

Legal help when you're out of luck

Written by By Beth Blakeman Associate Editor
Friday, 17 July 2020 03:08

New Mexico

Civil Legal Services Commission

Disburses funds from the New Mexico Civil Legal Services Fund to non-profit agencies who offer a "full range of free legal services to... low-income persons living in New Mexico." The NML Civil Legal Services Commission is guided by the State Plan of the New Mexico Supreme Court's Commission on Access to Justice.



Civil Legal Services Providers

The civil legal services providers funded by the New Mexico Civil Legal Services Commission help low-income New Mexicans meet basic human needs such as health, safety, education, housing, child custody and financial stability.

Equal justice under the law is not merely a caption on the façade of the Supreme Court building

Justice Lewis Powell, Jr.

General

New Mexico Legal Aid

Helps low-income families secure and maintain public benefits, affordable housing, safety for domestic violence victims and their children and protection from consumer fraud. Services include a statewide legal helpline, legal representation, outreach, education, training, and pro se clinics.

Service Area: Statewide

Tel.: 866-416-1922

Website: newmexicolegalaid.org

Children & Youth

Pegasus Legal Services for Children

Services to at-risk children & youth including guardianship, homelessness, education, & teen parents.

Service Area: Statewide

Tel.: 505-244-1101

Website: pegasuslaw.org

Disabilities

Disability Rights New Mexico

Individual advocacy for persons with disabilities to resolve disability rights problems; advocacy and training to promote, protect and expand the rights of persons with disabilities.

Service Area: Statewide

Tel.: 505-256-3100

Website: drnm.org

Homeowners

United South Broadway Fair Lending Center

Direct legal representation and educational workshops for homeowners at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure. Consumer education and advocacy on fair housing and fair lending issues.

Service Area: Statewide

Tel.: 505-764-8867

Website: unitedsouthbroadway.org

Immigrants

Catholic Charities

1. Center for Immigration and Citizenship Legal Assistance. Low cost immigration legal services, including family-based petitions, DACA, and citizenship. Phone: 505-724-4600

2. VAWA Immigration Project: free representation for immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child sexual abuse.

Phone: 505-724-4649

Service Area: Albuquerque metro

Website: ccasfmm.org

NM Immigrant Law Center

Legal assistance to asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, and low-income immigrants facing separation due to deportation.

Service Area: Statewide

Website: nmilc.org

A New Mexico judge knows what to do

When Supreme Court Justice Shannon Bacon was a practicing lawyer, she learned a lot about people who found themselves homeless and the problems they faced.

Before Bacon was on the New Mexico Supreme Court she served as a District Court Judge and before that as a practicing lawyer, who at one point worked at Cuidando Los Ninos in

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Albuquerque. Her focus at that time was on homeless youth.

In her efforts to champion the Access to Justice Commission, Bacon told the *Gallup Sun* July 8 about the many civil legal issues people at or below the poverty line can find themselves facing: things like eviction, employment problems, child custody, divorce, government benefit difficulties—all of them legal issues that have nothing to do with a crime.

Bacon said basic human needs and human rights fall into that civil arena where there is no right to a lawyer. She added that people know they are entitled to a lawyer in a criminal case. But “most people assume that the same is true for a civil case and it is not. There is no right to a lawyer in a civil proceeding,” she emphasized.

Those early years working for non-profits focused on homeless youth created a warm spot in her heart when it came to the Access to Justice Commission. “That’s what sparked the passion for me personally,” she said. “It fit my point of view that we should be helping people.”

She told the story of a mother escaping an abusive relationship who took the children with her and suddenly found out that she not only needed to care for them, but also had to provide for her family.

“Now with COVID-19, those kinds of stories are far too numerous to count,” Bacon said. “Businesses have shut down. You lose your income and it has a cascading effect on everything in your life. That often leads to legal problems ... You can’t pay rent, get child support, pay bills. You end up in the legal system ... and you can’t afford a lawyer.”

Bacon has been the spokesperson for the Access to Justice Commission for about ten years and wants people to know they don’t have to ignore their legal problems. They can reach out and ask for help.

With the pandemic, she and the commission are getting ready for a wave of civil legal issues.

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Bacon says the most familiar place people can go for such services is Legal Aid. Another is DNA People's Legal Services, which helps people in Window Rock, Ariz., and Shiprock and Farmington, N.M.

Bacon told the *Sun* she plans to apply the lessons from the economic downturn of ten years ago to today.

She said people facing civil legal issues can avail themselves of help right away by calling 833-LGL-HELP. The number is a phone line clearing house to point people with civil legal issues in the right direction.

It is operational throughout the state of New Mexico, and even when it is not staffed, you can leave a message there 24 hours a day, seven days a week for a call back.

By Beth Blakeman
Associate Editor