

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, April 11, 2025
ATJ In-Person (with video appearance option)

Location: New Mexico State Bar, 5121 Masthead St. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109

12:00 – 2:30 pm

Item 1: Welcome, Introductions, In attendance:

*Hon. Erin O’Connell (ATJ Chair; SJDC)	Lori Thornton (NMSL)
*Alex Flores (ATJ Commission)	Maria Jose Murray (Mediator)
Allison Freedman (UNM Law School)	Mary Smith (CLS Commission)
Aja Brooks (SBNM; US DOJ)	*Hon. Mercedes Murphy (ATJ Comm; 7 th JDC)
Beth Wojahn (AOC)	Michael McGuire (SCLO)
Bette Fleishman (Pegasus Law)	Hon. Michael Aragon (4 th JDC)
Caitlin Carcerano (SBNM)	Natalie Meyers (LREP)
Cheryl Thompson (Metro Court)	Paige Diem (USBC)
Craig Hay (ALTSD)	*Pamelya Herndon (ATJ Comm; NM State Representative)
DeAnne Romero (SJDC)	Peggy Cadwell (AOC)
*Doug Echols (ATJ Comm; SBNM)	*Rebecca O’Gawa (ATJ Comm; 2 nd DAO)
Gary Housepian (DRNM)	Rudy Sanchez (DNA)
Heather Norfleet (Equal Access to Justice)	*Scott Cameron (ATJ Commission)
*Jennifer Salazar (ATJ Commission)	Sireesha Manne (NMCLP)
Jennifer Scott (NM Div. Vocational Rehab)	Sommer Smith
John Arango (CLS Commission)	Stephanie Wilson (NMSC)
John Greacen	*Teague Gonzalez (ATJ Commission; NMILC)
*Juan Abeyta (ATJ Commission)	Torri Jacobus (AOC)
Kasey Daniels (MMH)	Winter Torres (NM Eviction Prevention & Diversion)
Kip Bobroff	Zac Addison (NMLA)
Julie Radoslovich (Office Sen. Sedillo Lopez)	*Hon. Zach Ives (ATJ Comm; NMCA)
Lisa Giandomenico (AOC)	

Item 2: Minutes Approved from January 9, 2025

Alex moved to approve the minutes; Juan seconded. No objections. The minutes are approved.

Jennifer Salazar, a new commissioner, was invited to introduce herself by the Chair. Quorum confirmed.

Item 3: Community Integration Annual Report (Juan Abeyta)

Juan explained the objectives of the community engagement team. One of their activities is webinars. They will be starting to do 2025 webinars monthly in May; the statewide Foreclosure Settlement Program (FSP) will be presenting this year for one of the webinars. If you have a webinar topic to suggest, please let them know. The webinars are usually one hour in length. The team invites a large listserv to the webinars. The webinars are recorded and posted on the ATJ website. The webinars have a total of 4,000 views so far. This team will work with you to highlight a topic.

The community integration team partners with the NM State Library and they have a good relationship. They are also initiating a partnership with the ALTSD at the senior centers. They are going to work with them on topics of interest. The FTC funeral rule may be one of the topics this year. Send Juan a note if you would like to work with this team.

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Erin explained the connections between LREP and Meals on Wheels to encourage more community integration efforts. She introduced Caitlin and Natalie of LREP. They try not to schedule webinars at the same time as other organizations.

Erin complimented Juan's work and productivity as a volunteer and expressed ATJ's happiness to have non-lawyers participate in ATJ efforts. Juan conducted listening sessions around the state a long time ago to learn the needs of communities.

Webinar topics are often suggested by community members who attend the webinars.

Erin also thanked Zach. We just served 217 people at a recent NMLA legal fair. Legal Aid VAP really stepping up.

Item 4: Scribing Program Update (Peggy Cadwell)

Chair wants these scribing updates at each ATJ meeting for awareness about statewide scribing services. Peggy is the statewide ADA coordinator at AOC and she is in charge of statewide implementation of the scribing program. Staff in every court and staff at the law library have now all trained in scribing. Peggy presented the usage data since Jan. 1, 2025.

