

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Item 1: Welcome, Introductions, Announcements, In Attendance:

Attendance:

Justice Shannon Bacon	*Lori Smith Thornton (ATJ Commission)
*Hon. Erin O’Connell (ATJ Chair; SJDC) – excused	*Lucy Sinkular (ATJ Commission)
Aaron Holloman (AOC)	Mary H. Smith
Aja Brooks (AOC)	*Mark Fidel (ATJ Commission)
Alison H. Block-Chavez (NM Law)	Marlee Miller (UNM Law School Student)
*Allison Freedman (ATJ Commission)	*Hon. Mercedes Murphy (ATJ Commission)
Alma Lerma (AOC)	Natalie Meyers (LREP)
Amy DiBello (NM State Library)	Rep. Pamela Herndon (NM Legislation)
Andoe Arathoon (NM Legal Aid)	Peggy Cadwell (AOC)
Bette Fleishman (Pegasus Law)	*Rebecca O’Gawa (ATJ Comm)
Caitlin Carcerano (SBNM)	Richard Spinello (SBNM)
Cheryl Thompson (Bernalillo County Metro. Court	*Scott Cameron (ATJ Commission)
*Doug Echols (ATJ Commission)	Sonya Bellafant (NM Legal Aid)
Gary Housepian (DRNM)	Sireesha Manne (NMCLP)
Heather Norfleet (Equal Access to Justice)	Stephanie Wilson (NM State Law Library)
Jacque Ring (NCSC)	Tabinda Ruiz (DNA Farmington)
Jennifer Bartlett (Greenberg Traurig)	Therese Yanan (Native Disability Law)
*Jennifer Salazar (ATJ Commission)	Teresa
John Greacen	Hon. Tom Stewart (6 th Judicial District Court)
Josh Butz (NCSC)	*Verily Taylor (ATJ Commission)
*Juan Abeyta (ATJ Commission)	Winter Torres (NM Eviction Prevention & Diversion)
Josh Pando (AOC)	Zac Addison (NM Legal Aid)
Kasey Daniel (MMH)	*Hon. Zachary Ives (ATJ Commission)
Laura Bassein (SBNM)	

Announcement

Judge O’Connell was unavailable. Quorum was verified.

Justice Bacon introduced and welcomed two new appointed members, Lori Smith Thornton and new 2026 State Bar President Elect, Lucy Sinkular. Three re-appointed commissioners for a second term were announced; Scott Cameron, Verily Taylor and Judge Mercedes Murphy.

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Item 2: Minutes Approved from November 14, 2025:

Commissioner Doug Echols moved to approve minutes. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Juan Abeyta, with no objections. The minutes are approved.

Item 3: Scribing & ADA Updates (Peggy Cadwell, State LAS ADA Coordinator, AOC):

Current updates will be available upon receipt of pending stats. Previous quarter stats show that numbers are moving along and that the program is doing well. New promotional items are being used to promote awareness to the public about services available. This information is being provided at legal fairs, through flyers and by sharing it with local agencies. Key tools and effective practices are those such as trainings provided to employees within the Judiciary. Future trainings will be available to employees with topics in program managing systems and legal information v. legal advice. This will expand services and will be helpful in training scribes.

Item 4: NCSC Kiosk Project Presentation (Josh Butz & Jacquie Ring, Court Consultants - NCSC):

Presentation: “New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts-Kiosk Study – National and Statewide Scan”

Funding for this project is provided by the NM State Bar Foundation Grant. The goal for this project is to know how kiosks can support and provide access in all communities including those who may lack digital resources. NCSC is a contractor to define court kiosk use, identify its use and how it can be utilized in NM. They will be doing a National and State scan to develop recommendations and best practices for NM. The National scan will be conducted to help shape the statewide factors and recommendations for NM. This will include a survey to help them find use and capabilities. The National lens will help provide recommendations for locations, community and non-profits, infrastructure and technology options and the types of accessible materials and functions. There were examples presented of the most current use/types of kiosks throughout various states.

The statewide scan will help with compiling and reviewing the existing kiosk and its functions in NM. Information will be gathered through a survey inquiry. New Mexico’s current kiosk variations in use are, “Clara” used for Language Access virtual assistance and community access stations within certain courts.

