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Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2 AM	3	4	5 PM	6
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A Call to *Serve*

Chief Justice C. Shannon Bacon

I appeal to all members of our legal community to support the efforts outlined below to ensure justice for all New Mexicans in these challenging times. We have made progress. Over 78% of New Mexicans have completed a primary series of COVID-19 vaccinations, and 46.3% have received a booster shot. Businesses have been able to resume activity, and schools and childcare centers have reopened.



However, the pandemic-constrained economy coupled with strong demand has resulted in increasing prices for consumers. Adding to this, the war in Ukraine has incited a supply shock that has increased energy and food prices. Collectively, the impact of these economic effects has been significant, particularly on low-income New Mexicans.

Historically, when people feel the effects of an economic downturn, their lives become increasingly vulnerable to legal problems like eviction, foreclosure, debt collection, loss of benefits, and domestic violence. The human impact in such cases can be very serious. Losing your home. Losing your benefits that keep you alive. Filing for a restraining order to protect yourself or loved ones from domestic violence. During the pandemic, the New Mexico Supreme Court realized that a wave of new civil legal cases—wherein parties may not fully understand their legal rights, let alone have the means to afford legal representation—was unavoidable. Accordingly, the Supreme Court and the New Mexico Access to Justice Commission (ATJ Commission) have initiated additional steps to alleviate the impact of these types of cases. **Please join us in these efforts.**

The legal community must ensure that all New Mexicans have the necessary resources to access the judicial system and to receive equal application of the law. Eliminating barriers to the civil legal system that deny justice and keep people in poverty, such as socioeconomic and racial inequities, is our shared legal and moral obligation. The ATJ Commission supports this mission by connecting people with the legal resources they need.

The ATJ Commission is an independent, statewide body dedicated to expanding and improving civil legal assistance to

New Mexicans living in poverty. The ATJ Commission's goals include expanding resources, increasing public awareness of the need for civil legal assistance, and encouraging more pro bono work by attorneys. The ATJ Commission works with stakeholders to connect them with resources such as self-help centers within the courts and connection to appropriate civil legal service providers. These legal service providers provide

legal assistance or representation at little to no cost. These nonprofit organizations manage over 20,000 cases each year.

Recently, the ATJ Commission conducted four (virtual) community listening sessions with representatives from community organizations in Silver City, Truth or Consequences, Las Vegas, and Shiprock to learn more about the civil legal needs in these communities and how to better partner with non-legal organizations. In response, the ATJ Commission produced informational webinars, accessible on its website, about civil legal topics, including public benefits, foreclosure and eviction, immigration issues and resources, and expungement. The most recent webinar, presented on March 23, 2022, addresses agricultural workers' rights and resources.

The ATJ Commission has engaged a public relations firm, Carroll Strategies, to inform the public about assistance available through New Mexico Legal Aid, and has collaborated with a national organization, Voices for Civil Justice, to develop a campaign, "1000 Lawyers for 1000 Cases," that will encourage pro bono assistance, particularly with pandemic-related legal needs. The ATJ Commission continues to collaborate with the Second Judicial District's Pro Bono Committee and New Mexico Legal Aid to provide twice-monthly tele-clinics for self-represented litigants. The telephone-based format allowed volunteer attorneys to assist people outside the Albuquerque area, greatly expanding access. In 2021, these clinics served 167 people.

The ATJ Commission also spearheaded the Court Navigator Pilot Project in Lea County and within the Second Judicial District to assist litigants there with the judicial process. With time, the Supreme Court hopes to expand the Court Navigator Project to additional courts.

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Meet the Lawyers

Stepping Up to Pro Bono Work

The Access to Justice Commission would like to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to the lawyers who are taking on pro bono work as a regular part of their practice. Two attorneys, who have committed to maintaining a pro bono caseload as a regular part of their practice, share their insight during a recent interview, on how to enrich access to justice in New Mexico.



Leslie McCarthy Apodaca

RODEY, DICKASON, SLOAN,
AKIN & ROBB, P.A.

Tell us about your legal practice in New Mexico.