First quarter numbers – jurors take place first place when it comes to scribing, followed by criminal cases, and then traffic cases. The majority of the cases (84%) do not require an interpreter at this time. We are trying to compile the reasons why people use scribing services. The main reason is need, followed by no access to a computer. The length of time is being tracked, and the majority of the sessions are 15 minutes or less, followed by 15-30 minutes.

DeAnne Romero added that the SJDC statistics are different. Sessions typically take one to two hours and 70% need interpreters. Erin expressed concern about whether AOC is getting the data from SJDC. Because jurors are using scribing services for the online juror questionnaire, it skews the data. SJDC is helping people with divorce and restraining orders, so that is different. DeAnne also stated that probably 70% also require interpreter services – they have a lot of Spanish speakers using the program. The SJDC rotates the staff right now. They try to accommodate when the need is urgent. Erin stated that we are very fortunate at SJDC to have a self-help center.

Peggy added that other agencies in and out of state are asking NM about our program and asking for trainings. She observed that these services are desperately needed nationwide and there is no system in place for this type of assistance.

Erin stated that she typically attends two national conferences per year and always mentions the scribing program, which gets a lot of attention. She added that the need is so great and that it is doable. She also remarked, for example, that the FSP is too big of a lift for some states.

Erin gave kudos to Peggy and everyone who does the work.

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Peggy also shared that NM is talking with the Mexican consulate; they are providing scribing services at the consulate because their clients are too afraid to go to a courthouse. She said that NM may do some training for them as well as a webinar to inform the public.

In addition to the updates above, Peggy said that the NM scribe groups meet monthly to discuss issues. Beth helped the AOC to release PSAs in Spanish, English, and Navajo so the public becomes aware of scribing services.

Another AOC project that Peggy described is the Self-Evaluation and Transition Project. It is a big, long project. She put out an RFP and has a contractor in place to evaluate accessibility for individuals with disabilities to all of our courthouses. She asked people to distribute the survey and take it.

Erin asked if the announcement went out to the state bar. Peggy said that there is a survey and a meeting.

Any questions?

Alex Flores pointed out the recent NMSC letter reaffirming its commitment to the various languages in our state.

Lisa stated that the link to the survey and the link to the meeting flyer were posted in the meeting chat by Beth.

Erin invited people to contact us or Peggy if they are interested in taking the scribing training.

Item 5: Legislative Session Summary (John Arango)

John is on the Civil Legal Services Commission (CLSC). John introduced himself and Erin stated that she has learned so much from John. She explained how valuable his help is. For this year's legislative session, CLSC was seeking an increase in funding to \$8M. It turned out that the legislature knew the federal issues would hurt New Mexico and they stepped up their funding for the legal services budget.

John explained the legislative budget process. Budget bills originate in the House and the move to the Senate. The critical step is what the House does; then the Senate revises it. At the House level, CLSC got the same as last year plus \$2M. John said that Sireesha found a special appropriation for another \$2M in the bill. He also said that Juliana, the lobbyist, got the speaker's support and it made a difference.

John said the ultimate amount demonstrated remarkable support for civil legal services. The extra \$2M special appropriation was unexpected. \$1M is for FY27 and \$1M is for FY28. The new legislators came in with the knowledge that civil legal services needed support.

Background – John explained that the Senate was deeply troubled by how much the House had spent, and they planned to cut the spending. The Senate kept the regular appropriation and kept the special appropriation and added \$2M to it. George Munoz, Chair of Senate Finance, did not object to the increase.

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For FY26, the CLSC can spend up to \$9.1M and \$2M is reserved for FY27 and FY28. It is up to the CLSC to decide on the spending. The problem the CLSC is facing is that federal money from many sources is going to be cut, and possibly severely cut.

John then provided the history of the federal funding of civil legal services and the role of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC).

There have been three attempts to eliminate the federal funding of civil legal services, but in each instance, the funding was preserved. We need support from the private bar and the courts for the funding of LSC. The second thing we need is a Senator in Congress to step forward as a champion of civil legal services.

