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Equal Justice For All

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September 13, 2002

Robert D. Gross
Senior Program Counsel/State Planning
Legal Services Corporation
750 1st St., N.E. 11th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20002-4250

Re: Arkansas Legal Services' Response to Program Letter 2000-7

Dear Bob:

Enclosed please find the Arkansas Legal Services' Response to Program Letter 2000-7.

By e-mail notification dated February 22, 2002, Barbara Donnelly Gibson confirmed that LSC had granted an extension for filing the Arkansas self-evaluation report to September 15, 2002. I have submitted this report electronically to your e-mail address as of this date, September 13, 2002. A hard copy will follow by Federal Express delivery. I am submitting this report to your attention, because Barbara is no longer with LSC.

If you need any additional information, please contact me.

Yours truly,

Jean Turner Carter
Executive Director

jtc

cc: Mona Teague

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ARKANSAS LEGAL SERVICES' RESPONSE TO PROGRAM LETTER 2000-7

To what extent has a comprehensive, integrated and client-centered legal services delivery system been achieved in Arkansas?

1) What are the important issues that impact upon low-income people within your state? How is your state responding to these issues?

The two programs commissioned the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Center for Research and Policy to conduct the 2002 Civil Legal Needs Assessment of Low Income Households in Arkansas. This study has provided us with solid information that can be used to better allocate resources and develop priorities in the new integrated system.

Housing: According to the Arkansas Low Income Housing Coalition, more than 239,000 Arkansas households face housing problems. They vary from cost overburden and overcrowding to substandard physical conditions. More than 615,000 Arkansans feel this impact, which is over 25% of the State's population.

To combat the problem, the Legal Services programs have formed an Emerging Poverty Law Issues Task Force to address this issue with possible solutions. Due to the demand for housing-related services in the Delta, we have been able to increase access to affordable housing for many clients through home buyer assistance classes, credit counseling and home maintenance workshops.

Domestic Violence: Another problem facing low-income people in Arkansas is domestic abuse. Two years ago, Arkansas moved from the country's twelfth highest to the third highest in the rate of women murdered by men. Between 1996 and 1999 in Arkansas, male perpetrators murdered over one hundred and thirty women. Over half of those cases constituted spousal abuse.

Last year 7,175 victims of domestic violence received services through legal aid in Arkansas. Shelter was provided to 2,812 individuals, and 6,645 were given emergency legal assistance. Arkansas has 25 domestic violence shelters. Arkansas Legal Services has contributed by establishing a Family Law Task Force to tackle the root of the problem by developing plausible solutions, and has teamed up with Advocates for Battered Women (ABA) to create the Domestic Violence Project. Legal Aid of Arkansas has created a partnership through Memorandums of Understanding with fifteen shelters, victims' assistance, and prosecuting attorneys offices in an effort to provide a holistic approach to this problem. The Circuit Court Clerks offices in several counties have also been engaged in this effort. Additionally, a Pro Se Task Force was created to empower clients with the knowledge needed to address these situations. Plans are

underway to identify areas of the State receptive to pro se litigants and conduct divorce clinics in those areas.

Elderly: Furthermore, legal problems of the elderly have become an important issue. Nursing home abuse and neglect is a serious concern facing our elderly. According to the Office of the Attorney General, Arkansas tied for 5th in the nation in the number of nursing home employees convicted of criminal charges for abusing nursing home residents who are no longer able to protect themselves.

Other Substantive Issues: Other problems that plague our low-income population are custody/visitation, bankruptcy, public benefits (including denials of income support and inadequate access to healthcare), debt, child support, utility issues, consumer law, school discipline cases, individual rights (especially for children, disabled, terminally ill and the elderly), and problems arising out of emergency circumstances (dealing with income, health, safety or access to shelter).

Task forces in such areas as Helpline/Pro Se, Emerging Poverty Law Issues and Pro Bono are working on many of these issues. Moreover, numerous trainings have been held regarding, bankruptcy, social security, and SSI issues. Legal Aid of Arkansas receives substantial grant money from the Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office; Victims of Crime Act money administered through to the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration; a Community Care Foundation Grant; and a grant from one local United Way to combat the domestic abuse problem in sixteen counties, and has applied for funding to expand this project to an even wider service area. Trainings have been held with the local shelters and other members of the domestic violence service community, including Court Administration staff and members of the Judiciary, to enhance education and the exchange of information about concerning this continuing problem.