NCSC will provide recommendations from their analysis to the project team at AOC. JTech Judicial Kiosk Standards will be considered when providing current kiosk standards. This Kiosk study began in December of 2025 and is projected to be complete by August 2026 with a Final

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Report on recommendations. NCSC is currently in its gathering of information stage and is open to information on kiosk use by Project Team, AOC, JID, Access to Justice Commission, and any other participants that can be recommended.

Justice Bacon shared history of what originated the plan for a kiosk project during covid. A kiosk was placed in a Chapter House in Farmington. Currently there are no reports and updates are welcomed if anyone can provide information.

Item 5: Civil Legal Services Commission Update for 2026 (Mark Fidel, Chair, Civil Legal Services Commission):

FY27 begins on July 01, 2026 with a budget of nine (9) million, two hundred forty thousand dollars (240,000.00). Legal services are supported by the Finance Administration and this will be a challenging year for civil legal service providers because of federal administration impacts. We are approximately eight hundred thousand dollars (800,000.00) shy of this number because the administration requested a flat budget from various executive agencies. These eight hundred thousand dollars (800,000.00) are already allocated in the budget to its vendors and flat budgets do not have an automatic replacement. All providers are aware and given the impacts, we may be at eight (8) million three hundred thousand dollars (300,000.00) if the nine (9) million, two hundred forty thousand dollars (240,000.00) are not granted. Providers are actively working with legislators. Next RFP should be issued in April with responses due in May which will allow for an in-time fund distribution. Distribution is granted by percentages of available budget. Therefore, if 32% is granted it will be for the awarded time period of the available budget. The challenges of this type of distribution prevent for a new annual RFP requirement and also challenges the goal of yearly funding increases, which cover salaries.

Q & A's

Q. John G. - What is the level of funding of LSC, as discussed at the last meeting in regard to income for civil legal services?

A. Mark F. – It may be a five (5) million dollar impact to NM. Sonja – There is no confirmation yet but an anticipation of a bill provides for a 3% - 9% cut.

Q. J. Bacon – What are the projects that are funded?

A. Mark F. - NM Legal Services was created by statute with five (5) commissioners as voting members which request proposals through an RFP to determine money of what is provided to civil legal services like NM Legal Aid (portion) and Pegasus (significant amount). There are various legal services who can provide access to an attorney, based on income status eligibility

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

and that assist in areas of law for elders, children, immigration and general law issues. The commission itself is a funding mechanism for a number of organizations who have been awarded through an RFP yearly.

Q. J. Bacon – As a grant fund server the experience has been that entities get together and collaborate to leverage funds for multiple services, rather than singular, is this focus possible?

A. Mark – No, but it doesn't prevent entities from collaborating once funds are delivered. Funding received from the Legal Services Corporation does not prevent other entities from receiving funds. Funding helps those entities who are not receiving funds directly from civil legal services.

Juan A. – A flat budget cannot be generated but legislators can decide.

Sonja – All civil legal services work together with other smaller entities who assist those at the 200% poverty level.

Bettie F. – Everyone has a different area to cover and services are not duplicated. Agencies meet monthly to raise issues and discuss how they can support one another.

Item 6: Rural Justice Initiative Update (Aja Brooks, Rural Justice Coordinator, Administrative Office of the Courts):

The Rural Justice Initiative Program is a recruitment initiative which originated in 2022 when the Supreme Court convened a group of legal practitioners and created a committee from the 9th Judicial District (rural attorneys, college staff, other legal professionals) who recommended a program which would assist rural justice areas where there are no lawyers. The Program consists of four (4) components; Rural Judicial Clerkship, Rural Practice Externship, Rural Judicial Externship and Rural Practice Incubator. There are currently two of these components that are being worked on out at the 9th and 11th districts. One of them is the Rural Judicial Clerkship which is where a law student will clerk for a Judge for up to two years. The second one that is currently being worked on is the Rural Judicial Externships where law students who have completed their first year of law school will have the opportunity to do their externship in a rural area. There are 2 vacant positions for this externship out in Farmington/Gallup. The program has received 14 applications from UNM Law School students but is also open to students attending other law schools. Positions are still open and available on the NM Courts career website. The selected candidates will be placed for 10 weeks in a rural area with Judges. Another component is that Judges will expose the clerk/extern to legal activities; pro bono legal fairs, network meetings to foster relationships with people and the community in the rural area. The goal is that the clerk/extern can go back to that community once they are attorneys. This

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

then allows for the other component of Rural Practice Incubator which is for attorneys who go back to a rural area to start a practice for a given amount of time and will receive a stipend. The other component which provides opportunities for practice is the Rural Practice Externship which is for students that have completed their second year of law school. This externship will allow them the opportunity to partner up with a law firm and/or public defender in that community. These are pipe line practices.

