

SMART Act Hearing 2026: Colorado Access to Justice Commission



**COLORADO
ACCESS TO JUSTICE
COMMISSION**

Access to Justice Commission (ATJC)

Mission

- To expand access, quality, and fairness in the justice system for all Coloradans.
- Focus on addressing the "**Justice Gap**" — the divide between people's legal needs and available resources.

Access to legal resources isn't exclusively a low-income issue; most middle-class individuals can't afford a lawyer, posing a challenge to equal justice under the law.



Justice Gap

Coloradans with legal problems connected to their most basic needs are often left to navigate the exceedingly complex legal system without the help of an attorney.



Housing

- Rental Disputes
- Foreclosure
- Bankruptcy



Financial Security

- Disability
- Unemployment
- Food Cash Assistance



Physical Safety

- Protection Orders
- Family Violence



Family Composition

- Divorce
- Custody
- Adoption
- Parent Incarceration
- Family Separation



Health

- Emergency Medical Services
- Worker's Compensation
- Medicaid/Medicare



Access to Justice Commission (ATJC)

Our Role:

- Assess needs
- Identify high-impact, scalable solutions
- Mobilize cross-sector partnerships to implement solutions
- Implement solutions ourselves, with partner support



What Types of Solutions? A Spectrum:

No Legal Help

Limited Legal Help

Full Representation



Policy

Self-Help Resources

Legal Help Clinics

Pro Bono

Legal Aid



Access to Justice Commission's Work

Strategic Priorities:

- **Secure funding for Legal Aid**
 - Equal Justice Authority - \$2-4M annually for legal aid - administration
 - Advocacy - U.S. Congress
 - Advocacy - Colorado General Assembly



Access to Justice Commission's Work

Strategic Priorities:

- Secure funding for Legal Aid
- **Legal resources for Rural Legal Deserts**
 - Rural Justice Internships
 - “Legal First Aid” training program & certification
 - Lawyers in libraries - rural legal clinics via zoom



Access to Justice Commission's Work

Strategic Priorities:

- Secure funding for Legal Aid
- Legal resources for Rural Legal Deserts
- **Mobilize Pro Bono lawyers**
 - Pro Bono Resource Center
 - ProBonoCO.org - centralized clearinghouse for legal volunteers



Access to Justice Commission's Work

Strategic Priorities:

- Secure funding for Legal Aid
- Legal resources for Rural Legal Deserts
- Mobilize Pro Bono lawyers
- **Oversee centralized free legal help website**
 - LawHelp Colorado (spring 2026)
 - (inform GPT)



