

Legislators commend Access to Justice Commission for work to help the poor

March 2, 2016

The Mississippi House of Representatives on Tuesday, March 1, recognized the Access to Justice Commission for a decade of work to improve poor people's access to the civil justice system.

Members of the Commission were in the House gallery when House Concurrent Resolution 23 was read on the House floor. The concurrent resolution was adopted by the House on Feb. 8, and by the Senate on Feb. 11. Rep. David Baria of Bay St. Louis, a Commission member, introduced the resolution. HCR 23 is at this link: <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2016/pdf/HC/HC0023SG.pdf>.

Commission Executive Director Tiffany Graves said, "We are so pleased to have received the recognition from the Legislature for the work we've done over the past 10 years to expand access to civil legal services to the state's disadvantaged citizens. Our work continues, but the support we've received today will give us renewed confidence and energy to face what lies ahead."

Commission Co-Chair Rodger Wilder of Gulfport said, "I am extremely pleased with the progress the Commission has made over this last year."



During the past year, numerous free legal clinics have provided assistance to people seeking help with family law matters and expungements. The number of legal clinics has increased.

An online legal help site is being developed and is expected to begin operation April 1, said Gayla Carpenter-Sanders, executive director and general counsel of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project. MVLP will host the site, www.mslegalhelp.org. MVLP and the Access to Justice Commission are working to recruit attorneys to respond to questions via the online legal help site. Attorney volunteers will answer questions by e-mail for low-income people who post inquiries privately. Access to the site will be available only to low-income people.

The online legal help site is based on a similar system in Tennessee, Graves said. "It has been a tremendous tool there, and we hope that it can be successful in Mississippi."

The Access to Justice Commission will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a program scheduled for Aug. 25 in Jackson. The Commission was created by the Mississippi Supreme Court in June 2006 to develop a unified strategy to improve poor people's access to the civil courts. The Commission is tasked to investigate the need for civil legal services to the poor in Mississippi, and to evaluate, develop and recommend policies, programs and initiatives which will assist the judiciary in meeting the civil legal services needs of the poor.

For more information, contact Executive Director Tiffany Graves at 601-960-9581 or visit the Access to Justice Commission website at <http://www.msatjc.org/>.