In addition, Rural Justice Initiative is now in the process of expanding to the 5th, 6th and the 12th District Courts. The challenges that this program is facing is that it is not generally funded, as it is a one-time funding source and there may be other competitive salaries.

Item 7: NM Courts HelpLine Update (Lisa Giandomenico, Attorney Senior, Administrative Office of the Courts):

The NM HelpLine is a robust call center that is accessible for people to find resources and understand how to navigate and get legal information from the courts in a more accessible way. There was a soft launch on February 02, 2026 which was introduced to the entire judiciary and its number was provided on the NM courts homepage through the self-help option. There are many people who collaborated and helped review, provided input on training guides and/or assisted with trainings that were provided to staff; AOC Legal Department, Las Cruces Call Center Management Team, multiple civil legal service agencies like DV Coalition, Modest Means HelpLine, LREP, NM Legal Aid, Pegasus, NM Immigration Law Center and ATJ Commissioners (all names were mentioned).

There were 15 different topics, including DV informed assistance by Mary Allen from DV Coalition. Currently there are four (4) temporary positions who will learn these 15 most common legal topics. The topic on Immigration is still not in place but we are arranging for a Spring training that will teach us about tool kits from the Immigration Law Center. Our goal is to add more topics such as Immigration and Probate. Currently the call center assists with citations and are now training on these new topics. Resources are provided to callers such as Modest Means and LREP.

To expand outreach, there is an Outreach Campaign in the process so the public can learn about it. Justice Bacon thanked Lisa for all her hard work and putting this project to the works from the idea/vision that there will be help available to all counties in NM. The NM HelpLine may help streamline calls to other legal service agencies as it is most appropriate. All legal service providers are invited to reach out and participate by providing information about their services/resource available for future training topics.

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Item 8: ATJ 2026 Discussion:

Continued Work

There has been continuous work through the Scribing Program, Rural Justice Initiative, NM HelpLine and the Portal Project which will be housed at the NM State Bar foundation, who has been helping move this project forward.

Upcoming conversations

Allied Justice Workers and Paraprofessionals is an upcoming conversation which will help other legal professionals with access to justice work.

Open discussion on, “Other things that commission wants to be informed about:”

To Do List - Lisa will keep a to-do list on interested topics.

Funding Changes - John G. shared that funding changes are now in effect and some will go in effect at the end of 2026 for SNAP and Medicaid benefits. This is a critical access to justice need as thousands will be affected who currently receive SNAP/Medicaid benefits. We may see these changes in January 2027 and there will be a great need for educational purposes such as helping the public understand how to fill out their forms. People may not be able to navigate the systems which will require more education/help especially on issues that may come up for rural communities. More information can be found on the ACA website and can be a good source to educate people. Process and requirements can become unclear to the public, therefore providing education and awareness is important in order to help people understand how to navigate the system. This is anticipated knowing from previous reports that people can lose their benefits from not understanding how to feel out their applications.

Housing - Winter T. shared that there is a pre-liminary injunction requiring HUD to continue with the plan which was implemented by the previous administration. NM receives twenty (20) Million dollars of which the majority of it goes to the unhoused population. Although there are other forms of funding opportunity for the unhoused population, this may be taken away. Currently NM and other states are part of an appeals process in this matter.

Challenges - J. Bacon invites the group to think collectively on solutions that can bring conversations which can build productive and supportive efforts that will work to help underserved populations.

Annual Report - Juan A. recommends an Annual Report that will show the good work, collaboration and greater awareness of what commission has undertaken and its challenges. This

Meeting Minutes
ATJ Commission Meeting, January 09, 2026
ATJ Hybrid, In-Person (with video appearance option)

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

12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

can be shared with the public, legislators and other service agencies that may create partnerships, which may help with challenges.

Collaborations - J. Salazar recommends exploring collaboration opportunities with law school. These options have begun to be explored. Lisa attended a clinic event and has a list of interested law students who may be interested in assisting with access to justice. On February 11, 2026, Aja presented the Rural Justice Initiative to Law School staff/students.

Allied Professional Program - Please contact Aja if interested.

Item 9: Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.