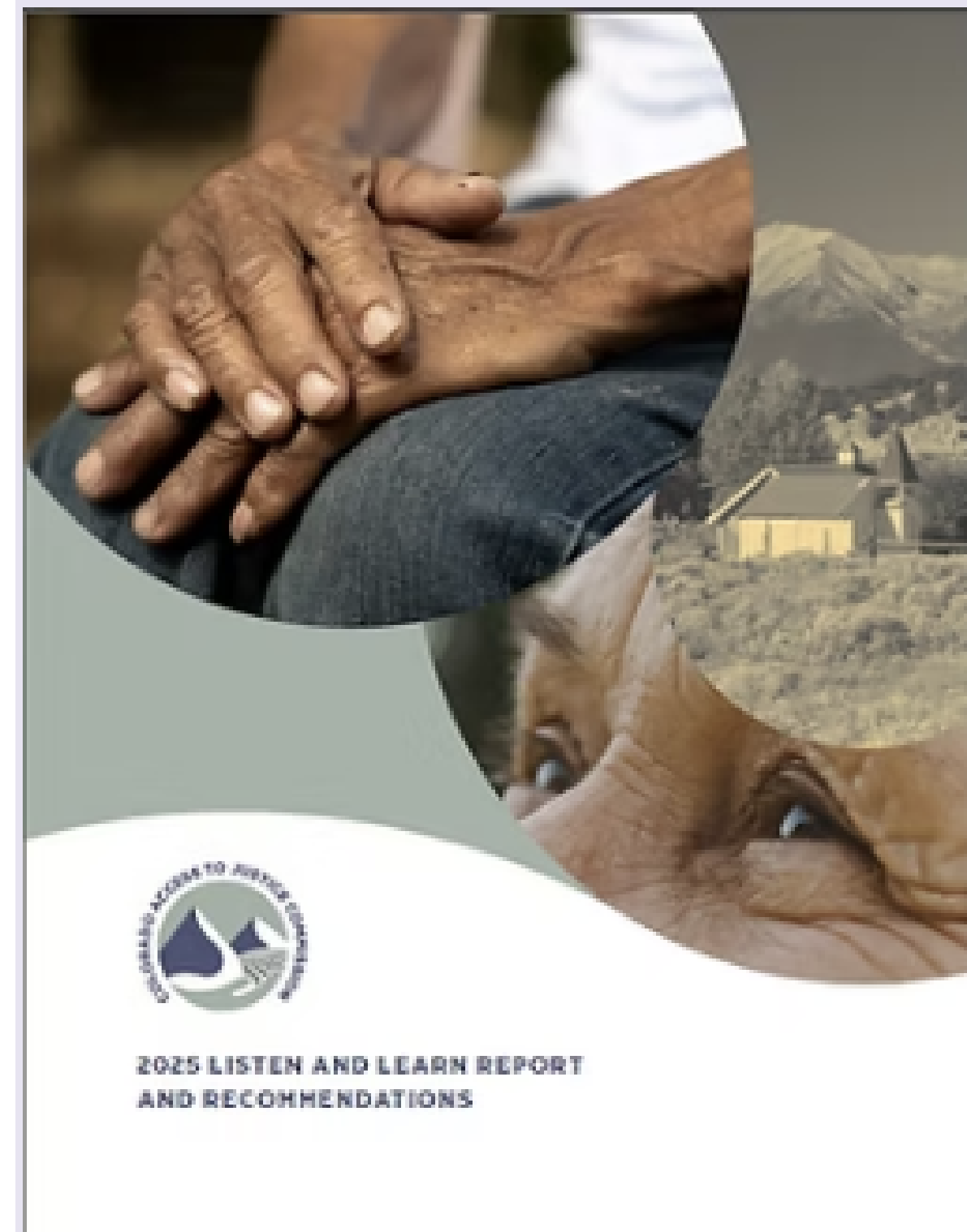
Access to Justice Commission's Work

Strategic Priorities:

- Secure funding for Legal Aid
- Legal resources for Rural Legal Deserts
- Mobilize Pro Bono lawyers
- Oversee centralized free legal help website
- **Assess needs; communicate needs to policy makers**



2025 Listen and Learn: Report and Recommendations



2025 Listen & Learn

- Spoke with >300 stakeholders
- Held meetings in every Judicial District
- Invited equal parts legal and non-legal stakeholders
- Reported findings and recommendations: General Assembly; Judicial Department; local governments; lawyers & law firms; access-to-justice advocates



Recommendations: General Assembly

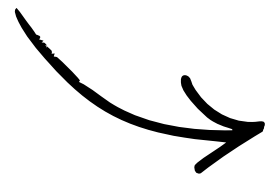
1. Defend Legal Aid Funding

- Eviction Legal Defense Fund (ELDF): \$1.1M
- Family Violence Justice Fund (FVJF): \$2.0M
- Colorado Access to Justice Commission: \$100k
- Immigration Legal Defense Fund (ILDF): \$350k



Recommendations: General Assembly

1. Defend Legal Aid Funding



Save costly downstream state expenses:

- emergency services
- supports for people experiencing homelessness
- services & programs for at-risk youth
- criminal & juvenile justice system
- incarceration & post-incarceration services



Recommendations: General Assembly (cont'd)

2. Support Judicial Department request for Judges
3. Incentivize rural legal practice
4. Support free online legal help - LawHelp Colorado
(coming spring '26)



Perennial Recommendations: General Assembly

- **Prioritize bills with protections for marginalized individuals**
 - Especially in evictions, family disputes, consumer protections & debt
- **Use “Plain Language” in bills**





COLORADO
ACCESS TO JUSTICE
COMMISSION

Elisa Overall (Emo)
Executive Director

elisa@coloradoaccesstojustice.org

coloradoaccesstojustice.org