I am a Director at Rodey, Dickason, Sloan, Akin & Robb, P.A. My practice there focuses on general commercial

litigation and particularly class action cases and business disputes.

How did you get involved in pro bono work?

At the beginning of my career, I worked at a firm in Phoenix, Arizona with a strong pro bono culture. There, I would do over 200 hours a year of pro bono work. At that time, I was doing a variety of pro bono matters, including asylum cases for immigrants fleeing violence in Guatemala and El Salvador and matters for Planned Parenthood. When I came to New Mexico and began my work with the Rodey firm, one of the firm's partners, John Robb, was a huge proponent of pro bono work and providing legal services for the poor. He had a big impact on me, and many other attorneys at Rodey, and helped reaffirm my commitment to serving pro bono clients.

How do you get involved in pro bono work and cases?

Throughout my years of practice, I have gotten involved in pro bono cases through the State Bar referral program and for a number of poverty law initiatives that were supported by John Robb. However, since the 2016 election, I have been doing most of my pro bono work by volunteering with the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC). I assist the NMILC by preparing U-Visa applications as well as going to court to obtain court orders necessary for the immigration attorneys. For example, I may have to go to family court and obtain a custody order for a single parent when the other parent is not in the United States. It is necessary piece of the application for a child to obtain special juvenile immigrant status.

How often do you have a pro bono case on your case load?

I almost always have at least one pro bono case on my case load.

How do you balance your pro bono work with your practice?

I treat my pro bono cases like any other case and make it happen. You can't think about it as different from your other cases – this person is just another client. You just have to get it

done, like everything else. Also, the associates at our firm get credit toward their billable hours for the time they spend on pro bono cases, in addition to other incentives.

What pro bono experiences have stood out for you?

Earlier in my career I was able to obtain asylum for two people from El Salvador who were fleeing the violence there. My clients were able to stay and be safe in the United States because of my legal work, which was obviously life-changing for them and very rewarding for me.

What would you say to encourage our colleagues to do pro bono work?

It is really easy not to do pro bono work because lawyers are always "too busy". Lawyers are always working more hours, giving up their nights, and working weekends. But once you get into the habit of doing it, you find that you really can fit this work in. The psychic and emotional rewards are enormous. In working on a discrete issue for a person in need, you can actually make a difference in their life. ■



Meredith Baker

LAW OFFICE OF
MEREDITH BAKER, LLC

Tell us about your legal practice in New Mexico.

I have my own law firm and am a solo practitioner. My practice includes family law, particularly divorce and custody proceedings and I often will serve as a Guardian Ad Litem for children in those cases. I also do federal criminal defense work.

How did you get involved in pro bono work?

Brian Colón was a big part of how I began doing pro bono work in New Mexico. In 2012 I had just moved to New Mexico from California and I met Brian. I watched Brian mentor people and he invited me to do some pro bono work with him. Growing up, community service was an important part of my life. However, I had always done community service through music as I was a musician. As an attorney, pro bono work became an easy way for me to continue my commitment to community service. Through pro bono, there was a structure in place for me to give back in a meaningful way.

How do you get involved in pro bono work and cases?

I often participate in the pro bono clinics that Judge LaMarr runs in Santa Fe as well as those put on by Judge Levy in Albuquerque. There is also a pro bono clinic just for mediation which I sign up for as well. In addition, I receive requests directly from Legal Aide. The organization provides me with a synopsis of the issue and asks if I can take on the limited representation. Finally, I have been appointed by a few of the judges in Albuquerque as a Guardian Ad Litem in a kinship guardianship proceeding to serve in a pro bono capacity when the parties are unable to pay.

How often do you have a pro bono case on your case load?

Currently I have approximately 5 pro bono cases. They are a mix of representing a party and serving as a court appointed Guardian Ad Litem. My pro bono work usually amounts to approximately 20 to 30 hours per month.

How do you balance your pro bono work with your practice?

