

Tab 1

December 6, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission
December 6, 2024
Zoom Video Conference
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Justice Beth Baker, Ed Bartlett, Lillian Alvernaz, Hon. David Carter, Hon. Leslie Halligan, Kekek Stark, Katy Lovell, Juli Pierce, Margaret Weamer, Alison Paul, Olivia Riutta, Sen. Laura Smith.

Commissioners Absent: Rick Cook, Hon. Stacie FourStar, Sen. Wendy McKamey, Jacob Griffith Aimee Grmoljez, Hon. John Kutzman.

Others Present: Alissa Chambers, Emma Schmelzer, Dave McAlpin, Grace Loveless, Patty Fain, Franklin Runge, Madiera Zehnder, Beth McLaughlin, Linden Howard-Murphy, Valerie Falls Down, Ann Goldes-Sheahan, and Krista Partridge.

Call to Order & Introductions

Justice Baker called the meeting to order at 10:00am and asked participants to introduce themselves. She welcomed the new Court Administrator, Dave McAlpin, and thanked Beth McLaughlin for her years of service.

Approval of September Meeting Minutes

Justice Baker asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the September meeting. Judge Halligan so moved and Olivia Riutta seconded the motion. The minutes were approved without objection.

Court Administrator Update

Beth McLaughlin reported that the State Justice Initiative grant application was submitted with MLSA's help, and she expects to receive a favorable decision by the end of the month. The funding request was for \$297,000 over three years to start a Community Justice Worker program for landlord-tenant and consumer debt matters. She also reported that funding to continue the Family Mediation Program was included in the governor's budget and she's optimistic that the program will be funded. Beth reminded the group that one of the recommendations from the evaluation of the Self-Help Law Centers was to bring all of the access to justice programs under one management umbrella and to support the Access to Justice Commission with program staff. For this reason, the position of Access to Justice Program Coordinator was created and Katy Lovell was hired for that role. Beth added that Katy is already doing great work. Katy said that she's thrilled with her new role and has begun a weekly training program with the Justice for Montanans AmeriCorps members and is working with Emma Schmelzer and MLSA on a communications plan for the Family Law Mediation Program. Justice Baker welcomed Katy to her new role and said that Katy will help the Commission move forward on projects and the strategic plan. Justice Baker added that we need to replace Katy on the Commission and asked members to send recommendations. Justice Baker also said that the Commission will not be taking an active role in advocating for the Family Law Mediation program at the legislature unless Dave or Beth request assistance. Dave said he would reach out to Ed Bartlett and Aimee Grmoljez if needed.

Community Justice Workers Support Letter

Justice Baker pointed out the support letter in Tab 3 of the meeting materials that was submitted with the State Justice Initiatives grant application on behalf of the Commission.

Self-Represented Litigants Committee Report: Alissa Chambers said that the committee has prioritized text message reminders and said that coordination with the Supreme Court Technology Commission will be crucial. Beth McLaughlin said this is not technically possible right now and that they are still finishing implementation of Full Court. She said that this would need to be a separate budget line item in 2027 and that planning would need to start in 2026. She added that text messaging for the pre-trial program has been very challenging and has taken a huge amount of effort. She cautioned that this should be a long term project with realistic goals. Maggie Weamer mentioned that she and Megan Dishong had discussed MLSA's text reminders system and she would like to continue to pursue this project. Justice Baker noted that technology enhancements in the court system are very difficult to implement because consistency is needed across all courts and because many people don't have cell phone plans, but use systems such as WhatsApp for communication. Alison Paul added that MLSA has been using text reminders from our case management system for years and that we're currently building a system called "What's Next Text" to allow clients to opt in for text reminders on what steps to take for their legal matter.

Policy and Resources Committee Report: Justice Baker reported on the committee's three priorities. The first to secure funding for the Family Law Mediation Project has already been discussed during the Court Administrator's update. The second priority is to secure outside funding for the Commission and to target grants to fund the areas of greatest need. She added that perhaps the text reminder project would be a good candidate for outside funding support. The third priority of the committee is to continue long-term outreach efforts at the legislature. Sen. McKamey and Aimee Grmoljez are developing an outreach plan. Sen. Smith and Jacob Griffith will assist in this effort.