Throughout its history, the system has made changes to survive. One change was to establish neighborhood offices around the country that served as the community's law firm. The available money did not cover that model. In 1967, a new model, called law reform, tried to focus on the main areas that affected low-income people. The LSC then debated law reform vs. services for individual clients. Ultimately, Congress made it clear that they wanted a model that provided individual services. Organizations receiving federal funding then shifted to more individual services. That model was the dominant model from 1975-1995. In 1995, Congress really limited impact litigation by providers and a split occurred. Providers then went in one direction or the other. An example of the law reform model in NM is the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty; they focus on large issues as opposed to individual cases. New Mexico tries to reach as many people and expanding the number of people helped is the primary goal, which has reached specialized organizations like Pegasus.

John questioned and recommends whether we might need a new state plan if federal funding is gone and explains that this is important to understand because this funding issue is at the core of what ATJ does, including writing the state plans. The federal budget has to be done by September 30th, and we need to discuss it again once that occurs so that we may think of solutions to this problem, organize to support federal funding for legal services and think of a plan on what to do if cuts are made. Preserve current funding for worst situation and look how to conceptualize from largest funded programs. From past experiences, John expects 1/3 to 50 -100% elimination.

John is asked what he believes may be at risk for NM and others join. The estimates shared by members were as follows; NM Legal Aid (\$4M plus additionally \$1M- \$2M), DNA \$10B for four (4) states, NSC funding for four (4) different grants, not from audit numbers but \$4.5M, other grants/federal funding for NM Legal Aid/Department of Justice, federal estimate to NMLA is 70% of the budget. DNA gets approx. \$4M. John concludes it is lots of money and its hard to track because it comes in bits and pieces and in different ways. John was appreciated for sharing his knowledge/views on possible future cuts on funding.

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Teague stated that we should consider a study/committee. NM is likely to have a special session this year in the fall including this concept of investment of legal aid programs that would close the gap.

Alex asked why John is optimistic. John stated that he is optimistic that a champion will emerge at the federal level and provided a history of this by presenting an example from 2016, mentioning that this can be rare because a legislators' thoughts on current money given is also to await to see how it will be used before anything else may be done. He also expands on deeper history by referencing two authors, Earl Johnson, who was the first director of the first legal service book and traces what is done to arrange and handle this topic. In contrast, Alan Housman, a legal services attorney and a lobbyist for legal services writes about his field perspective. John recommends both books for an analysis of the history of Legal Services, emphasizing an understanding of a "behind the scenes action" and how the convincing of congressman and legislators will support civil legal services.

Judge O'Connell concludes on this topic and explains that there will be a lot of communication on budget matters involving the next budget cycle. One of the most important parts of ATJ is working toward the fundings of the providers here. As a priority, Justice Bacon (who has more expertise on this topic) and her will turn their attention to this as she returns. The goal is to always try to get a definitive and permanent amount and will take it one step at a time as it funds most of the providers present.

She also emphasizes that this is the beginning of this conversation and that Judge Bacon can later share more as the goal is to centralize funding and making it recurring of definitive amounts to firm up this 9.1K alone and fill the gaps, which is a discussion for the beginning of the budget cycle for next legislative session. She opens it up for questions?

Mary asked in what year was the first appropriation? John shares that the first year of appropriation for CLS funding came from major cuts in 1995/1996 and provided its history; Sarah Singleton was President of State Bar/Chair and money became available in 2001/2002, so civil legal services commission was created. State appropriation from legislator was made in January 2026, \$200K just for NM Legal Aid. In June or July 2026 there was an appropriation of \$2M dollars, of which he can provide a chart.

Item 6: Internet Portal Final Report Presentation (John Greacen and Juan Abeyta)

John and Juan introduced the organization and work of the Portal Committee. Juan presents, welcomes questions and asks for suggestions to be shared at the end of the presentation.