Representing persons without the ability to pay for legal services is an important priority for my business. It is also important work for my staff who share my values of serving the community. Also, I like to hire law clerks from the law school to help me in my practice. Rather than focusing on a students' grades or writing sample, I want to know about their dedication to the

community and to pro bono work. With a team of people who all feel this work is important, we are able to work hard on both our fee generating cases as well as work equally hard on the pro bono cases.

What pro bono experiences have stood out for you?

I participated in a legal clinic in Santa Fe. At the clinic, they give you the option of if you want to take a case on after the clinic and to continue to assist the person in need. I decided to take on two clients who were victims of domestic violence and were struggling with trying to locate their spouses to serve them with legal paperwork. Both of these clients were monolingual Spanish speakers and they were struggling not only with the stress of their legal problems, but also with it being incredibly overwhelming to communicate and get help through access to legal help in their own language. My paralegal assisted with translation for these clients. I was able to get the legal work done for them and they also had access to a lawyer with whom they could communicate.

What would you say to encourage our colleagues to do pro bono work?

You get what you give. As you give your time and expertise to those in need, your life will become enriched in important ways. ■

A Call to Serve *continued from page 3*

The Supreme Court is equally committed to access to justice. As a Court, we have connected our most vulnerable citizens to civil legal service providers and provided vital resources necessary for their cases. Some highlights of the Judiciary's work during past two years include:

- A new court-based program, the Eviction Prevention and Diversion Program, to assist New Mexicans facing eviction during the pandemic and to provide property owners with an alternative to evicting tenants unable to pay their rent. This program connects tenants and property owners with mediators and with the Emergency Rental Assistance Program's \$170 million in emergency rent payments. The Program will serve New Mexicans statewide by July 8th of this year.
- New court rules encouraging mortgage servicers to work with borrowers to try to prevent foreclosures.
- Expansion of the Volunteer Attorney Program to serve a larger number of New Mexicans in need.
- Leveraging technology to expand virtual appearances, making it easier for self-represented litigants to appear in court and for attorneys to engage in pro-bono representation statewide.
- Expanding the ability of self-represented litigants to electronically file pleadings.

When people have access to legal resources such as plain language forms, legal advice, self-help centers, or a pro-bono attorney,

they are empowered with knowledge about their full rights and the legal process, giving them access to the justice they deserve. Such access is also the focus of a Supreme Court-convened task force examining and addressing the lawyer shortage in rural New Mexico, as well as assessing the effects of the pandemic and the economic downturn. The lack of lawyers in rural New Mexico bolsters the need to make sure people are aware and knowledgeable about available legal services. New Mexico has large "legal deserts," where there are few to no options for legal representation in civil matters. For instance, three New Mexico counties do not have a single practicing lawyer, and more than one-third of the state's counties have ten or fewer attorneys.

This scarcity is a critical backdrop for the development of innovative programs and of partnerships with service providers to ensure access to justice. We need attorneys who have not engaged in pro bono services to step up to the plate and say, **"I'll take a case and I'll help out."**

I have pledged to continue to work with the ATJ Commission as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to expand resources for all New Mexicans with civil legal needs. I hope that members of our bar will support, as a basic and ethical service, full access to justice for all New Mexicans, through removal of legal roadblocks to the basic needs of food, shelter, energy, and government benefits. Fortunately, critical information on how to volunteer your time and resources is easily available at [accesstojustice.nmcourts.gov](https://www.accesstojustice.nmcourts.gov). ■

When Limited Legal Representation Makes a Big Difference

While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted us all, many New Mexicans also suffered severe financial devastation. As a result of people being unable to work, many New Mexicans had to utilize the benefits and assistance meant to serve as a safety net for the people in our state and in some cases barriers and challenges frustrated the purpose of this safety net. We share three stories of circumstances in which an attorney's limited scope of representation and work on an isolated issue, led to a tremendous impact on the clients' lives.

Error From Unemployment Benefits

Client Gerges was a Lyft and Uber driver. In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the State of New Mexico implemented a shutdown of all but essential workers. As a result, Mr. Gerges went from having a livable income stream to almost no income whatsoever due to the shutdown. For the first time in his life, Mr. Gerges sought government assistance and applied for unemployment benefits. He had never gone through this process before and was careful to correctly complete the paperwork and provide the Department of Workforce Solutions with all necessary information. Based on his application, the government determined he was entitled to \$461 per week in unemployment benefits.