Access to Information: Community outreach and legal education have been conducted in the form of newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, manuals, videos, seminars, workshops, legal clinics, community involvement and the development of referral systems. The programs have provided outreach including community legal education forums at various senior centers, branch offices, churches and community organizations. Specifically, the programs have built upon the variety of community legal education efforts, which have been accomplished during the past 36 years. A high priority will be the continuation of forums within the aging network and a consumer debt clinic utilizing pro bono attorneys. Clinics are currently planned for this fall in the Arkansas Delta dealing with the topics of Black Land Loss and Motor Vehicles. Additionally, other topics such as protecting legal rights, guardianship and available alternatives will be explored.

2) **What are the components of the delivery system?**

Two non-profit legal services programs funded by LSC work together to provide free civil legal assistance to low-income residents throughout Arkansas. To help us provide this assistance, the delivery system consists of the statewide Helpline, statewide website, and one-on-one representation.

The statewide Helpline is designed to assist our clients with problems they may have. Clearly, the Helpline makes the intake process more efficient and effective. When a client calls in, we are able to determine immediately if the client's problem is one that we handle. Also, we are capable of instantaneously establishing the client's eligibility and we can resolve what kinds of services the client needs, whether it be advice or representation. The goal has been to provide some form of advice, referral, or brief service to every qualified applicant who accesses the HelpLine. The Programs then use the priorities as set by their board of directors to determine which cases are candidates for extended service representation. Clients are now getting the same level of service throughout the State, regardless of where their call may originate. It provides a level playing field for all residents of Arkansas who try to access services.

Another delivery component, the statewide website, has been a tremendous aid for our clients. The site, which can be accessed at www.arlegalservices.org, consists of an office location list, information about the HelpLine, FAQs, research links, and self-help forms. These forms cover many topics including child support, consumer and bankruptcy issues, and family problems. Our site also contains information regarding pro bono volunteerism, donations, briefs, and success stories. Many questions a client might have can be answered via the website.

Both of the programs have their own websites which supplement and compliment the statewide website. The web site for Legal Aid of Arkansas can be accessed at arlegalaid.org while the web site for the Center for Arkansas Legal Services is accessible at arkansaslegalservices.org.

As previously mentioned, a third component are our community legal education and outreach efforts, which provide valuable information to our clients that they probably would not receive on their own. By offering this type of assistance, low-income persons can use the knowledge they have obtained to improve their situations.

The core component of the delivery system is, of course, the full-time, dedicated staff of the two LSC-funded programs. Together, the state system employs 48 lawyers and 18 paralegals, supported by 44 other professional staff members, providing daily advice, brief services and extended representation to more than 11,695 clients in 2001.

A fifth component is still in development. Currently, the state does not have any means of handling restricted cases, but the state is working on correcting this problem through the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission.

Finally, the sixth component of our statewide delivery system is the pro bono services of hundreds of private lawyers, organized through the private attorney involvement efforts of each of the LSC-funded programs, AVLE and both state and local bar associations.

Even though our technological capacity has tremendously improved, one-on-one representation is still the backbone of Legal Services' delivery system. If a client's legal problems necessitate representation, our capable staff and pro bono attorneys can meet the client's needs.

3) **Has this system created mechanisms to assess its performance in relationship to commonly accepted external guides such as the ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor, the LSC Performance Criteria or some other set of objective criteria? What is the protocol for undertaking system performance review and when was a review last undertaken?**

Although no prescribed mechanisms have been fashioned for the purpose of measuring performance internally, the last performance review conducted by LSC in May 2001 for the Center. Legal Aid of Arkansas contacted LSC soon after the merger and requested technical assistance. A team of four people from the Compliance Office spent a week in Arkansas in June, which culminated in a program wide training for staff. This visit proved very valuable in establishing standards and criteria for program operations and performance. This visit was followed up in August by another visit, this time from the Program Performance Office. A team of three LSC staff members again spent a week in Arkansas, reviewing the service delivery system and assessing performance, then providing valuable feedback. In November of 2001, in anticipation of the mergers, the American Bar Association provided a team of experts to visit Arkansas to evaluate and consult with staff about the pro bono delivery system. Legal Aid of Arkansas has created and published comprehensive manuals and policies dealing with HelpLine operations, case acceptance procedures, case management system use, and technology use. Most of the past year has been spent on the program mergers, which continue to monopolize much of the programs' time. Future endeavors include developing a Manual of Performance Standards and a system where the two programs can evaluate each other.

