



The Path to a Statement of Principles for Civil Legal Services on Legal Practitioners (2023–2024)



At least 12 states have implemented programs that allow people who are not lawyers to provide legal help in some circumstances, and similar initiatives are under consideration in at least 10 more states. This concept is often framed as an access-to-justice solution, but legal aid organizations and client communities have not always had the opportunity to legitimately engage in the development of these programs. Many people who receive these services are potential clients of civil legal services organizations.

For these reasons, NLADA believed it was important to develop a policy position representing its members' views on the topic. NLADA began this process by convening a meeting of the Civil Council and selected additional program directors at the Equal Justice Conference in 2023. At that meeting, we heard a broad range of opinions including enthusiasm, uncertainty and opposition. Recognizing that a diversity of perspectives existed within our membership, NLADA convened an advisory group (see participants listed below) composed of program directors from where such initiatives had been implemented or seriously considered, as well as interested Civil Council members.

This group met once collectively and shared thoughts about this type of reform. NLADA then categorized these thoughts into themes and created subgroups that met separately for further conversations about each topic (challenges, opportunities, and legal aid's role).

NLADA also convened a meeting of the Client Council (see participants listed below) to listen to their thoughts about this type of reform. While opposition to the concept was minimal and many agreed with the importance of exploring new approaches to address the justice gap, members had serious concerns about programs' design and operation, as well as about the need to ensure competent services and protect clients from harm.

NLADA has a statement of principles reflecting these views and articulating specific concerns expressed by members. Suggestions for further evaluation include the development of practice standards and evidence-based guidelines. This statement was reviewed by the Advisory Group, the Client Council, and a separate group of program directors at the Annual Conference in 2024.

Advisory Group Members: Sam Abel-Palmer, Sonya Bellafant, Michelle Burrell, Ashley Campbell, Diego Cartagena, Janice Chiaretto, Tiffany Doherty, Daniela Dwyer, Clarissa Gaff, Betsy Goodale, Stephanie Hudson, Nikole Nelson/Maggie Humm, Sarah Lipka, Shannon Lucas, Sarah Mattson Dustin, Joan Marie Michelsen, Amy Morgan, Zach Newman, Leslie Powell-Boudreaux, Sharon Sergent, César Torres.

Client Council Member participants: Soummer Crawford, Eddie Ellis, Robyn Hasan-Simpson, Liza Merrill, Christina Sanders, Ronald Simpson-Bey, Suzanne Small, Rosita Stanley, Marquita Wise.



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