However, after some time, the state labor department made a mistake on Mr. Gerges file, resulting in a significant overpayment to him. When the department recognized an overpayment had been made, it immediately cut him off from receiving any unemployment benefits. The state also began to recoup Mr. Gerges ongoing benefits prior to providing him any avenue to appeal the decision. Once the state exhausted Mr. Gerges' ongoing benefits in the recoup it determined that he still owed the state over \$10,000 and prepared to send the illegal debt to collections.

Mr. Gerges was fortunate to have been referred to the New Mexico Center for Law and Poverty, whose attorneys undertook legal representation on his behalf. The Center for Law and Poverty's lawyers advocated for the state to adopt a federal option to waive overpayments that were caused by the state agency (i.e., those made through no fault of the party receiving the benefits). Through this legal advocacy and effort, Mr. Gerges successfully obtained a waiver for the overpayment and was not sent to collections for an illegal debt created by the state agency's error.



Denial of Medicaid and SNAP Benefits

Client Sanchez¹ is a survivor of domestic violence and has immigration status under the Violence Against Women Act. As a result of significant economic hardship Client Sanchez became homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic and applied for Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. His immigration status, along with his income level, met the

criteria for him to qualify for the needs-based food and medical assistance he sought. Despite clearly qualifying for these critical forms of assistance, the government improperly denied his application for Medicaid and SNAP.

Fortunately, Mr. Sanchez was able to receive assistance from an attorney with the New Mexico Center for Law and Poverty who was able to assist him in the limited scope of appealing the denial of these benefits. Despite Mr. Sanchez being represented by counsel and being a monolingual Spanish speaker, the state called him (without his attorney present) and, in English, convinced him to withdraw his appeal. Through the efforts of his lawyers with New Mexico Center for Law and Poverty, Mr. Sanchez's appeal was reinstated and ultimately, he was awarded Medicaid and SNAP. This limited engagement and advocacy by the New Mexico Center for Law and Poverty resulted in Mr. Sanchez receiving the critical benefits of food and medical care to which he was entitled.

Denial of TANF Benefits and Kinship Guardianship Help for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Mr. and Mrs. Smith² began raising their three young grandchildren who were placed with them following intervention by the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) as the children's mother was unable to keep them safe and meet their needs due to drug addiction. Through that process, Mr. and Mrs. Smith obtained legal guardianship over

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New Mexico Needs YOU to Take on a Pro Bono Case

Last year, civil legal service providers in New Mexico handled approximately 20,000 cases, benefiting approximately 40,000 people. These providers included Legal Aid, NM Center on Law and Poverty, Pegasus, Catholic Charities, Enlace Comunitario, Disability Rights NM, Southwest Women's Law Center, United South Broadway Center, NM Immigrant Law Center, Native American Disability Law Center, Senior Citizens' Law Center, and KWH Law Center. Despite the incredible work undertaken by these civil legal service providers and other volunteers a large percentage of New Mexicans are still without access to the civil justice system.

The New Mexicans who received legal assistance comprised less than 20% of those with needs as tens of thousands of New Mexicans cannot afford the legal help they need for critical life challenges nor have their civil legal needs met by the limited amount of resources. This lack of access to the civil justice system is compounded in rural areas of the state as there are counties in New Mexico with no lawyers at all. Other counties have just a handful of practicing attorneys and often those attorneys only handle criminal cases. Without additional help, the most vulnerable populations in New Mexico will be unable to access necessary legal help for ensuring access to essential needs such as food, housing, safety, economic security and healthcare.

While even before March, 2020 the need for access to civil legal services was great, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the number of people with civil legal needs to increase significantly. As more people are applying for government benefits like unemployment, Medicaid, TANF, and SNAP, there are more people with legal issues associated with the application of those benefits. Vulnerable populations which may have been 'getting by' prior to COVID-19 were critically impacted by lockdown, shortages, and the closure of many small businesses. Families were also impacted by the loss of service providers and other resources which could not maintain during lockdown.