Community Education & Partnerships Committee Report: Katy Lovell reported that the committee is conducting a survey of different projects to assess funding needs and to support community outreach. She said that she plans to meet with Emma Schmelzer and Madiara Zehnder to work on a communications plan for the Family Law Mediation Program. Finally, she added that the committee needs to elect a new chair since she will be stepping down from the Commission. Justice Baker said that Katy will be the link for all of the different committees in her new role as the Access to Justice Program Coordinator.

Court Education Committee Report: Justice Baker said that the committee will present a report at the March meeting.

State Law Library Update

Franklin Runge reported on the role of the State Law Library in promoting access to justice, adding that the seeds of access to justice can be found in the written history of the library. Montana's State Law Library is unique in that it's open to the general public. He said that the library staff are very dedicated to access to justice, and they help train prison law library staff to assist prisoners. He added that the library's digital collection includes legislative histories from 1975-1997, and the librarians are a resource when the legislative website isn't available. Justice Baker said that

Franklin is also ensuring that updated court rules are all available free of charge on the website and that they are formatted to be more accessible and readable. She said that 30-40% of the filings at the Supreme Court are made by non-lawyers and they need access to the rules. Finally, Franklin said that 70% of the customers served by the law library are the general public and prisoners. He thanked the Justice for Montanans members, Katy, Emma, and Grace for their assistance.

MLSA Update

Alison Paul said that the poverty population in Montana declined relative to other states, and so MLSA's funding from the Legal Services Corporation will be reduced slightly in 2025. Alison then reported on a number of projects at MLSA, including: a new 3-year grant to represent victims of human trafficking; expungement clinics that are scheduled for March 2025 in Helena, Missoula, and Billings, organized by MLSA's Skadden Fellow Amy Reavis; a special clinic in Helena to assist workers from a Montessori school in Helena that closed suddenly. Many of the workers hadn't been paid appropriately and have potential tax issues. Alison also discussed her participation on the State Bar's Committee on the Future of the Legal Profession that is tasked with exploring alternative legal education, alternative practices in the legal profession, and with vetting the Community Justice Worker (CJW) initiative. She said that court rule changes might be needed in order to implement the CJW program, and the committee will seek the support of the State Bar for those changes. Olivia Riutta asked if legislation would be needed to allow the CJW program and Alison said that it probably won't require legislation. The rule changes would be in the form of a petition to the Supreme Court and then the legislature would have two years to overturn any decision by the court.

ABA Access to Justice Commissions Meeting Update

Alissa first congratulated Alison on receiving the 2024 Pierce-Hickerson Award at the National Legal Aid and Defender Association's Annual Conference in Atlanta in November in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the advancement and preservation of Native American rights. At the ABA meeting, Alissa learned about the wide variety of Commission structures across the country. Montana is an example of an unfunded commission that has accomplished a great deal despite the lack of funding. She reported that the Self-Help Law Centers, needs assessments, and other initiatives such as the Informal Domestic Relations Trials, put Montana ahead of the curve compared to many funded commissions in larger states. Alissa said that she is really proud of Montana's Access to Justice Commission and what we've achieved without dedicated funding.

Upcoming Meeting Dates and Public Comment

Justice Baker congratulated Sen. Wendy McKamey on her selection as a 2024 Henry Toll Fellow by the Council of State Governments. The Fellowship includes an intensive leadership boot camp with other state government officials from across the country. Justice Baker asked for public comment and there was none. She noted that the first three meeting dates for 2025 are listed on the agenda. The meeting was adjourned at 11:23am.