3) **Does your statewide system work to ensure the availability of equitable legal assistance capacities to clients – regardless of who the clients are, where they reside or the languages they speak? How does your system ensure that clients have equitable access to necessary assistance including self-help, legal education, advice, brief service, and representation in all relevant forms?**

Please describe what steps you anticipate taking to ensure equitable access in the coming years.

Equal access for all potential clients is enforced through the state's branch offices, website and Helpline. With the aim of the website being to inform, clients are offered important information through our pro se materials. In addition, the statewide Helpline and virtual law offices, provided for by the Technology Initiative Grant, are designed to reach prospective clients who may not have the luxury of having a legal services office in their area. The Helpline provides several services to clients including advice, brief service, and referrals. Also, we have local branch offices located in the rural areas of Arkansas, which is mostly a rural state.

Furthermore, both legal services programs either employ a multilingual staff member or have interpreters available for serving clients who speak other languages. Multiple language versions of printed materials on various legal topics are available in legal services offices as well. To ensure equitable access in the future, legal services plans to work with the Arkansas Bar Association and the judiciary to establish an Arkansas Access to Justice Commission which will guide the further development of a comprehensive, integrated, client-centered statewide delivery system.

The programs utilize portable TDD machines to assure easy access to the HelpLine for the hearing impaired, and have contracts with interpreters for the deaf to assist with in person intake and representation.

4) **How does the legal service delivery system employ technology to provide increased access and enhanced services to clients throughout the state? What technological initiatives are currently underway and how will they support the integrated statewide delivery system?**

The technology-led portions of our delivery system consists of our statewide website and Helpline. Both methods of delivery make available to clients the necessary information needed to handle possible civil legal problems.

Our 2001 Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) provides us with the financial backing to implement our Integrated System, which will facilitate access to legal services for low-income clients in a primarily rural state. The goal of the Integrated System is to fully address the unmet legal needs of a larger segment of Arkansas' low-income population by providing them with convenient Helpline access, extended legal representation, and Virtual Law Offices. The Integrated System will also allow staff and stakeholders to work together more efficiently so that we can create an Arkansas Justice Center that will handle "gap" cases.

The Integrated System is being implemented by Arkansas' new two-program delivery system in cooperation with other justice community stakeholders, and

covers all 75 counties. It is a statewide effort consisting of a Helpline, integrated case management database, and Virtual Law Offices. The integrated case management system is Kemp's Caseworks utilized through an Application Service Provider (ASP). The use of an ASP allows all offices to share and access the same information simultaneously through high-speed Internet connections. This allows caseworkers to access and work on the database from Court, at home, or while on the road, greatly enhancing the ability to quickly and efficiently serve clients. The ASP eliminates the need to transfer and integrate data from outlying offices to a central database, and avoids delay while checking conflicts and duplications. It also allows all staff members to access valuable statistical and client data in their day-to-day operations, not only from their area, but also from all parts of the system. This is very useful when transferring or referring clients from one office to another, and when referring clients from the HelpLine to receive extended services. It is anticipated that the programs will be able to double services to the targeted population as a result of these innovations.

Clients will be able to: (1) access the new intake system via a telephone call to one toll-free number that will be heavily advertised, (2) complete an online form over the internet to request a callback for an initial application, and (3) access educational materials via Virtual Law Offices in six locations throughout the state. Receiving the 2001 Technology Initiative Grant has given us the tools we need to provide equal access to justice for all Arkansans.