"There simply are not enough resources to address the tremendous need for access to the civil justice system by New Mexicans."

Early on in the pandemic, a moratorium or stay was placed on eviction proceedings and some foreclosures. There was a recognition that the financial impact was going to impact many people and it would be better for the community to ensure that people not lose housing during the pandemic. Those stays are lifting and the courts anticipate a large increase in the number of eviction and foreclosure filings. The NM Supreme Court, in collaboration with state agencies, local movements, property owners, housing advocates, and civil legal service providers, is implementing the Eviction Prevention and Diversion Program

to address the anticipated influx of eviction cases. The program, in addition to settlement facilitation, directs both landlords and tenants to available emergency rental assistance to try to help ensure tenants who have fallen behind do not become homeless while making landlords whole. However, even with the Eviction Prevention and Diversion Program's implementation, there is still a serious need for legal representation for those facing eviction.

In addition to financial legal issues, New Mexicans are also facing legal issues regarding children and families. People are put into a position in which they have to worry about how to protect the children in their lives when they cannot afford legal help. Currently,

Pegasus Legal Services for Children has a four month wait. "That means it takes four months just to have an intake done and even speak with an attorney", explains Mariel Willow, a staff attorney with Pegasus. The organization now has three full time attorneys dedicated to kinship guardianship cases and it is still unable to meet the current needs. The needs and this wait list will likely increase by August as children return to school as there will be more eyes on them, resulting in an increase in identified legal issues. Willow explained that Pegasus takes kinship guardianship cases statewide and is one of the primary providers of legal services in this area. "Many of the children for these kinship guardianship cases we are handling have been

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How Can I Help

FILL THE GAP

in Access to the Civil Justice System?

“A lawyer should be mindful of deficiencies in the administration of justice and of the fact that the poor, and sometimes persons who are not poor, cannot afford adequate legal assistance. Therefore, all lawyers should devote professional time and resources and use civic influence to ensure equal access to our system of justice for all those who because of economic or social barriers cannot afford or secure adequate legal counsel. A lawyer should aid the legal profession in pursuing these objectives and should help the bar regulate itself in the public interest.”

— Preamble to the New Mexico Rules of Professional Conduct

From the start of law school to the passing of the bar, each of us attorneys gained training and skills to utilize our legal system to solve problems for community members. For many New Mexicans access to this legal system is not a reality, they lack the financial resources to hire an attorney. New Mexico is fortunate to have many civil legal service organizations which provide free legal representation, including, but not limited to: Legal Aid; NM Center on Law and Poverty; Pegasus Legal Services for Children; and Disability Rights New Mexico. These organizations work hard every single day to serve New Mexicans who cannot afford counsel and otherwise lack meaningful access to the civil justice system. They cannot do it alone. No matter how hard they try, the level of need is too great for these organizations, to have the capacity and ability to serve all of those in need. Each of us must step forward and help in this effort and invest our time in assuring that everyone has equal access to the civil justice system.

There are many ways you can help, even with a limited time investment, in a meaningful way that will positively impact our community and ensure greater access to the civil justice system



1. Sign up for the Volunteer Attorney Program

Volunteer Attorney Program (“VAP”) is a program run by New Mexico Legal Aid in partnership with the State Bar of New Mexico and New Mexico’s 13 Judicial

District Pro Bono Committees. VAP connects low-income New Mexicans with members of the private bar. In signing up for VAP, you will receive an email when Legal Aid needs to find an attorney to consult with and possibly undertake representation of the pro se client. You are not obligated to take on the case, but rather have the opportunity to agree to consult and the option to provide limited representation.

Contact VAP at 1-866-416-1922 or VAPreferrals@nmlegalaid.org.