March 7, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission

March 7, 2025

Zoom Video Conference

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:

Justice Beth Baker, Ed Bartlett, Lillian Alvernaz, Kekek Stark, Alison Paul, Olivia Riutta, Kimberly Dudik, Hon. Stacie FourStar, and Jacob Griffith

Commissioners Absent:

Rick Cook, Sen. Wendy McKamey, Aimee Grmoljez, Hon. John Kutzman, Leslie Halligan, Margaret Weamer, Sen. Laura Smith, Hon. David Carter and Juli Pierce

Others Present:

Alissa Chambers, Becky Schupp Watson, Emma Schmelzer, Dave McAlpin, Franklin Runge, Madiera Zehnder, Linden Howard-Murphy, Valerie Falls Down, Katy Lovell, Megan Dishong, and Justice Katherine Bidegaray

Call to Order & Introduction:

Justice Baker called the meeting to order at 10:02 am. She welcomed Justice Katherine Bidegaray who joined the Supreme Court in January. Justice Bidegaray will participate in the Access to Justice Commission when she has the capacity to do so.

Approval of September Meeting Minutes:

No quorum, therefore, the minutes were not approved. Will try to pass the minutes during the June 2025 meeting.

Court Administrator Update:

Dave McAlpin provided an update on the Legislature, which has reached its transmittal break. He highlighted challenges the Judicial Branch is facing in both the Senate and House, particularly regarding tight deadlines and the limited time available to analyze fiscal notes. In some cases, the short turnaround has resulted in bills being considered without a full understanding of their financial implications.

Dave emphasized the high priority of adding judges in Billings due to a significant caseload and increased violent crime. Although his office requested three additional judges, the House Appropriations Committee approved only two. During the same budget review process, funding for the Pretrial Program was cut. His office is actively working to restore it.

The Pretrial Program provides judges with important information to assess the risk of individuals absconding or reoffending—an especially critical tool in county jails facing limited bed space. Justice Baker pointed out that this could potentially impact the work of the Commission as pretrial incarceration can lead to job and housing loss, which often escalates into broader civil legal issues.

Dave mentioned that his office asked for a floating law clerk in Missoula which was okayed in budget and Justice Baker pointed out the budget subcommittee did approve the continuation of our family mediation project with general fund money.

SB 31 Update:

Justice Baker asked Alissa Chambers about the IOLTA bill, which was introduced to make the IOLTA program voluntary. Alissa offered a brief synopsis of IOLTA and the SB31 bill and explained that if it had passed it would have given clients three choices regarding their funds, including keeping them in a non-interest-bearing account, an interest-bearing account, or elect to have their funds go to into an IOLTA account. All options would make client funds taxable.

The bill was met with opposition, and it was voted down on the Senate floor. The discussion also highlighted the significance of legislative involvement in our commission because it promotes understanding of civil legal aid and what access to justice means. Justice Baker acknowledged the efforts of Senator Wendy McKamey, Senator Laura Smith, Alissa Chambers, and the Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) in addressing the bill.

Karla Gray Award Nominations:

Justice Baker announced that nominations are now open for the Karla Gray Award, presented annually by the State Bar to honor a Montana judge from any court who has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. She reviewed the award criteria and reminded members to send their nominations to the Montana Justice Foundation by May 16. These submissions will be considered at the June meeting, and the Commission will send nominations to the State Bar President's Committee for final selection.

Access to Justice Commission Report:

Katy Lovell shared her progress on multiple projects and expressed gratitude for the team's support.

Community Justice Worker Grant (awarded in December)

Currently navigating the contract process. Due to the legislative session, further momentum is expected once the session concludes.

Self Help Law Center Leases

New leases are underway in Great Falls and Billings. Reese Loveless and Katy will soon begin drafting grant applications and developing an initial budget overview. Katy is planning site visits to the Kalispell and Great Falls centers in the coming weeks to visit with their coordinators and observe operations.

AmeriCorps Members

Two new AmeriCorps members have been placed: one in Bozeman (through August) and one in Billings (through early June).

AmeriCorps Recruitment

Recruitment has begun for the next group who will start in September. Two members are already placed, and additional placements are being sought in Missoula, Bozeman, Helena, and Billings.

Weekly Training Series

Every Tuesday afternoon, AmeriCorps members participate in an hour-long training series with attorneys covering topics such as veteran service coordination, immigration law, Social Security, child and family services, and other areas supported by the Self Help Law Centers. It is a good opportunity to ask questions about all sorts of different areas of law that Self Help law centers assist with. Professional development workshops are also a part of the training series, which can cover grant writing, public speaking, and Excel use.

