



STATEMENT OF VISION AND THE TEN CORE VALUES FOR THE NATIONAL CIVIL LEGAL AID SYSTEM

Our Shared Vision

*THE FIRST DUTY OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY
IS TO ASSURE EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL.*

This means that fundamental fairness and access to the justice system, in all its parts, must be fully available to everyone, particularly those who need them most—people who are poor, culturally or socially isolated, and people who may belong to groups who are unpopular.

The law is powerful. Our laws must serve equally the powerful and the powerless. That goal -- "equal justice for all" -- cannot be reached if people or communities are denied access to the system and institutions that make or enforce the laws or denied the help they need to assert or defend their legal rights.

Our Shared Commitment

We, the national community of legal aid clients, workers, providers, managers, board members, volunteers, funders, and supporters are committed to working together to promote equal justice for all and to eliminate inequalities within our justice system and within our legal aid community itself. We believe that the poorest and most vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities within our localities, states and nation will not realize their full measure of justice until:

- ❖ All people have a meaningful ability to assert, defend, and enforce their rights
- ❖ All people have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the creation of the laws and regulations that govern them
- ❖ No one is deprived of their rights without fair access to the justice system
- ❖ No one is discouraged from seeking or is denied access to the justice system due to their lack of resources, personal characteristics, or membership in a community that is subject to disparate treatment
- ❖ The law itself serves the ends of justice, equality and fairness
- ❖ The national civil legal aid system attains 10 core values on the back of this page

The Ten Core Values of a Civil Legal Aid System

- 1. Treat all applicants and clients with dignity and respect.** This includes strictly maintaining the confidentiality of client communications and providing services in a manner that takes into account differences in culture, race, ethnicity, education, physical and mental ability, and language.
- 2. Provide access for all low-income and disadvantaged individuals,** including those who are difficult to serve because of language, cultural, educational, disability, social or other barriers, including homelessness, geographic dispersal or institutionalization.
- 3. Reach out to and interact with low-income and other disadvantaged and vulnerable clients and other people, groups, and communities,** in order to fully understand and be able to address their legal problems and to involve them in planning and priority setting at the program, regional, state, and national levels.
- 4. Respond to the most important and pressing needs of low-income and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and communities** and when allocating resources consider the seriousness of the harm to the client community, their vulnerability, and how others in the community at large are treated.
- 5. Provide access to a full range of legal assistance.** Legal aid should provide legal information about rights and responsibilities; legal advice and brief services; and representation in litigation, in transactions, and before legislative and administrative bodies.
- 6. Provide high-quality and effective legal assistance.** Services should be delivered by well-respected providers that employ diverse, qualified, competent, and well-trained staff, who meet rigorous professional and performance standards and work in coordination with other providers and services to strategically leverage all possible resources. These staff members should be adequately compensated and be responsible for reasonable caseloads allowing for high quality representation.
- 7. Achieve meaningful results and the greatest possible benefits.** Legal assistance should have a strategic focus that will produce tangible, measurable, and lasting results. It should lead to the greatest possible benefit both for individual clients and for the low-income community and other communities served.
- 8. Engage with government, including the judicial, legislative, and executive branches,** in efforts to improve meaningful access to the civil justice system and to ensure the system is open, fair, responsive, and accountable to low-income and other vulnerable persons, groups, and communities.
- 9. Maintain active partnerships with the private bar, the private sector, and the community at large to expand available resources and increase support for its work.** Legal aid should actively partner with the private as well as the public sector, integrating the resources of the private bar and other services and reaching out to the business community, the academic community, and the general public, including civic institutions and the media.
- 10. Engage in continuous innovation, experimentation, and evaluation.** Legal aid should continually experiment, evaluate, research, and innovate to advance equal justice and improve and expand delivery of high-quality services, efficiency of program operations, and effectiveness of legal strategies and initiatives.