Administrative Office of the Courts

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Access to civil legal resources improved through judicial partnership with State Library

SANTA FE – Libraries are helping to connect New Mexicans with resources on civil legal matters through a partnership between the State Library and the Commission on Access to Justice.

The State Library's website offers information about civil legal topics and programs that provide legal services to low-and-moderate income people without an attorney. Notices are sent to libraries across New Mexico about online community legal webinars, such as one in July to help people seeking wildfire assistance and another in September on services for individuals with disabilities.

"Libraries have long served as a trusted clearinghouse for information. Thanks to this partnership, the State Library and about 100 libraries across New Mexico can help guide people to legal resources on issues ranging from consumer debt, evictions and foreclosures to child custody, kinship guardianship and veterans benefits," said Chief Justice C. Shannon Bacon, a member of the commission.

"Other than calling a lawyer, pretty much all of us don't have an idea where to go if we have a legal problem. Libraries can help. It is a perfect fit. You can learn where to go for resources and assistance," said Lori Smith Thornton, Chief of Public Services at the State Library.

The Supreme Court established the Access to Justice Commission nearly twenty years ago as an independent statewide organization that focuses on improving civil legal assistance for New Mexicans.

"The lack of access to legal resources is really severe in a lot of smaller communities and rural areas, where there may be few or no available attorneys. Libraries serve as one avenue into these communities," said Juan Abeyta, who serves on the commission's Community Engagement and Integration Team, which recruited the State Library to help fill the gap in civil justice services

for New Mexicans. “If we can get to the places people are going to show up, we hopefully get information to them that might be beneficial when they are struggling with a legal issue.”

“This is a great partnership,” said Second Judicial District Court Judge Erin O’Connell, co-chair of the Access to Justice Commission. “We are working to expand the availability of civil legal resources throughout New Mexico and this collaboration with our State Libraries is another positive step in this direction.”

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