5) **How has the legal service delivery system expanded its resources to provide critical legal services to low income clients including hard to reach groups such as migrant farm workers, Native Americans, the elderly, those with physical or mental disabilities, those confined to institutions, immigrants and the rural poor?**

Arkansas Legal Services has expanded its resources to include hard-to-reach groups in various ways. We are affiliated in a Comprehensive Cooperative Agreement with the Area Agencies on Aging in our service area to provide both legal assistance and preventive legal education to our senior citizens. Most of the Area Agency on Aging offices in Arkansas have sub-contracts with Legal Services to provide legal representation to the elderly. We participate in forums developed by the Department of Treasury to educate public benefits recipients on electronic transfer accounts. Additionally, legal services has provided preventive legal education to the Arkansas Department of Education Special Education Transition Division, and our AVLE program has successfully dealt with problems of the elderly. In pursuit to achieve this goal of equal access, our staff occasionally leaves the office to interview clients in their own homes or in outlying counties at the offices of pro bono attorneys, space provided by domestic violence shelters or prosecuting attorneys, and space made available in outlying courthouses. Legal Aid of Arkansas has set up a fully functional outreach office in the Senior Citizen Center in one of the poorest counties in Arkansas that is staffed on a weekly basis.

6) **What steps have been implemented within the legal services delivery system and among client communities to identify and nurture new leaders? Do the existing leaders reflect the diversity within the state and within client communities that your delivery system serves? Do your state's equal justice leaders reflect the gender, race, ethnic and economic concerns of important but sometimes overlooked groups within your state? Does the leadership provide opportunities for innovation and experimentation; does it support creative solutions to meet changing needs; are new ideas welcomed; are clients nurtured as leaders? Has the leadership been given sufficient authority and resources to implement needed changes?**

In order to identify and nurture new leaders within the delivery system and among client communities, our programs planned and carried out the first annual Access to Justice Symposium in March 2001. The symposium, co-sponsored by the Arkansas Bar Association and funded in part by the Arkansas IOLTA Foundation, Inc., was designed to bring together stakeholders from the courts, community groups, other government and non-profit agencies involved in delivery of services to our client community, and the bar for the purposes of insuring complete and meaningful access to our state's civil justice system. LSC President John McKay inspired the more than 115 people who attended and former Senator Dale Bumpers was honored by the group.

Several goals for the symposium were achieved. We provided a forum in which many voices and institutions could speak candidly and be heard clearly with regard to the most important access to justice challenges facing Arkansas. Collective knowledge and wisdom of the stakeholders were tapped to begin developing strategies for addressing access to justice concerns. We brought the state justice community up to date on the important changes we are making in the infrastructure of the LSC-funded legal services programs. In addition, we helped participants understand the ethical issues and practical challenges of pro bono representation, and achieve a consensus on the best vehicle for a coordinated statewide effort on access to justice. As a follow-up to the Symposium, stakeholders agreed that an Arkansas Access to Justice Commission (AAJC) be created. Formation of a working group to establish the AAJC is currently underway.

In addition, both programs have client members on the boards. This gives the client community the voice that is needed to communicate their views and positions. The two programs' staff, boards, and the Access to Justice Symposium all emulate diversity within the state as well as the client communities. They also foster a supportive environment where fresh and innovative ideas are encouraged, clients are nurtured as leaders, and leadership has the authority and resources to employ necessary changes.

Some client board members are very active in the Southeast Regional Client's Counsel with at least two holding leadership positions in that organization. Plans are underway to develop a statewide Client Counsel to involve even more client board members in leadership roles. It is anticipated that the development of this valuable resource will enhance our visibility in the client community and ultimately assist us with identifying and developing new funding sources.

7) **What do you envision will be your next steps to achieve a client-centered integrated and comprehensive delivery system within your state or territory? How will clients be actively involved in the determination of these next steps?**

To achieve a client-centered, integrated and comprehensive delivery system in Arkansas, we are in the process of planning for our Access to Justice Commission (AAJC). In the pursuit of building a stronger Arkansas justice community that is client-centered, a working group of 10 to 15 key stakeholders should convene in September for the purpose of planning for the creation of the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission. The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission will be a partnership between the Arkansas Supreme Court, the Arkansas Bar Association, the two Legal Services Programs in Arkansas and the public. A consultant will work with the AAJC to assist with the development of a shared vision, a mission and appropriate goals. The *Working Group to Establish an Arkansas Access to Justice Commission* is charged by Arkansas Supreme Court and the Arkansas Bar Association to examine legal needs in the state and to create a blue ribbon panel of leaders for the purposes of developing and implementing policy initiatives designed to expand access to and enhance the quality of justice in civil legal matters for low-income residents of Arkansas.

A Strategic Alliance Building Program, co-sponsored by AARP, is another step in reaching this comprehensive delivery system. The purpose of the program is to promote more client and stakeholder activity and involvement.