Data Collection for Service Delivery

Over the next few months, Katy will begin collecting data to identify opportunities for expanding service delivery. Plans are in motion to update the new Family Law forms and to brief judges and court clerks on what to expect during the transition.

Support for New Legal Service Developer

Katy is coordinating introductory meetings for Gretchen Hall and assisting in the recruitment of legal volunteers. They are currently looking for legal volunteers for their upcoming legal clinics.

RFP for the Legal Contract. The contract position for a supervising attorney will be posted on the department's website soon. Attorneys interested in a contract with the Legal Services Developer Program should apply.

Family Transition Project update:

Emma Schmelzer provided an update on the Family Transition project, highlighting its growth and promising potential. Five new attorneys and a few new mediators have been recruited, which is already driving an increase in referrals. Outreach from social media has helped bring in many self-referred cases. Emma would like to get the rest of the district courts on board this summer. The program has added another child-support consultant, bringing the total number of consultants to three.

IDRT: Justice Baker noted that the Supreme Court recently had its first appeal decided that involved the Informal Domestic Relations Trials process and published the opinion. This could be helpful to other judges going forward. Emma discussed the need for further outreach to community groups about the process.

MLSA Update:

Alison Paul pointed out a couple issues MLSA is facing now. Currently, 70 percent of MLSA's budget is supported by federal grants. Their recent grant successes have triggered requests to certify compliance with recent Executive Orders regarding DEI. The

looming federal budget uncertainty and proposed funding cuts pose a risk to long-term sustainability. While MLSA isn't in crisis today, Alison stressed the importance of securing stable funding for the future.

Justice Baker noted that the Commission had sent a letter to Montana's Congressional delegation in the past, urging continued support for the Legal Services Corporation, and discussed whether it would be helpful to do so now. Alison noted that MLSA cannot lobby Congress but agreed with the importance of educating new Congressional members about MLSA's work. Justice Baker also suggested involving Aimee Grmoljez, who works in the business community, and Todd O'Hare in finding potential advocates for the cause.

Ed Bartlett proposed a motion for the Commission to send a strong letter to all members of the Montana delegation. The motion was seconded by Olivia Riutta and unanimously approved by the present members. Justice Baker agreed to revisit the motion in the June meeting or through email when the timing appears right to present advocacy on the topic.

Alison provided an update on the Community Justice Worker project, which is moving forward with training and relationships. The project involves a federal grant and will also add a Medicaid piece.

Upcoming Meeting Dates and Public Comment:

Justice Baker noted the next three meeting dates listed on the agenda for 2025. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Tab 2

Karla M. Gray Equal Justice Award

This award honors a judge from any court who has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Consideration for this award will be given to nominees who demonstrate this dedication and commitment with a combination of some or all of the efforts described below:

- Personally done noteworthy and/or considerable work improving access of all individuals, regardless of income, to the Montana court system.
- Instrumental in local Access to Justice efforts, including program development, cooperative efforts between programs, and support for community outreach efforts to improve understanding of and access to the courts.
- Active support of citizen involvement in the judicial system.
- Active support and commitment to increasing involvement of volunteer attorneys in representing the indigent and those of limited means.
- Other significant efforts that exhibit a long-term commitment to improving access to the judicial system.

The Access to Justice Commission selects nominees for the award, and the State Bar of Montana Past Presidents Committee selects one award winner. Nomination materials will be retained and considered by the Access to Justice Commission for three years.

Nominee: Hon. Amy Eddy - District Court Judge in Flathead County

Address: 920 S. Main Street, Suite 310
Kalispell, MT 59901

In a separate document, please describe how the nominee has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Please attach the description and other supporting documents to this nomination form.

Your signature: 

Print your name: Angie Rolando

Your address: 155 W. Granite Street
Butte, MT 59701

Your phone number: (406) 497-6230

**Please email the nomination by May 16, 2025, to
Becky Schupp Watson at the Montana Justice Foundation, becky@mtjustice.org**

I am writing this Nomination in consideration of the Hon. Amy Eddy, District Court Judge in Flathead County, for the Karla M. Gray Equal Justice Award.

