** – We will be helping to support a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to locate every access to justice data set in the US, as we also complete our own study (with support of the National Science Foundation) of new models for judging in New York City Housing Court.

Relationship to the Fordham Law School Access to Justice Initiative:

NCAJ is a free-standing nonprofit that enjoys a special relationship with Fordham Law School in New York City where it is based and where NCAJ’s executive director, David Udell, co-chairs the [Fordham Law School Access to Justice Initiative](#) with Dean Matthew Diller and with New York State’s former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman. NCAJ’s affiliation with Fordham Law School includes partnering with faculty members and students on courses, guiding students on research projects, and hosting public gatherings that advance the leading edge of the access to justice movement.

Justice Index Coverage

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- [Bob Herbert's Op-Ed.TV: David Udell on Legal Representation in Civil Court](#), CUNY TV (March 28, 2016)
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- Maha Jweid & Allie Yang-Green, [White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable: Civil Legal Aid Research Workshop Report](#), U.S. DoJ (February 2016)
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