

The Justice Index: An Overview & An Agenda

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The civil justice system is hurting people – Each day our civil justice system endangers people with the unwarranted loss of their homes, their children, their savings and possessions, their physical and emotional safety, and even their freedom. In a system designed for lawyers, millions of people each year proceed alone in matters affecting their most fundamental human needs. Wrong outcomes push people into homelessness, isolation, debt, injuries, and even into the criminal justice system.

The solutions are in sight, but out of reach – We need more civil legal aid lawyers, more interpreters and translators, more help for people with disabilities, and much simpler courts that will be fairer to all, especially people without lawyers. We need new ways to resolve civil disputes before they ever reach a court. We need an increased and intelligent reliance on tech innovation. Best policies are emerging, but vision and vigilance are needed to identify, test, and establish the policies that can make a difference.

The Justice Index is helping – Created by NCAJ through a massive, unprecedented, award-winning pro bono initiative, the Justice Index, justiceindex.org, is helping. The Justice Index is a resource for judges, lawyers, reformers, social scientist researchers, reporters, and the public. Relying on transparency and indexing, the Justice Index is sharpening a consensus in support of best policies and driving competition among the states to put the best policies into place and effectuate them.

Justice Index results – All findings for all states are visible at justiceindex.org. Highlights include:

- Best states overall (top, down):
Massachusetts, Hawaii, Maryland,
Connecticut, Colorado
- Worst states overall (bottom, up):
Mississippi, Wyoming, Puerto Rico,
Nevada, South Dakota
- Best and worst states on access to legal
aid lawyers: New York and South
Carolina
- Best and worst states on self-
representation: California and Rhode
Island
- Best and worst states on interpreting and
translating: Hawaii and Alabama
- Best and worst states on disability
access: Colorado and Wyoming
- Total number of civil legal aid attorneys
in the country: 6,953
- Average number of civil legal aid
lawyers per 10,000 poor in each state:
beneath 1
- Number of states with statewide civil
right to counsel in eviction cases: 0.

Agenda for Strengthening the Justice Index

1. Create a downloadable report for each state – Enable reformers to use a one-click command to download reports containing specific findings for each state, including a comparison to findings for neighboring states (and for other states of the user’s selection).
2. Increase user control over Justice Index measures – Enable reformers to rank states based on customizable measures of justice they consider most important (for example, one from column a, two from column b, etc).
3. Expand the coverage of “best policies” – Enable reformers to rely on more categories of best policies, including: a) best policies for pro bono, b) best policies for regulating excessive court imposed fines and fees, and c) best policies for civil right to counsel.