Prior to going to law school, I was the Regional Administrator in the Flathead County area for Child and Family Services. I have worked with Judge Eddy in multiple capacities, including practicing as a Deputy County Attorney in front of her and my work with Child and Family Services, for nearly a decade. During my work with Child and Family Services, I worked very closely with Judge Eddy during the implementation of a Pilot Project in Kalispell that allowed parents in Dependency and Neglect cases access to the Court within 72 hours of having their child removed from their care. This project allowed families to be reunified in a timelier fashion, which decreased the amount of time children spent in foster care and engaged parents with the Court system in a more active and expeditious manner. Without Judge Eddy, this project would never have succeeded and because of her work, dedication, and willingness to ensure parents, who often are in the most vulnerable positions of their lives, had equal access to the Courts and this Pilot Project is now codified in our state statute.

More than anything, Judge Eddy's vision in this process gave marginalized individuals in these cases not only the opportunity, but the right to be present, be heard, and meaningfully participate in cases where beforehand they often felt left out. Individuals received services quickly, had attorneys assigned immediately, and instead of waiting nearly a month, parents were before the Court in a matter of days. That is not merely my sentiment. During my tenure at Child and Family Services, I kept track of statistics for reunification numbers in Flathead. In one year, the reunification rate for Flathead County went from 67% to 82%. That statistic speaks for itself. There is no doubt the increase in the percentage of the number of children who were able to be reunified safely with their parents is large part due to the work Judge Eddy put forth.

It is an honor for me to nominate Judge Eddy for this award.

Karla M. Gray Equal Justice Award

This award honors a judge from any court who has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Consideration for this award will be given to nominees who demonstrate this dedication and commitment with a combination of some or all of the efforts described below:

- Personally done noteworthy and/or considerable work improving access of all individuals, regardless of income, to the Montana court system.
- Instrumental in local Access to Justice efforts, including program development, cooperative efforts between programs, and support for community outreach efforts to improve understanding of and access to the courts.
- Active support of citizen involvement in the judicial system.
- Active support and commitment to increasing involvement of volunteer attorneys in representing the indigent and those of limited means.
- Other significant efforts that exhibit a long-term commitment to improving access to the judicial system.

The Access to Justice Commission selects nominees for the award, and the State Bar of Montana Past Presidents Committee selects one award winner. Nomination materials will be retained and considered by the Access to Justice Commission for three years.

Nominee: Hon. Jessica T. Fehr

Address: P.O. Box 35029
Billings, MT 59107

In a separate document, please describe how the nominee has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Please attach the description and other supporting documents to this nomination form.

Your signature: _____

Print your name: Anna Rose Sullivan

Your address: 514 Whatley Road
Nashua, MT 59248

Your phone number: (406) 546-9426

**Please email the nomination by May 16, 2025, to
Becky Schupp Watson at the Montana Justice Foundation, becky@mtjustice.org**

I nominate Judge Jessica T Fehr. She is an outstanding judge in the 13th judicial district. Judge Fehr has the highest case load in the State and runs a successful treatment court. She was also the head judge last year. Judge Fehr is warm and welcoming to all who come before her and will always allow defendants an opportunity for treatment prior to incarceration. Judge Fehr is very deserving on this special award. Thank you for your consideration and if you would like additional information on why Judge Fehr deserves this award I'm happy to go on and on.

Warm regards,

Anna Sullivan, Public Defender

Karla M. Gray Equal Justice Award

This award honors a judge from any court who has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Consideration for this award will be given to nominees who demonstrate this dedication and commitment with a combination of some or all of the efforts described below:

- Personally done noteworthy and/or considerable work improving access of all individuals, regardless of income, to the Montana court system.
- Instrumental in local Access to Justice efforts, including program development, cooperative efforts between programs, and support for community outreach efforts to improve understanding of and access to the courts.
- Active support of citizen involvement in the judicial system.
- Active support and commitment to increasing involvement of volunteer attorneys in representing the indigent and those of limited means.
- Other significant efforts that exhibit a long-term commitment to improving access to the judicial system.

The Access to Justice Commission selects nominees for the award, and the State Bar of Montana Past Presidents Committee selects one award winner. Nomination materials will be retained and considered by the Access to Justice Commission for three years.

