

NCAJ National Center for Access to Justice

Our Mission:

Every year, millions of Americans contend with legal problems during critical—and often crisis—moments in their lives. People have been arrested. Parents face removal of their children. Families confront eviction, bankruptcy, and crippling debt. Often, people face strong opponents and powerful institutions alone. For many, racial injustice, cost, complexity, fear, unequal power, and lack of knowledge place the law’s protections out of reach.

The National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to ensure that everyone—no matter their race, the language they speak, where they live, how much money they have, or whether they have a disability—has a meaningful opportunity to be heard, assert their rights, and obtain the law’s protection. Using data, research and policy analysis, NCAJ exposes how the legal system all too often fails to deliver the equal justice it promises. It then uses those findings to develop and drive policy solutions to these complex, pressing problems.

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 benchmarks and 5,000 findings, the Justice Index makes it easy to understand how the states compare across six areas of law and practice that determine fairness in the courts: i) attorney access, ii) language access, iii) disability access, iv) self-help access, v) court-imposed fines and fees, and vi) consumer debt litigation. Since its founding in 2014, the Justice Index’s findings and rankings have promoted legal system reform, the accountability of legal institutions, and cutting-edge research. The Justice Index offers a rare 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 2024:

In 2024, NCAJ is pursuing these projects: i) the [Justice Index](#), supporting access to justice policy improvements in all the states; ii) the [Fines and Fees Index](#), supporting changes in state laws and practices that currently extract excessive court fines and fees from those least able to afford them; iii) the [Consumer Debt Litigation Index](#), supporting changes to increase fairness to consumer debt litigation, where, in some states, up to 70% of lawsuits end in default judgments and many people do not find out they have been sued until their wages are garnished; and iv) the [Legal Empowerment Project](#), supporting changes to enable frontline justice workers – often social workers, librarians and other professionals – to help people address legal needs where “unauthorized practice of law” rules criminalize even basic forms of legal advice and assistance provided by anyone other than lawyers.

NCAJ’s Relationship with Fordham Law School:

NCAJ is a nonprofit (with a 12-person [Board](#)) that makes its home at Fordham Law School in New York City. NCAJ’s executive director, David Udell, co-chairs Fordham Law’s [Access to Justice Initiative](#) with Professor (former Dean) Matthew Diller; Senior Counsel of Latham & Watkins (former New York State Chief Judge) Jonathan Lippman; and Associate Dean for Experiential Learning and Director of Clinical Programs Norrinda Brown. NCAJ’s Legal & Policy Director is Lauren Jones and its two Senior Counsel, serving pro bono, are Jamie Gamble and Judy Mogul. In addition to carrying out projects with law students and faculty, NCAJ’s staff co-teach the Access to Justice Seminar. [8/2024]