Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission
Zoom Video Conference
June 5, 2026 - 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:
Justice Beth Baker, Gretchen Hall, Olivia Riutta, Alison Paul, Lillian Alvernaz, Aimee Grmoljez, Jacob Griffith, Hon, David Carter, Kekek Stark, Maggie Weamer, Juli Pierce Sen. Wendy McKamey, Rep. Alanah Griffith, and Ed Bartlett

Commissioners Absent:
Hon. Stacie FourStar, Rick Cook, Hon. John Kutzman, and Hon. Leslie Halligan

Others Present:
Katy Lovell, Becky Schupp Watson, Alissa Chambers, Stephanie Marshall, Madiera Zehnder, Megan Dishong, Valerie Falls Down, Sarah Capdeville, Brooke Dolan, and Rose Chehrazi

Call to Order & Introduction:
Justice Baker called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and asked participants to introduce themselves.

Approval of March 6, 2026, Meeting Minutes:
There were no questions or additions to the March 6, 2026, meeting minutes and they were unanimously approved.

Access to Justice Programs Report:
Self-help law center facilitators and AmeriCorps members have been doing outreach to courts across the state. Members of the Gallatin County Self-Help Law Center travel to Livingston once a week where the court schedules appointments for them. The Kalispell facilitator travels to Polson weekly and will be headed to Libby and Cut Bank soon. The Missoula facilitator is currently providing outreach to Mineral County.

Several Court Connect computer stations installed in 2017 no longer work and will be refurbished and redeployed by court technology staff.

Six AmeriCorps members have been approved for the next program year in the Self-Help Law Centers: two each in Helena and Bozeman, and one each in Kalispell and Missoula. Billings and Great Falls will continue to have staff but no AmeriCorps members.

The Family Transition Project has enrolled 335 cases and currently has a 70% agreement rate. A grant from the Montana Justice Foundation will fund the program through the end of 2026, until legislative funding begins on January 1, 2027.

The working group for the Community Justice Worker Program has been meeting weekly and will submit a proposed order to the Court next week. The Family Transition Project Administrator position is expected to be posted soon.

Judicial AI Guidance Overview:
Rose Chehrazi, an AmeriCorps member at the Bozeman Self-Help Law Center, presented her research on AI guidance for self-represented litigants across the U.S., Washington D.C. and federal courts. She reviewed judicial orders and opinions, non-binding guidance, task force reports, pro-se materials, and court websites to see how other jurisdictions are addressing AI use and what approaches might be appropriate for Montana.

Overall, AI guidance is in its early stages. Many jurisdictions have not yet adopted statewide policies, although many are examining the issue or have issued guidance for individual courts or judges. Illinois and Arkansas are currently the only states with statewide AI guidance issued by their supreme courts. Existing rules vary, with some jurisdictions prohibiting AI-generated filings, while others require disclosure and verification of AI-generated content. Many have no AI-specific guidance. Most guidance is written for attorneys, making it less clear how it applies to self-represented litigants.

Rose highlighted several questions for Montana to consider, including whether AI guidance should be advisory or mandatory, statewide or local, and how it should address confidentiality and privilege concerns. She recommended adding AI guidance to Montana's pro se packets, making Montana Law Help's AI resources easier to find, encouraging counties to post AI guidance on court websites, developing a federal pro se AI resource, and providing AI handouts at Self-Help Law Centers.

Katy Lovell shared that Rose's research is the AI Working Group's first project. The group plans to meet soon to review her recommendations and discuss next steps, and its work will be included in the Commission's biennial report to the Court. Justice Baker suggested the group consider creating a publication that summarizes its research and recommendations. Members also noted that the Fourth Judicial District has adopted a local rule requiring disclosure of AI use, and that a proposed amendment to the Montana Rules of Evidence addressing AI is currently out for public comment.

