



Supreme Court of Florida

MEDIA ADVISORY 05/11/2015

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FLORIDA COMMISSION ON ACCESS TO CIVIL JUSTICE TO MEET **FRIDAY May 15 IN TAMPA**
(Press availability at 11:00 a.m. in the same location)

The Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice will hold its second meeting on Friday, May 15, from 1:00 p.m. until 5:45 p.m. at the Tampa Airport Marriott Hotel, 4200 George J. Bean Parkway, Tampa. The meeting will be in the Hillsborough Grand Ballroom. It is open to the public and will be broadcast live on the Florida Supreme Court's Gavel to Gavel website at <http://wfsu.org/gavel2gavel/>.

Made up of leaders from all three branches of Florida government, The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other stakeholders, the Commission is working in a coordinated effort to identify and remove economic barriers to civil justice. It was created by an administrative order signed last fall by Florida Chief Justice Jorge Labarga.

Chief Justice Labarga explained the need for the Commission when he addressed the Florida House Judiciary Committee in February: "The American and Florida judicial systems are founded upon the fundamental principle that justice should be accessible to all persons regardless of economic status or disadvantage. However, this foundational principle is, for some, nothing more than a theory."

Civil cases involve matters of the utmost importance – divorce, child custody, foreclosure, landlord-tenant dispute are just some examples. Many people find themselves forced to deal with these life-changing events without the help of an attorney. This difficulty is not limited to people who live in poverty but reaches into the middle class, where people earn too much to qualify for legal aid but often don't have enough money to hire an attorney.

Florida's courts do not currently have the capacity to collect data at the state level on the number of people who do not have lawyers, sometimes called "pro se cases" or self-represented litigants. But anecdotal evidence suggests that pro se cases are increasing, especially with regard to family court cases. And local data from just one urban area of Florida indicates the scope of the problem: The judicial circuit that includes Jacksonville and two neighboring counties has reported that it sees 1,600 pro se walk-ins each month. Florida is divided into 20 circuits; this statistic is from just the Fourth Circuit.

At its first meeting in January, the Commission's 27 members divided into five subcommittees, which will present reports to the full Commission during Friday's meeting. The subcommittees are Access to and the Delivery of Legal Services, Continuum of Services, Funding, Outreach, and Technology.

The meeting agenda is posted on the commission's website at <http://www.flacesstojustice.org/>.

Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation to participate in the Commission meeting should contact Francisco-Javier Digon-Greer at (800) 342-8060 ext. 5793 or email flaccessjustice@flabar.org as much in advance as possible. Persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech impairment, and who use specialized telephone equipment may contact Mr. Digon-Greer through the Florida Relay Service by dialing 7-1-1.

ATTENTION NEWS MEDIA REPORTERS: Your coverage of all or part of the meeting is welcome. In addition, **a media availability will be held at 11 a.m.** in the meeting room for interviews with Chief Justice Labarga, Florida Bar President Greg Coleman and possibly some commission members. Please contact Francine Walker at The Florida Bar, 850-561-5762 or fwalker@flabar.org, if you plan to attend the availability and/or the meeting.

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