



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE – OFFICE FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

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“Equal justice is a fundamental promise of American society – but for too many low-income Americans with critical legal needs, that promise goes unfulfilled. At the Department of Justice, we are committed to ensuring that every citizen receives the representation and the consideration that they deserve, regardless of their means. The Constitution – and our national conscience – demands nothing less.”

Attorney General Loretta Lynch

OVERVIEW OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since its launch in 2010, the Office for Access to Justice (ATJ) has served as the catalyst within the Department of Justice to marshal the power and resources of the Federal Government to secure fair outcomes for all in the justice system. ATJ works within the Department of Justice, across federal agencies, and with international, state, local, and tribal justice system stakeholders to increase access to counsel and legal assistance, and to improve the justice system that serves people who are unable to afford lawyers.

ATJ has accomplished much in this short time, including:

- **Developing a Robust Statement of Interest Practice:** As part of its efforts toward protecting the constitutional guarantee to effective assistance of counsel and eliminating the criminalization of the poor, ATJ in partnership with the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division (CRT), has filed a [series of Statements of Interest and amicus briefs](#).
- **Launching & Staffing the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable:** Originally launched and staffed by ATJ as the Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable in 2012, this interagency collaboration works to raise federal agencies’ awareness of how civil legal aid can help advance a wide range of federal objectives including improved access to health and housing, education and employment, family stability and community well-being. In recognition of this work and on the eve of the historic United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, on September 24, 2015, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum formally establishing the [White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable \(WH-LAIR\)](#) to continue and further this work.
- **Fighting the Criminalization of Poverty:** When people are incarcerated simply because they are poor, they often lose their jobs, may lose their housing, or be forced to abandon their education. They and their families often sink deeper into poverty. ATJ has made it a priority to ensure that in our criminal justice system all people receive the equal protection of the law, regardless of their money or their means. In March 2016, ATJ and the Civil Rights Division issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to provide greater clarity to state and local courts regarding their legal obligations with respect to the enforcement of court fines and fees.
- **Serving as the Central Authority on Access to Justice for the US Government:** Over the last decade, activity around access to justice has taken root in a variety of international forums, such as the Open Government Partnership, the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Organization of American States. ATJ represents the United States Government in [many of these efforts](#).