

Access to Justice Commission will meet August 22

August 21, 2007

The Mississippi Access to Justice Commission will meet on Wednesday, Aug. 22, at the Mississippi Bar Center at 643 North State Street in Jackson.

Commission members and guests will gather at 9:30 a.m. for informal discussions over coffee. Commission Co-Chairs Chancery Judge Denise Owens and Joy Lambert Phillips will call the meeting to order at 10 a.m. Members of the media are invited. The meeting is scheduled to last until 1:30 p.m.

Among issues to be discussed are funding, long-range planning, and plans for a series of public hearings.

The Mississippi Supreme Court ordered public hearings to be conducted in each congressional district in early 2008. Dates have not yet been set.

The public hearings are expected to explore and document the difficulties poor people face in pursuing legal remedies through the civil justice system when they can't afford to hire lawyers to help them. Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Jess H. Dickinson, the Court's liaison to the legal services community, said the hearings are intended to educate public officials, the general public and the media about the extent of the problems poor people face in gaining access to the civil legal justice system.

"The more we can do to raise awareness, the more solutions we can find," Justice Dickinson said.

"These are not people who are suing the local hardware store because their lawn mower doesn't work. These are children who don't have a home, and women who have been beaten," he said.

The Access to Justice Commission was created by the Mississippi Supreme Court to develop a unified strategy to improve access to the civil courts for the poor. The Commission includes members of the judiciary, a representative of the Governor, legislators, business and community leaders, and members of the clergy. Representatives of entities which provide legal services to the poor are ex-officio members of the Commission.

The Access to Justice Commission is working to:

- improve delivery of legal services to the poor;
- raise public awareness;
- develop resources.

The Mississippi Access to Justice Commission works to address *civil* legal representation of the poor. It does not deal with indigent criminal defense issues.

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