Reports as follows (Power Point):

6 month process – John presents: NM ranked with highest level of poverty in the country, possibly 82%

21 member stakeholder – 10 working members, 2007, 22 conducted national gap studies and 2017, 71% of low income experienced – 87% received no inadequate, 2022, 74% of Americans experience civil legal problems and 92% receive no adequate services. Legal aid funding increased 33%. Delivery process went from 88 -92% failure. 15 months ago, at an LSC, Nicole Nelson, at Alaska Legal Aid Program, called out on failing process for something to be done. This perspective is what brought our attention. One phenomenon (%) is that people

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with legal problem do not perceive that their problem is legal or they don't have enough money, can't pay their bills, and a remarkable amount of people believe, God has proved that I believe to prevail in hardship. This LSC data provides that this gap is not known to be a legal issue. Question is, "How do we provide legal help to those that believe this." Answers, "Put a website, title us legal aid, just the center, but nobody finds it." These two perspectives helped develop the proposal for NM Portal.

Groups' vision:

What is portal, what does it do, what it looks like, how does it function basically generates artificial intelligence for legal information. Unlike world wide web it only goes to NM Cloud or tribal cloud, sources that have information system. Accessible in multiple ways via phone/desktop, with a series of imageries/language reciprocity (Spanish/Navajo)/capabilities, and with some limitations. We can make people aware of it through trusted intermediaries who are trusted and ask for help in these areas. This is using artificial intelligence to generate legal information. Doesn't go to a whole cloud but sources specific only to those areas.

1st cohort of trusted intermediaries can be NM libraries as they can direct to Self-Help Centers, access forms and for assistance through the portal. There would be five (5) workgroups who would convene in October as self-assembled teams for structural issues, trusted intermediaries, referral process, tribal interference and for evaluation; meeting monthly/develop data. Membership population should be broad; representing different sectors such as education, library, faith based, legal, medical, media, social service, non-profit, philographic, and from sector with robust engagement of high level of participation

Capabilities of what portal can do; utilizes its search capability to search if they have a legal problem. Particularly also in other languages such as Spanish/Navajo, which are languages used here in NM. Stats show that 50% of the population nationwide do not have legal representation while for New Mexico's population this is 80%, with no representation, of which most involve civil/family matters.

This will be a publicly accessible website and will accept information, verbally/via text. We have set-up the portal as a whole so its available to trusted intermediaries and community providers to identify what the legal problem is, ex. social workers/local priests (community service providers to whom individuals turn to for problems). These examples are modeled in San Francisco through social workers, operating for 9 yrs., who are currently using this type of portal. This program provides resources of resource providers, state courts, local self-help centers. The initial information will be anonymous, with first question being, "what county in NM." An example of this comes from Boston and Summit University of Law there is a free AI legal service provided by attorneys which inquiries about location/spot and asks user if they wish to id their location/spot for attorney to assist. This query function uses general AI, and can also be used here in NM. As explained at previous meeting, we can use a rep in general AI which provide us with the language/statements that would identify the legal area of law which the user requests.

The second question that the portal would ask would be, "do you want to know if your eligible for free legal services." This is where the screening process begins and where the user id's more information at the time such as age, gender and/or income. AI will be trained on matching up the screening criteria and the id of the legal provider who may handle the situation. Once a match is made the AI portal will respond and confirm the

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referral that can be made, requesting more information. This will also allow the information to be sent to the providers as they need it. It sends it in different formats to multiple recipients, provider then receives cases that they choose to take or not. This is not in lieu of provider intake process. This is in addition to the intake process. Portal will capture when a referral is selected or when there needs to be further searching to assist the caller. It will also provide an option for selection of private lawyer in order to filter out to self-help resources.

Reference to call center and stats given to Lisa G. about call center calls were 100,000 in the last year. This reference shows that a portal would not be a wrong door but at very list provide information to people and also those who may not know they have a legal issue/or what type of case they may have. It is recommended that there be a pod of networks, which are already providing assistance, including tribal interference team for tribal law resources and State of NM Dept. of Indian Affairs. There may not be a single website with working links to all these types of networks. Currently there is a website with information to recreational licenses but not one to assist for legal assistance in this area; 7 of 23 tribes had online presence with a few resources but most links are not working. One of the tribal court members has been conducting an analysis of this plan and voiced an interest in wanting to be a part of this. Given this information there is phase proposal for future discussion.

Mentions:

Rudy Sanchez at Legal Aid - “yellow tab” study by foundation and will later be shared.