Creation of a statewide client counsel should also enhance efforts to develop a true client-centered delivery system. Once client board members are able to meet and receive training and information, it is anticipated that they will then go back to their local communities with a better understanding of the logistical and theoretical aspects of the Legal Services programs. They will then be able to rally local support and client involvement.

8) **What has been the greatest obstacle to achieving a statewide, integrated, client-centered delivery system and how was that obstacle overcome or, alternatively, how do you plan to overcome that obstacle?**

The greatest obstacle to achieving a statewide, integrated, client-centered delivery system has been the time that we have to spend tending to program mergers. This reconfiguration has taken up an enormous amount of our time and is still doing so. A particular challenge has been bringing all of the offices in LAA up to

acceptable levels of quality and compliance; this is a work still in progress. Ultimately, this will be time well spent as the mergers are an important aspect of achieving a statewide delivery system that is both integrated and client-centered.

Lack of funding would be the greatest obstacle at the present time. Arkansas has received word that we will be receiving funding cuts from LSC as a result of the recent census. These cuts total nearly 11% of our grant. Additionally, because of a downturn in the economy and interest rates, we will be losing anywhere from 50% to 66% of our IOLTA funding. There are other legal challenges to the IOLTA system nationwide which may jeopardize all of this funding. Arkansas is one of only a few states that provide no funding for Legal Services. Repeated efforts have been made to obtain funding from the state with no success. In addition, the programs rely heavily on Federal Domestic Violence grants and the continuation of those grants is still in limbo. Resource development at this point has to be our biggest obstacle. We plan to overcome this obstacle by making resource development a priority within the programs and as coordinated by our Resource Coordination and Training Unit.

9) **Has any benefit-to-cost analysis been made in terms of creating a comprehensive, integrated and client-centered legal services delivery system in your state? If yes, what does your analysis show?**

Since the reconfiguration of the programs has recently taken effect, there has been little time left to conduct a benefit-to-cost analysis of the new system. On the other hand, a benefit-to-cost analysis would be beneficial and should be conducted promptly.

10) **What resources, technical assistance and support would help you meet your goals?**

The resources, technical assistance, and support that we need to meet our goals are as follows: 1) hire consultants who would travel around the country and provide objective on-site facilitation of difficult issues to be faced in the on going state planning process; 2) host regular regional training programs for program staff and boards on relevant state planning issues – at least one program per quarter in each region; 3) provide training in communication and leadership; 4) provide training in fund raising and resource development; 5) provide continually updated information about government and private grants through a website; and 6) provide diversity training.

Finally, more staff and funding would help legal services in meeting its goals. Specifically, a full-time Access to Justice Coordinator should be hired for the purpose of overseeing access to justice initiatives in Arkansas.

To what extent have intended outcomes of a comprehensive, integrated client-centered legal service delivery system been achieved including but not limited to service effectiveness/quality; efficiency; equity in terms of client access; greater involvement by members of the private bar in the legal lives of clients, and client-community empowerment?

1) **In terms of the issues impacting upon low-income persons within your state, what strategies have you designed to address these issues and how do you plan to measure your future success in addressing your objectives?**

   Increased technology is our main strategy for attending to issues that impact low-income persons in our state. The two programs have activated a statewide Helpline. Using a single toll-free number, clients are able to contact their legal services office from anywhere in the state. This single number works by enhanced call routing. The call center is able to determine where the call originates from and directs the call to the proper HelpLine office based upon this information, without human intervention or inconvenience to the client. An application service provider (ASP) is used to provide seamless access to a central client database and allows the HelpLine to operate from various locations instead of one central center. The Helpline will virtually eliminate all delays for clients who just need advice or a referral. This is a joint effort to improve case intake systems that have been affected by federal funding cutbacks and subsequent staffing reductions. Additionally, our Arkansas Legal Services website provides information on various issues affecting our clients and clients are able to apply for legal assistance online.

   A thorough evaluation is conducted on a regular basis to determine if intake, advice, and referral systems are working effectively and efficiently. Our programs also have cooperative agreements with providers such as Area Agencies on Aging, Community Economic Development Agencies, United Way, HUD, VAWA and VOCA-funded agencies, and the Disaster Legal Assistance Project.