Nominee: Judge, Amy Eddy
Address: 920 S. Main, Ste 310, Kalispell, MT. 59901

In a separate document, please describe how the nominee has demonstrated dedication to improving access to Montana courts. Please attach the description and other supporting documents to this nomination form.

Your signature: Michael F. Lamb

Print your name: Michael F. Lamb

Your address: 2601 Broadway, Helena, MT. 59601

Your phone number: (406) 459-1600

Please email the nomination by May 16, 2025, to
Becky Schupp Watson at the Montana Justice Foundation, becky@mtjustice.org

From: lambo@mikelamblaw.com
Sent: Wednesday, May 14, 2025 10:28 AM
To: lambo@mikelamblaw.com
Subject: FW: NOMINATION OF JUDGE AMY EDDY FOR THE KARLA GRAY ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD

Becky: per your reminder regarding the Karla M. Gray Access to Justice Award, and the form you provided requesting information supportive of the nomination, I submit the following. As reflected below, I have shared not only my professional experiences with Judge Eddy, but information available on-line, biographical background obtained from her husband, what I learned from visiting with Sara Smith, Judge Eddy's court clerk for a time, and a clerk in the Flathead county district court, and recommendations from two judicial officers (co-workers), Chief Justice Mike McGrath and Justice Ingrid Gustafson. I will scan and send your form by separate email. Please let me know that you received the Nomination, and let me know if you need anything further. Thank you, Mike

EMPLOYMENT:

2001: Graduated from the University of Montana School of Law

2001-2015: Private practice

2014-2015: Special Assistant Attorney General with the Montana Department of Justice as a Pro Bono Appellate Attorney to review involuntary commitment appeals

2015-Present: District Court Judge, Montana Eleventh Judicial District

In 2015, Judge Eddy was appointed the Department 1 District Court Judge for the Montana Eleventh Judicial District to fill a retirement vacancy. Pursuant to the timing of the appointment, she ran for election in 2016 and again in 2018 when the original term of her predecessor expired. She was reelected again in 2024. While elected District Court Judge in Flathead County, Montana, as a district court judge she has statewide jurisdiction, and handles cases on a statewide basis when requested. She also sits by designation on the Montana Supreme Court upon appointment. Montana District Courts are general jurisdiction; and district court judges preside over the following types of cases: criminal, civil, domestic relations, child abuse and neglect, juvenile, involuntary commitments, adoptions, guardianship and conservatorships, and probate matters. This involves over approximately 1,000 cases per year in Flathead County.

In addition, In 2017, Judge Eddy was appointed by the Montana Supreme Court as the Asbestos Claims Court Judge to manage the docket of cases arising out of asbestos exposure in Libby, Montana. This is in addition to her regular obligations in the Montana Eleventh Judicial District; without any additional support or compensation.

VOLUNTEERING:

My knowledge of Judge Eddy's Access to Justice support activities "above and beyond" her normal duties, and my decision to nominate her for our Karla Gray Access to Justice Award, was a function of my work with her on the MJF board, my knowledge of her appointment and service as the Asbestos court judge per appointment by the Montana Supreme Court, her involvement over the years in child welfare/emergency protective services judicial matters, and leadership in developing processes for dealing with the ever-increasing onslaught of unrepresented litigants in our courts.

Given my limited knowledge, I asked Judge Eddy's husband, Randy Bishop, known to me through our shared responsibilities as directors of the Montana Trial Lawyers Association, his service as law professor at our law school, his tenure as a director of the Montana Justice Foundation, and otherwise, what specific information he was aware of that he could share with me, relative to Judge Eddy's service activities responsive to the purposes of the Karla Gray Access to Justice Award. He admits to an incomplete book of knowledge, but referenced the below matters:

COVID: When the courtrooms shut down during a period of time during COVID, Judge Eddy trained lawyers on how to conduct a Zoom trial, and made every effort to keep the courtrooms functioning for individuals who had no option but to access the justice system for assistance. (As an aside, Randy noted that during courtroom hours when things were current and the courtrooms were shut down such that nothing could be accomplished, Amy volunteered at the Flathead Food Bank.)