Referral numbers and data is being analyzed

Trusted intermediaries; Libraries have inquired about portal

ECO - University of NM and nationally adopted by CDC, used in cancer related area/project dental, all support networks.

Liability issues regarding trust. Came up with strategic plan.

Portal is entering “no wrong door”

John and Juan were thanked for their detailed work on this portal and in helping others understand.

Judge O’Connell – explains it is a process and we will take vote of commission in moving it to next phase of presenting it to the Supreme Court, who has the authority to make decisions such as approving it for legislation proposal/recommendations. This is many years and many months of work for the first internet portal grant that we received from national experts and portal experts so we can present it to Supreme Court on their thoughts and recommendations.

Discussion:

Patricia mentions/asks **2.05?** This is recommendation of years and months of work for this but understand that this is for proposal to Supreme Court. Juan points out report is very detailed and has pros and cons with details/options for success. Judge O’Connell will prepare a cover letter for getting recommendations of a deliberate body to supreme court for their recommendations. Emphasizes that there has not yet been any

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agreement for funding. Her job is for presenting report and recommendations to the Supreme Court but as an educated knowledge as a Chair as Access to Justice, she will not present to Supreme Court that all members have agreed. She clarifies that although John and Juan have helped us understand the benefits of this portal to CLS, there is more exploring of each provider and its benefit.

Opinions/Thoughts/Questions:

Pros and Cons about funding/time are a concern. Judge O’Connell supports all comments as “free speech” for all.

Question – Is 350,000 to maintain portal or, is that for one attorney or one contact paralegal to update the site?

Johns says as key things there has to be an EDI and a filed person, ongoing tracking for the AI and gen AI, through legal support. Updating would be supported by gen AI, for current law and statute, law help New Mexico, but a first person would have to do it to keep up data. Not ED, we only point out functions, staff, levels and responsibilities and that it is allocated to what is recommended for function.

Comment - State Bar may have already had a program which had an early 90s project that was working on something similar and had elaborated and focused on helping people identify their problems. AI is already an example in the medical field and it can also do great things for the legal sector.

John – there have been five vendor responses that this can be built with current information within 8-12 months. This is based on quotes.

Judge re-emphasizes that voting purpose is to present this report for consideration if they want to move forward in some way with internet portal.

Concerns –

This is too heavy for AI so do we move forward without AI portal. –Lawyer – generating AI will just get better and better so this is exciting that if it's good enough then the investment is good to assist clients. – there were five 5 representatives amongst 5 legal service providers with feedback. **Question – Recommendation** – how it would impact legal service providers and some are concerned about it but more discussion about funding would benefit but also mentions caution about AI. John if no on-going source/support then don't build it. To many experiences in other states and in NM of project with no commitment and no on-going support.

Judge O’Connell – recommends some time to give thought in order to present to Justice Bacon. A vote is not approving funding but has a need as a commission and task to put together a report as how an internet portal may go forward. Framework exists and budgets may be independent and Supreme Court may say anything based on their discovery and existence. Justice Bacon may see this as being tied to current initiatives/regulatory resource/research management/allocation. May be most beneficial to discuss this with Justice Bacon as how she wants this presented to Supreme Court, she is our liaison between us and Supreme Court. This is the beginning to have a report to present through the work of the stakeholder’s commission. This is the first concept and this is all the work to move forward. – Invites to read report addresses some of her concerns with pros/cons for possibilities with information for providers. At this point Judge needs Justice Bacon to guide on

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how to proceed. The report is a good foundation. Lisa – complimented John and Juan and mentioned survey results of team members because they have established an impressive model.

Item 7: Other Business

John shared that he received an article that will be published in the Texas A&M Law Review about the economics of legal practitioners living and working in rural areas, which was focused on South Carolina. There have been initiatives for law grads to work in those rural areas. South Dakota has been working for 10 years and had 24 lawyers placed; 8 have left. The study finds that lawyers in rural settings are not the same as providing legal services for low-income individuals. Lawyers in rural settings specialize in areas of law in which they can make a living. The law review suggested, among other things, more targeted areas for paying lawyers to sit at the courthouse to help self-represented litigants.

Item 8: Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m..