

NCAJ National Center for Access to Justice

NCAJ's Mission:

The National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) is working to bring rigorous, principled research and analysis to the task of advancing progress toward a fair legal system, and in so doing, to achieve a just society.

What is Access to Justice?

Access to Justice is the right to be heard and to obtain a fair result under the law. Everyone deserves it, some have much more of it than others, and it is unavailable to millions even for basic human needs such as keeping a home, holding a family together, protecting income and savings, and securing food, health, safety and basic liberty. Bad actors and institutional obstacles put civil justice out of reach for people unaware of their rights, unable to secure legal aid, and/or unable to overcome barriers of exclusion and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability and basic poverty. Access to Justice is compromised in criminal cases by these and other factors. Access to Justice is racial justice. We need Access to Justice, not only for people in crisis, but also because our society depends on it.

The Justice Index:

Our flagship project at NCAJ is the [Justice Index](#), the [award-winning](#) online resource we created that uses data to improve the legal system by ranking the 50 states on best policies for Access to Justice. With 120 indicators and 5000 findings, the *Justice Index* makes it easy to understand how the states compare across five areas of law and policy that determine fairness in the courts: i) attorney access, ii) language access, iii) disability access, iv self-help access, and v) relief from excessive fines and fees. Since its founding in 2014, the *Justice Index's* findings and rankings have promoted justice system reform, public understanding of the legal system, and cutting edge research. The *Justice Index* offers a rare objective measure of whether the laws that help secure Access to Justice are sufficient, and whether they are sufficiently in place across the country.

NCAJ's Projects in 2023-2024:

In 2023-2024, NCAJ is carrying out four projects: i) We are using the [Justice Index](#) to help drive legal system reform in all the states; ii) We are using the [Fines and Fees Index](#) to support the movement to reverse state policies that extract excessive court fines and fees from those least able to afford them; iii) We are building out a new *Debt Claims Litigation Index* through a 50 state research initiative with seven major law firms (serving pro bono) to highlight state laws that are needed to fix the modern human and policy disaster in which up to 90% of consumer debt lawsuits end in default; and iv) We are advancing our [Legal Empowerment Project](#) to enable power to rely on frontline justice workers – often social workers, librarians and other trained professionals – who would help champion their rights but who are stymied in their efforts by the broad reach of state criminal laws that routinely penalize unauthorized practice of law.

NCAJ's Relationship with Fordham Law School:

NCAJ is a free-standing nonprofit (with a 10 person Board) that makes its home at Fordham Law School in New York City. NCAJ's executive director, David Udell, also co-chairs Fordham Law's [Access to Justice Initiative](#) with Dean Matthew Diller; Senior Counsel of Latham & Watkins (former New York State Chief Judge) Jonathan Lippman; and Law Professor Norrinda Brown. NCAJ's Legal & Policy Director is Lauren Jones and its Senior Counsel and Director of the Justice Index Project is Jamie Gamble. In addition to projects with law students, allied organizations, law firms, scholars, and communities, NCAJ's staff co-teach the A2J Seminar at Fordham Law.