Mental Health Initiatives (2023-Present): Judge Eddy has provided testimony to the Behavioral Health Commission for Future Generations and Law & Justice Interim Committee about best practices and ways to improve outcomes for individuals diagnosed with a serious mental illness who are involved in the civil or criminal justice system. This work has continued with Flathead County's Care Coordination Team and Flathead County's Behavioral Health Commission, and also by attending in-depth training with the Judges & Psychiatrists Leadership Initiative.

District Court Council, Member (2020-present): Judge Eddy was appointed by the Montana Supreme Court to serve on the District Court Council which has statutory responsibility to report to the MTSC and Legislature, and recommend ways to administer funding of the districts courts, including workload, resource allocation among the district courts; hiring policies; court procedures, information technology; for court reporters, work schedules, transcript fees, and equipment; and other issues regarding the state funding of district courts.

Montana Uniform District Court Rules Commission, Chair (January 2018—present): Judge Eddy was appointed by the MTSC to work lawyers across the state to develop rules to assist in the operation of the district courts.

Early Resolution and Mediation Program, Member (2017—Present): Volunteered family law cases on her docket to this pilot project to assist self-represented litigants in navigating family law cases. This pilot program has since become the Montana Family

Transition Project which provides pro bono legal representation and a free mediator to qualifying family law cases.

Dependent Neglect Pilot Projects, Judge Eddy has been a member (2016-Present): Engaged in team trainings with judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, CASAs and Child and Family Services to improve outcomes for children involved in dependent neglect proceedings. She currently volunteers to assist in the auditing of dependent neglect case files in other jurisdictions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing the limited perspective that I enjoyed with respect to Judge Eddy's work on Access to Justice issues, I imposed on Chief Justice (retired) Mike McGrath, and Justice Ingrid Gustafson to provide additional details and background. I also spoke with Sara Smith, Judge Eddy's court clerk for a time, and a clerk with the district court in Kalispell. Quite frankly, I didn't know what I was getting into. Their individual and collective praise and appreciation for Judge Eddy personally and professionally, and particularly her work supporting Access to Justice issues over the years, is unqualified and beyond my ability to relate completely. They all authorized me to represent that they fully and strongly support Judge Eddy's nomination, and would be willing to visit with anyone involved in reviewing nominations to provide additional information or details. I have summarized what I learned from them below; and if I misunderstood the details I apologize in advance: but you will get the point:

SARA SMITH: After explaining the purpose of the Award, and my intention to nominate Judge Eddy, Sara advised that after working with and observing her for years that "She amazes me all the time. She always goes above and beyond. She is not someone who sits back and waits for someone else to handle things. She proactively helps identify and provide solutions to litigant and court problems, always asking 'what do we need to do?; how can I help?'" "She makes everything work better." Sara focused on Judge Eddy's work with pro se litigants, both in family law matters and otherwise. She described Judge Eddy's work as follows: everybody gets a fair shot; everyone is treated with respect and provided an opportunity to participate in creating the solution that works best for everyone (children, parents, claimants, etc.); she gets things done, generating orders and agreements from the bench for approval and filing immediately when possible, so that the matter is resolved, people can get on with their lives, permanent solutions are provided immediately, and people have their peace of mind restored, a commitment to cooperate, resolution! And she does all of this respectfully, compassionately, efficiently and with a positive attitude. Pro se litigants, like everyone else, often do not know how the legal system works, and are generally intimidated and defensive; but by the time they leave Judge Eddy's court, they know that they have been heard, their positions and concerns considered, a "best" solution created and, in most cases, come away with a sense of satisfaction with the process and our court system. And they often walk out with a workable Order, and the fight is at an end. She genuinely cares: she is a "people person" and works hard every day to do "the right thing" for those who find their way into her courtroom; and works with pro se litigants to help them to that place, providing them with the opportunity to participate in its creation. In a word, "wonderful!"