While the impulse to turn down a case that is outside of your area of expertise may be automatic instead pause and

consider whether, with the support of other persons who have expertise in the area of law, if it is a case you could take on. Your willingness to expand your wheelhouse can bring some relief to the pro bono client who may otherwise lacked any realistic legal remedy. There are many resources to help you navigate legal issues involving family law, landlord-tenant/housing, public benefits, expungement, unemployment, consumer/bankruptcy, wills/probate, contracts, and immigration at: <https://www.sbnm.org/For-Public/Other-Legal-Service-Providers>. The additional effort to expand your practice area can not only assist the pro bono client but it can also enrich your practice.



2. Sign up for A Legal Clinic Hosted in Your County or a Tele-Clinic.

The NM State Bar has information on upcoming legal clinics here:

<https://www.sbnm.org/For-Public/Workshop-Legal-Clinics>.



3. Partner Up

Reach out to your colleagues, partners, and associates to team up on working on a pro bono case together. Take on a VAP case with your State

Bar mentee and start the culture of pro bono work from their first year as a lawyer.



4. Volunteer Your Mediation and Guardian Ad Litem Services

In addition to pro bono legal representation, pro bono mediators are in significant need throughout the State of New Mexico. Courts throughout the State of New Mexico face significant shortages of attorneys to provide necessary Guardian ad Litem services in guardianship and family law cases. Contact the Court Appointed Attorney Program (aoccaaff@nmcourts.gov) or your local district court to volunteer.



5. Give Financial Contributions to Organizations Supporting Legal Service Providers

You can make financial contributions to the following organizations that support or provide direct civil legal services to New Mexicans:

- ▶ **Catholic Charities:** <https://www.ccasfnm.org/>
- ▶ **Disability Rights NM:** <https://drnm.org/>
- ▶ **Enlace Comunitario:** <https://www.enlacenm.org/>
- ▶ **Equal Access to Justice:** <https://www.eaj-nm.org/>
- ▶ **KWH Law Center:** <https://www.kwhlawcenter.org/>
- ▶ **Native American Disability Law Center:** <https://www.nativedisabilitylaw.org/>
- ▶ **NM Center for Law and Poverty:** <http://nmpovertylaw.org/>
- ▶ **NM Immigrant Law Center:** <https://www.nmilc.org/?locale=en>
- ▶ **NM Legal Aid:** <https://www.newmexicolegalaid.org/>
- ▶ **Pegasus Legal Services for Children:** <https://pegasuslaw.org/>
- ▶ **Senior Citizens' Law Office:** <http://sclonm.org/>
- ▶ **Southwest Women's Law Center:** <https://swwomenslaw.org/>
- ▶ **United South Broadway:** <https://www.unitedsouthbroadway.org/>



6. Change Your IOLTA Account to A Bank in The Leadership Circle

The interest on your IOLTA account is distributed by the Access to Justice Fund Grant Commission to fund civil legal service providers in New Mexico. Banking institutions in the "Leadership Circle" have committed to providing a significantly higher interest rate on attorney IOLTA accounts, resulting in more money to fund these important civil legal service providers. Banks in the Leadership Circle include:

- ▶ **Wells Fargo**
- ▶ **Enterprise Bank & Trust**
- ▶ **Century Bank of Santa Fe**
- ▶ **Pinnacle Bank**
- ▶ **BMO Harris**

There are many ways that we can help support efforts to ensure access to the civil justice system. If we each commit to doing at least one of the items listed above, we would make a significant impact on making sure each New Mexican has access to the civil justice system while complying with our professional obligations as attorneys. ■

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When Limited Legal Representation Makes a Big Difference *continued from page 6*

these children, however the guardianship was not subsidized. To help them raise three young children, Mr. and Mrs. Smith applied for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which provides a monthly cash benefit to meet basic family needs such as housing, utilities and clothing.

In the spring of 2020, Mr. and Mrs. Smith received notification from the State of New Mexico that their TANF benefits were being suspended because they had not complied with filling out a form required by the Child Support Enforcement Division. Despite their attempts to contact the two different agencies responsible for this issue, Mr. and Mrs. Smith's benefits were suspended.