Judge Carter asked whether other states have generally started by adopting AI rules for attorneys before expanding them to self-represented litigants. Rose said most existing rules focus on attorneys, though many specifically state that their rules apply to all court participants. Judge Carter noted that deciding whether Montana's guidance should be binding will be an important policy decision and suggested any future rule changes may need to be incorporated into the Uniform Rules for Justice and City Courts. Justice Baker noted that any rule changes would require a formal

petition to the Court followed by a public comment period and the Commission on Courts of Limited Jurisdiction should be consulted before pursuing any proposed rules changes.

Community Justice Conversations:
Brooke Dolan provided an update on the Community Justice Conversations. The team recently visited communities across eastern Montana, including Glendive, Miles City, Scobey, and, most recently, Bozeman. Brooke noted that the team continues to refine its approach and has found it especially helpful when local judges reach out to legislators in advance to encourage their participation.

Upcoming visits are scheduled for Roundup and Lewistown in mid-June, with additional stops along the Hi-Line planned for July. On August 22, the team will visit Columbus and Hardin, followed by Lincoln County in September and Billings during the State Bar Conference. By then, the team will have visited nearly every judicial district in Montana, with the possibility of conducting another round of visits after the election. Feedback from this has been overwhelmingly positive and has received national recognition.

MLSA Update:
Alison Paul reported that MLSA is planning its annual Eastern Montana road trip during which four staff members will travel to Glendive and return through Lewistown to meet with community partners, share information about MLSA's services, and help with client referrals. While MLSA regularly serves eastern Montana, this trip provides a more focused outreach effort.

Alison announced the launch of MLSA's Fair Housing Project on June 1. After federal fair housing grants were terminated in early 2025, MLSA secured a HUD grant and hired two staff attorneys to implement the program.

MLSA has nearly filled its AmeriCorps positions, with approximately 22 members serving statewide. While federal funding has not yet been announced, no issues are anticipated. If necessary, limited state funding may be available through the Governor's Commission on Community Service, though it would reduce the number of positions.

The Bozeman City Council will grant MLSA a Right to Counsel grant for eviction cases. This pilot program is the first of its kind in Montana. Funding details are still being finalized but are expected soon. The program will be managed out of Helena with the goal of providing legal representation to every person facing eviction.

The Community Justice Worker working group plans to submit a proposed order establishing the program to the Court next week. No significant rule changes are anticipated, aside from a proposed amendment to the Justice Court Rules of Civil

Procedure and a future amendment to the State Bar admission rules, both of which would be submitted for public comment.

Self-Represented Litigant Committee Update:
Alissa reported that since February 2026, the committee has focused on reviewing and approving self-represented litigant forms with substantive revisions. Drafts are first reviewed by Katy Lovell and Stephanie Marshall before being submitted to the committee for discussion and approval. Once approved, the forms are posted on the website. To date, the Adult Name Change and Declaration of Homestead forms have been approved. Dave McAlpin has notified court staff to watch for the new forms, and a follow-up notice will be sent once they are posted, including a summary of the revisions.

Support Letter for Legal Services Corporation Budget:
The Commission discussed the draft letter supporting the Legal Services Corporation's proposed budget request to Congress. The letter highlights the impact of legal services in Montana and was presented for approval due to the submission deadline.

Ed Bartlett moved to approve the letter as drafted, Jacob Griffith seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously, with Alison Paul abstaining.

Karla M. Gray Equal Justice Award Nominations:
Justice Baker excused herself from the meeting and Katy Lovell took over as host. Katy reviewed the Karla Gray Award nomination materials included in the meeting packet. Aimee Grmoljez moved to nominate Justice Beth Baker for the award, and Ed Bartlett seconded the motion. Ed suggested that the remaining nominees be considered over the next three years. The motion to submit Justice Baker's nomination was approved unanimously.

Upcoming Meeting Dates:
Justice Baker noted the next three meeting dates listed on the agenda: September 11, 2026, and December 4, 2026.

Public Comment: No Public Comment. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am.