Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice Submits *Interim Report*

After several months of research and analysis, the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice believes it has identified some of the concrete steps that can help bridge the gap that leaves too many poor and middle-class Floridians isolated without legal help for life-changing problems ranging from family matters like divorce and child custody to housing issues, including eviction and tenant rights, to small claims disputes to domestic violence injunctions.

Recommendations by the Commission are detailed in an *interim report* submitted this week to the Florida Supreme Court for its consideration. One recommendation calls for development of a gateway portal to serve as an online connector to existing resources, such as hotlines, law libraries, legal aid organizations, and court self-help centers. Another calls for allowing law professors and retired judges to serve as “emeritus attorneys” in some cases, advising people on a pro bono basis. A third recommendation asks the Court to approve Commission consideration of a rule that would designate for legal aid programs residual funds left over after class-action settlements are distributed to the plaintiffs covered by the lawsuit.

“The need to provide all people with meaningful access to civil justice is so very, very important,” Chief Justice Jorge Labarga said. “I’m thrilled that the Commission has made such a strong start to tackling this problem.

“Certainly much more will need to be done but the work has begun and must not stop,” he added. “It’s so heartening to see progress being made, progress that will mean better justice in the end for more people -- the impoverished, the vulnerable and the middle class.”
Chief Justice Labarga serves as chair of the 27-member Commission, which is 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. Created by an administrative order the chief justice signed last November, the Commission is charged with working in a coordinated effort to identify and remove barriers to civil justice.

The Commission has five subcommittees: Access to and the Delivery of Legal Services, Continuum of Services, Technology, Funding and Outreach. In addition to its 27 members, the Commission has several ad hoc members who have made significant contributions to its work.

The full Commission will next meet on Feb. 12, 2016. Its final report is due to the Supreme Court on June 30, 2016.

The report and more information can be found on the Commission’s website at [http://www.flaccesstojustice.org/](http://www.flaccesstojustice.org/).

###