

**Next Steps for the Justice Index – Launch of the 2020 Update Survey**  
**National Center for Access to Justice at Fordham Law School**  
**4-29-20**

The Justice Index is NCAJ's comprehensive national resource that since 2014 has collected and presented data on the presence of selected best access to justice policies in each state, as a means of expanding access to justice across the country. We are undertaking multiple projects to update the findings contained in the Justice Index.

*Background.* Before describing the current updating projects, here is some information about the Justice Index: i) [recommendations of experts](#) describing the value of Justice Index 2016, ii) [materials citing and using the Justice Index](#) (news clips, reports, op eds, etc.), and iii) an [announcement and video](#) created by the American Bar Association when conferring the ABA's Pro Bono Publico Award on the teams of volunteers that built the Justice Index with NCAJ.

*The Survey.* On April 29, NCAJ emailed a Justice Index 2020 Survey to court officials and Access to Justice Commission officials in the 50 states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico. As in previous years, the 2020 Survey asks whether selected policies for assuring access to justice have been adopted in the states in the four traditional Justice Index categories of attorney access, self-help, language access and disability access. The 2020 Survey updates the existing questions and adds new questions that expand the Justice Index's coverage. We are inviting responses to the Survey by May 19, 2020, understanding that more time will be needed by some of the respondents in light of the challenges posed by the global public health crisis and its consequences (discussed in greater detail, below). In addition to the survey, the Justice Index research includes our Attorney Count, through which we – with the help of additional pro bono collaborators – determine the number of attorneys working for legal aid organizations in each of our target jurisdictions.

*Complementary Research.* As a complement to the Survey, NCAJ and its pro bono partners are also carrying out additional research on the presence of policies across the country for curbing excessive fines and fees.

*Pro Bono Support.* NCAJ's Justice Index initiatives are supported by pro bono attorneys, staff and students, including from six law firms and additional corporations. These colleagues will be conducting research on state policies, communicating with state officials, and organizing the updated findings. Ultimately, NCAJ will work with officials in the states and with the pro bono teams to publish findings from our research that will assist access to justice efforts in each state by providing both a roadmap of recommended policies and practices and a simple, numerical scale comparing policy environments across jurisdictions that can help advocates argue for better funding and better policies.

*Timing During The Current Public Health Crisis.* Access to justice is always important, and is especially important in this time of crisis. We understand that COVID-19 and its consequences have shut many courts to non-essential business, kept many court staff working from home, and imposed substantial additional burdens on every person. We have chosen to begin our data

collection now – despite these difficulties – because of the important role the courts will inevitably play in sorting out the devastation from this crisis, and in helping people to move on and rebuild. In talking with people in diverse settings who are knowledgeable about many different aspects of state justice systems, it became clear to us that while there is no perfect time, now is an important time for this work.

*The Survey and Related Justice Index Materials:*

- Complete Survey (all four sections)(MS Word, [here](#); PDF, [here](#))
  - Attorney Access Section ([here](#))
  - Self-Help Access Section ([here](#))
  - Language Access Section ([here](#))
  - Disability Access Section ([here](#))
  - Overview of Survey ([here](#))
- Justice Index 2016 ([here](#))
  - Experts’ statements about Justice Index 2016 ([here](#))
  - Justice Index news clips and citations ([here](#))
  - Justice Index award from American Bar Association ([here](#))
- NCAJ’s website ([here](#))

*Questions.* Thank you for learning about the Justice Index. We invite you to join forces in this effort. We will post Justice Index periodic updates on this NCAJ blog and website. We also welcome questions at [info@ncforaj.org](mailto:info@ncforaj.org). The Justice Index 2020 Update is guided by David Udell, Executive Director; Jamie Gamble, Director of the Justice Index Project; and Chris Albin-Lackey, Legal and Policy Director.