

# Hobbs Report

February 2020

## BACKGROUND

The New Mexico Commission on Access to Justice was established by the NM Supreme Court to expand access to the civil justice system for all New Mexicans. The Commission's guiding principle is that providing legal services to those most in need can only be accomplished by a community-wide effort. The Commission is working with communities across the state to identify needs and develop strategies and resources to address local priorities. This report details activities to date in the community of Hobbs.

## OVERVIEW

The Commission on Access to Justice has held two community forums in Hobbs (one in late 2018 and most recently in February of 2020) that drew a total of 21 individuals representing various sectors of the community including local government, educational institutions, the business community, the judiciary and non-profit organizations. The sessions were intended to create a space where participants could listen to each other and share their perspectives on civil legal needs and their impact on the community.

Participants identified what they felt were the barriers and issues that most affected the local community. Many of the issues are interrelated and many individuals are confronted with multiple issues. Those present were interested in continuing the dialogue on creating greater awareness and understanding of the issues, as well as, working together to develop strategies to address the issues.

Following is a ranked list of priorities. The Commission will work with local organizations and individuals to support efforts to address those concerns.

## CIVIL LEGAL PRIORITIES

Following are areas that the Hobbs community would like to address. Some of the concerns related to these issues are being addressed to various degrees by other working groups of the Commission and are noted where appropriate.

### A) Landlord/Tenant/Housing Issues

- Lack of affordable housing in Hobbs area and no meaningful low-income housing
- No landlord oversight by any agency and tenants feeling that there is no way to challenge violations

The JF Maddox Foundation recently established a Housing Insecurity working group to address the issue. David Reed, Senior Program Officer, offered to connect the Commission to the local group. Mr. Reed and Carrie Cooper, Guidance Center of Lea County, will serve as the POC's for this issue. Others that need to be included are: Regional Housing Authority (MFA out of Roswell); Russ Doss (Lea County Housing Inc.); Salvation Army; local elected officials; and, Homewise.

### B) Increase Availability & Quality of Services

- Resources need to be acceptable to people using them--i.e., people need to feel safe and comfortable accessing the resources
- Need language access services and need interpreters to make people feel comfortable
- Need more pro bono attorneys and legal clinics
- Use of technology (e.g. phone and video meetings/consults with attorneys) can help access in rural areas but may create barriers for people who are more comfortable face-to-face

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### **C) Reduce Access Barriers**

- Barriers to accessing courthouse--language, education, ability to self-advocate
- Legal language is very off-putting to self-represented litigants; need plain language resources
- NM courts website is not accessible--doesn't provide information in a way that is meaningful to SRLs or doesn't provide basic information; info not easy to find

The Commission has working groups that are addressing some of the issues in the previous two categories. As their work progresses, it will be integrated into local community efforts. Others that should be invited to participate: NMLA, DAs office, PDs office, social security office; local private attorneys; salvation army; Goodwill/Clovis; hospitals; NMILC; United Way 211; GAP; Opportunity House; CDC; DWI compliance.

### **D) Promote Local Agency/Organization Collaboration**

- Need information and education about resources for community members
- Agencies need to work together, including criminal agencies such as the DA's office
- Logistical and legal challenges with agency collaboration (e.g. need for MOUs, agency funding regulations and requirements may conflict)

### **E) Substance Abuse Issues**

- Lack of meaningful substance abuse treatment options in Lea County and lack of meaningful research and information about good treatment options overall
- People end up cycling through the criminal justice system due to substance use/abuse
- Medicaid regulations create barriers for agencies being able to provide substance abuse treatment (e.g. need to have a doctor specializing in detox)

### **F) Immigration Issues**

### **G) Senior Issues**

### **H) Special Education & Disability Rights & Access to Services**

### **I) Sustainable living wage**

### **J) Help with Access to Public Benefits**

## **COMMUNITY ACTIONS AND SUPPORT**

The participants took a survey to measure their respective organization's interest and capacity in taking specific actions. Listed below are activities they felt they could contribute to:

- Bring others together for community forums.
- Host public information seminars
- Participate in local planning processes
- Meet with policymakers/legislators on specific issues, policies, legislation, and/or funding
- Help resolve conflicts or disagreements
- Be called on by the Commission and local decision makers to offer opinions
- Assist others in the community in raising their own concerns or views
- Develop more awareness of civil legal needs in my sector
- Offer space for online access to legal resources by community members
- Host staff trainings including navigator training
- Serve as a clearinghouse for information
- Interested in analyzing policies that impact my community
- Collaborate on a new project to benefit the community

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Commission will work with local organizations on developing strategies to address housing issues. The Commission will also provide a report detailing actions to date and a list of existing resources. Organizations and individuals that would like to participate should contact:

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