Concurrent to learning of their TANF benefits being stopped, the Children, Youth & Families Department contacted Mr. and Mrs. Smith as their daughter had another young child whose needs were not met due to the mother's drug addiction. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, on a fraction of the income they had prior to their TANF cutoff, now had another young child to raise. Even though Mr. and Mrs. Smith were fulfilling the critical role of raising four young children (a role that would have been left for the State of New Mexico through its foster care program had these

grandparents not been able to be a resource), they were severely financially stressed and quickly running out of their savings.

The Smiths were able to obtain pro bono legal representation of a private attorney. This attorney guided them through participating in the reinstatement process. Ultimately their legal counsel was able to prevail and have their TANF benefits reinstated and increased, as they had taken on another child to feed, clothe, and care for. In addition, their legal counsel assisted them in obtaining kinship guardianship over the youngest child. The grandparents were frightened that without legal guardianship the child's mother would reach out to law enforcement and try to get the child from them as they had no legal rights—without a formal guardianship order by the court. Mr. and Mrs. Smith endured significant hardship and stress as a result of the suspension of their benefits as well as the fear of their grandchild's mother taking the youngest child away. With some legal help and attention, within a few months, both the financial and custodial stressors were able to be solved for them. ■

Endnotes

¹ This Client's name has been changed to protect his identity.

² The Clients' names have been changed to protect their identity.

New Mexico Needs You to Take a Pro Bono Case *continued from page 7*

orphaned from a parent or guardian dying from COVID-19." A report issued by the Covid Collaborative in December of 2021 estimated that New Mexico ranked high in "COVID-19 bereaved children" and in particular identified significant impact for American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) children. Due to the wait families have to wait four months just to get the process started which is four months without the caregiver having legal status to obtain services for the child and leaves them unable to provide legal protections for the child.

Pegasus also notes an increase in cases from youth who are seeking emancipation or who have either been kicked out of their home or have run away from an abusive home and lack shelter or other supports. Additionally, there has been significant rise in youth who identify as transgender seeking legal assistance where their parent or guardian is not accepting of their identity or needs including emotional support, stability, and/or medical care as a part of their transition. Five to ten percent of the cases that come into Pegasus originate from a young person identifying a need related to LGBTQ challenges.

Finally, Pegasus receives a significant number of calls for legal assistance for a service it does not provide – Guardian ad Litem in custody dispute cases. There is an incredible need for attorneys to agree to serve as a Guardian ad Litem in custody cases in order to provide unbiased insight to the court regarding the best interest of the children during a custody dispute. People with little to no financial resources get divorced and have custody disputes as frequently as those with the financial resources to pay for a Guardian ad Litem.

There simply are not enough resources to address the tremendous need for access to the civil justice system by New Mexicans. New Mexico's civil legal service providers, despite their incredible and nonstop work efforts, are only able to cover a fraction of the identified need. New Mexico needs more attorneys willing to take on pro bono cases which will assist with providing access to the civil justice system. ■

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Help New Mexico Wildfire Victims

In partnership with the **Federal Emergency Management Agency** and the **American Bar Association's Disaster Legal Services Program**, the **State Bar of New Mexico Young Lawyers Division** is preparing legal resources and assistance for survivors of the New Mexico wildfires.

A free legal aid hotline will be available soon and we need volunteers!

Individuals who qualify for assistance will be matched with New Mexico Lawyers to provide free, limited legal help.

- › Assistance with securing FEMA and other benefits available to disaster survivors
- › Assistance with life, medical, and property insurance claims
- › Help with home repair contracts and contractors
- › Replacement of important legal documents destroyed in the disaster
- › Assistance with consumer protection matters, remedies, and procedures
- › Counseling on landlord/tenant and mortgage/foreclosure problems

Volunteer Expectations

Volunteers do not need extensive experience in any of the areas listed below. FEMA will provide basic training for frequently asked questions. This training will be required for all volunteers. We hope volunteers will be able to commit approximately one hour per week.

Visit www.sbnm.org/wildfirehelp to sign up.
You can also contact Lauren E. Riley, ABA YLD District 23,
at 505-246-0500 or lauren@batleyfamilylaw.com.



FEMA



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