



Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission  
*PRESENTS*

**ACCESS TO JUSTICE FORUM SERIES**

*A series of statewide public discussions about civil legal services for low-income Montanans*

Wednesday, March 16

4 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Mansfield Education Center (Handicap Accessible)

2900 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue North

Billings, MT 59101

“**Access to Justice**” refers to improving and expanding access and eliminating barriers to our civil justice system (the network of courts and legal processes that enforce, restore or protect private and personal rights) for low and moderate income people to ensure that our justice system is truly available to all.

**More than 150,000 Montanans (about 15%) live at or below the poverty level.** Tens of thousands more exist barely above the poverty line. Many of these vulnerable citizens have acute legal needs. Unfortunately, the security and services of our legal system are lost to most living in poverty only because they are poor. Unmet legal needs contribute to the cycle of poverty.

**Access to Justice is not just a legal problem, it is a community problem.** This forum brings together community programs and access to justice leaders to continue the discussion of the legal, social and ethical issues that bear upon accessing our legal system – and specifically how they impact your community. Unmet legal needs of your citizens can affect many areas of life and so too the programs and service they utilize. Indeed, a community problem requires a community solution.

**Why should you attend?** Your attendance may be connected to involvement in community programs/organizations or perhaps with government or legal related professions and services. Maybe you or someone you know is one of low-income Montanans who face barriers in accessing our legal system. We hope you are someone who will want to be part of a bigger plan in meeting the needs for civil legal services to the poor in Montana. You will learn about how access to justice impacts you, your community and your organization.

**The Forum format** includes presentation of information from speakers to a Listening Panel. Speakers include legal, social and program service providers together with recipients of services and volunteers your community. The Listening Panel is comprised of **Supreme Court Justice Beth Baker**, District and Courts of Limited Jurisdiction judges, representatives from the Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission, the State Bar’s Justice Initiatives Committee, local community and government leaders and representatives from the Montana Legislature. There will be a period of public comment following presentations. Those wishing to speak are asked to complete a comment card. Time constraints require us to limit public comment to two or three minutes per speaker.

*Questions: Call Patty Fain, 406-794-7824 or [pfain@mt.gov](mailto:pfain@mt.gov)*