



ACCESS TO JUSTICE BOARD RESOLUTION

Adopted unanimously on April 3, 2009

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THE ALLIANCE
for Equal Justice

SUPPORTER

The Access to Justice (ATJ) Board applauds the Washington State Bar Association's leadership to secure emergency funding for civil legal aid.

Civil legal aid in Washington State faces a fiscal emergency caused by the simultaneous and precipitous drop in IOLTA revenues and state funding. This crisis comes at a time when the ranks of low-income persons in our state are swelling due to the current recession. Additionally, courts have an increasing number of cases with pro se litigants. Many staff legal aid and volunteer legal services offices around the state are threatened with closure for lack of funding. These conditions are unparalleled in our state. Never has the need been greater and never have the resources to address those needs been so abruptly diminished.

The ATJ Board supports the Washington State Bar Association's efforts to recruit and engage more private attorneys to provide pro bono representation in this time of historic need. The WSBA's Civil Legal Aid Crisis Summit on April 17, 2009 and its new Pro Bono Housing Preservation Initiative are important steps in this undertaking. Every attorney in Washington is in a special position and has an ethical responsibility to provide access to justice.

However, those efforts alone will not be sufficient to address the problem at this critical juncture because the need for civil legal aid services is now overwhelming and continues to grow.

The ATJ Board supports the creation of the Washington Lawyers' Fund for Civil Justice to be funded by a temporary surcharge on attorney license fees at a level that will generate additional funding sufficient to make a meaningful contribution to our common effort to preserve essential legal aid services during this time of unprecedented client need. We further support the proposal to use surplus WSBA CLE funds for this purpose.

We join with the Legal Foundation of Washington, the Office of Civil Legal Aid, the Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee and others in support of these efforts during this time of unprecedented client need.