

Justice Action Group

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January 2007

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to provide an update on the Statewide Access to Justice Planning Initiative recently undertaken by the Justice Action Group (JAG). As we begin the new year, I remain excited about the progress that is being made and the level of commitment and enthusiasm of those participating in the process. Without their involvement and dedication, this planning process would not be possible, and I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all of them.

People from all areas of the State and from outside as well as inside the legal community have been considering six broad issue areas that emerged out of the retreat. These groups have focused on: Reducing the Need for Crisis Intervention; Assuring a Consumer Friendly System; Assisting Self-Represented Litigants; Utilizing Lawyers to Enhance Access to Justice; Expanding Resources; Sustaining and Assuring Quality; and Sustaining and Promoting Leadership for Justice.

During the past several months, it has been very interesting to see the issues/strategies that are emerging from these groups. For example, one group is looking at the issue of homelessness to develop strategies that can be used to solve problems “upstream” before they require interaction with the legal system. Another group is developing proposals for court based self-help centers for self-represented litigants and for making the system more user friendly for everyone. Following the lead of the ABA, another group is considering a right to counsel in civil proceedings where basic human needs are at stake. Groups are also looking at: developing Maine’s own principles for a statewide system for providing legal services; assuring innovative ways to bring more resources into the system, whether through additional funding from both the private and public sector, or better and more efficient uses of *pro bono* resources; and, assuring that both in and out of the legal community, Maine has the leaders to support and guide these and future efforts so that access to justice becomes a reality for all Maine people.

We hope to have a final plan ready for presentation to JAG early this summer. Lots of important work remains to be done before then and if you would like to become involved in the planning process, please do not hesitate to contact me or JAG’s Executive Coordinator, Sally Sutton.

More detailed information about the process is available on the JAG website: www.mbf.org/justice.htm.

With all best wishes,



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