CHIEF JUSTICE MCGRATH: First, with respect to the Asbestos court: he noted that when created, when he was serving as our Attorney General, it was never funded and essentially sat dormant for years. When the cases started boiling over something needed to be done to have the cases prepared for trial (discovery, process, procedure, motions, etc., i.e., all preliminary matters). Given Judge Eddy's background in complex and multi-district court litigation, she was "volunteered" into the job, and appointed by the Court. Per Justice McGrath, "She did an amazing job." She quickly organized the cases into appropriate categories for processing, developed the processes and procedures for dealing with those categories, dealt with all of the preliminary matters, and organized things so they could be set for trial. This provided a necessary solution to what had been an insoluble problem for many years; and allowed Montana citizen asbestos victims and all parties to bring their cases to resolution and closure. "Again, amazing, and that is not all....."

Judge Eddy was intimately involved in the family court pilot type programs; including developing the mediation model for resolving domestic violence disputes. She worked at designing and setting up the training, process, procedures, forms, etc., with other judges, to reduce costs, delays, court time, to facilitate the more timely resolution of family law matters; an effort designed to improve access to justice not only in her district court, but across the state, benefiting everyone involved. It was "wonderful work," over and above her responsibilities managing cases.

Judge Eddy was also an initiating force with respect to the "rocket docket" concept for getting appropriate civil cases to trial quickly; a concept that allowed parties quick access to the courts (access to justice) where there is agreement upon limited discovery, the issues to be litigated and other conditions: in exchange for which the parties get a guaranteed quick trial date.

Finally, whatever Judge Eddy was "volunteered" into, and/or appointed to do, she did well, quickly and efficiently. She developed consensus and buy-in, simplified procedures, developed efficiencies, saved time and worked to make things better for everyone that our legal system serves. She listened to other input and engendered trust by the way she worked, "everyone was willing to trust her."

JUSTICE GUSTAFSON: Justice Gustafson responded to my question about the Access to Justice Award by declaring, with a laugh, "I can't tell you how many things I've 'volunteered' Amy for, since forever! Even when I was serving as a district court judge. If you want to get something done, and get it done right, call Amy. If you have a problem that she can assist with, she is the one to call; and once you do, you can rest assured that things will go better. She has been instrumental in improving access to justice in innumerable ways over the years, over and above handling her case load, and I doubt that I can even remember them all." Some examples include:

- 1) She single-handedly got the asbestos court organized and underway, a situation that sat dormant for probably 20 years;
- 2) She has worked for years improving the handling of child welfare cases in the district courts; developing and

implementing best practices designed to reduce time frames for resolution, avoid minors languishing in temporary care situations, improving reunification rates, ensuring timely evaluations, etc. This has involved modifying procedures, developing forms, implementing training and working in developing consensus and best practices models with various courts throughout the state, etc. With respect to emergency protective services matters--working with other judges, she spearheaded the development of the forms, notices, orders, etc., so as to ensure everyone was snapped into the process and on board, with a goal of moving things quickly and appropriately to resolution. This allows children to get the support and evaluation they need, so as to find a permanent solution in a timely fashion;

- 3) She has been intimately involved in and supported access to justice through her work in her community, through the state bar education committee, through judicial education (awareness, consensus building, best practices development and training), the uniform district court rules commission, the district court council, etc.;
- 4) She has worked with other judges to develop pilot projects and processes designed to facilitate and make more efficient the handling of self-represented litigants in family matters.

Concluding her recommendation and comments about Judge Eddy, Justice Gustafson observed, "Amy is a big picture person, who takes the judiciary's responsibility to improve the justice system personally; and has worked hard since her original appointment to make things better. She thinks things through, and is a common sense consensus builder. She is transparent in her work, and can always explain and justify her processes and goals. She is humble, and never suffers from self-importance. You know that once she is 'volunteered' into a project, it will be well thought out, she will not muck it up, and you don't need to worry about it."

CONCLUSION

From my perspective, the comments/recommendations about Judge Eddy, shared above, are wonderful to hear—and not surprising. In Montana, we have generally been blessed with talented, committed judges who work hard to do the right thing every day. As her record of service and these observations reflect, Judge Eddy goes above and beyond in service to the public our judiciary serves, and promotes access to justice by both word and deed. I am proud to nominate her for this award.

Thank you for considering my nomination of Judge Eddy. If there is any further information you require or that I can access for you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Lamb', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Mike Lamb