



National Center *for* Access to Justice

AT FORDHAM LAW SCHOOL

NCAJ's Mission:

The National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) is relying on data to expand access to justice in the civil and criminal justice systems.

What is Access to Justice?

Access to justice is the opportunity to be heard and to obtain a fair result. Everyone deserves it, but some have more of it than others, and it is unavailable to millions of people in disputes over the most elementary human needs including keeping a home, holding a family together, defending life savings, and securing sustenance, health and safety. It is routinely compromised in criminal cases. And it is out of reach when people are unaware their concerns have legal remedies, unable to qualify for free legal aid, unable to afford the expense of private counsel, and unable to overcome barriers of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability and other factors. We all have a stake in access to justice, not only because we (and those we love) may face an urgent legal crisis at a crucial moment in our lives, but also because the basic stability of our society (the rule of law and the reliability of democratic institutions) requires justice for all.

NCAJ's Flagship Project - The Justice Index:

Our flagship project at NCAJ is the Justice Index, 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 best policies in place for access to justice. With 120 indicators and 5000 data points, the Justice Index makes it easy to see and understand these policies in four core categories: i) 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 fourth year of increasing the power of people in the American justice system, promoting public understanding of American courts, and facilitating social science research. It is [widely covered in the media](#), and used by countries developing justice indexing systems of their own. In an era when facts are pitted against "alternative facts," it is an objective measure of whether policies that expand access to justice are being advanced or undermined.

NCAJ's Role in the Year Ahead:

In 2019, NCAJ will be helping to promote civil justice system reform through its work with data on the following specific projects: **i) The Justice Index** – carrying out new national research on court-imposed "fines and fees;" developing and using new data analytics to reveal patterns in the provision of access to justice; and relying on Justice Index current findings to expand access to justice in state justice systems; **ii) Measuring Outcomes** – educating the legal aid community on best practices for civil legal aid programs to rely on data and measurement to uncover the effects of justice in people's lives; **iii) Implementing Goal 16** – helping to implement UN Sustainable Development Goal 16's call on all countries, including the U.S., to use data and indicators to expand access to justice as a means of ending extreme poverty by 2030; and, **iv) Gathering AtJ Scholars** – helping to advance a US National Science Foundation initiative to unify scholars across disciplines as a means of deepening scientific and public understanding of access to justice through research.

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 Senior Counsel of Latham & Watkins, former Chief Judge of New York's highest court, Jonathan Lippman. NCAJ's partners with Fordham Law faculty members and students on courses, guides students on research projects, and hosts public gatherings that advance the access to justice movement.

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