   Furthermore, the private bar is working diligently with the Volunteer Organization for the Center for Arkansas Legal Services (VOCALS), the River Valley Volunteer Attorney Project, Legal Aid of Arkansas' Equal Access to Justice Panel and the Arkansas Volunteer Lawyers for the Elderly (AVLE) to serve our elderly population by providing free legal assistance to low-income elderly Arkansans 55 and over. The Resource Coordination and Training Unit (RC&T) offers training and administrative support for the legal services programs. We engage in ongoing preventive legal education efforts, and just this past summer we have reorganized our task forces so that they can better strategize about the problems facing our low-income community. We now have three task forces: Pro Bono, Emerging Poverty Law Issues, and Helpline/Pro Se.

2) **Has the legal services delivery system expanded access and services through coordination with providers throughout the state? Can this be quantified?**

As previously mentioned, legal services has matched efforts with such providers as the Area Agencies on Aging, domestic violence shelters and service providers, including the County Court Clerks offices and Victims Assistance branch of the prosecuting attorneys offices, and the Community Economic Development Agencies. There are no other organizations or projects that provide the same or similar legal services to low-income persons in our service area. While occasional legal assistance may be provided free of charge to some individual poor persons, there is no organized, consistent or comprehensive civil legal assistance available to low-income persons except for the two programs' pro bono projects and Arkansas Volunteer Lawyers for the Elderly (AVLE). Furthermore, both of the Arkansas legal services programs contribute by way of subgrant agreements to the AVLE which provides pro bono referrals to low-income persons 55 years and older. AVLE is a joint project of the Arkansas legal services programs and the Arkansas Bar Association.

Legal services have working relationships for client referrals and advocacy with organizations such as Advocates for Battered Women, mental health advocacy organizations, homeless shelters and food banks. Additionally, we have created and maintained the Domestic Violence Project in partnership with Advocates for Battered Women.

3) **Has the quality of services provided by the legal services delivery system improved? How?**

We have improved the quality of our services by providing more community outreach and training to the low-income community and to individuals and organizations working with the poor. This has been accomplished in several ways: newsletters, brochures, manuals, videos, seminars, workshops, legal clinics, community involvement and the development of referral systems.

The Helpline continues to be a great innovation in providing legal assistance to our clients. All 75 counties in Arkansas are now covered. Clients are able to contact their legal services office from anywhere in the state using the toll-free number and to receive consistent, carefully supervised advice and brief services. The Helpline is a joint effort to improve case intake systems that have been affected by federal funding cutbacks and subsequent staffing reductions.

We are also improving the quality of our services through supervision, quality control and training. Of particular importance, with the help of LSC's OCE we have made major strides forward in timely documentation of case data and legal work, file maintenance and case reporting. We have also enhanced our abilities in breaking the cycle of domestic violence, helped families off welfare, prevented the victimization of the elderly, reunited and strengthened families, helped to

retain safe and affordable housing, collected unpaid wages for workers, helped people obtain health care, prevented child snatching, kept families from impoverishment, protected the rights of persons with disabilities, fought consumer fraud and prevented victimization by the system meant to help low-income persons.

4) **Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity of client access throughout the state for all low-income clients regardless of who they are, where in the state they reside, what languages they speak, their race/gender/national origin, or the existence of other access barriers? How is this equity achieved?**

We cannot accept that a client who lives in a small rural county does not have ready access to a pro bono attorney while a client living in a more metropolitan county does. We understand that we cannot justify nor tolerate the possibility that clients in one part of our state may receive less access or less effective legal assistance than clients in other parts of the state. We feel so strongly about this concept that we have been known to make house calls for those clients who can't come into the office.

The programs have made substantial strides in providing equal service to all of our clients regardless of race, languages spoken, and where they live. Through the operations of our Helpline and website, we are able to better serve our clients over the entire state. The centralized intake of the Helpline provides more convenient service to our clients who live far from a legal services office. In addition, the website offers pro se materials and information for all clients with access to a computer with Internet. To assist our clients who speak other languages, both programs are affiliated with translation services

5) **Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity in terms of the availability of the full range of civil equal justice delivery capacities throughout the state? What mechanisms have been developed to ensure such relative equity in the development and distribution of civil equal justice resources throughout the state? Are there areas of the state that suffer from a disproportionate lack of resources (funding as well as in-kind/pro bono)? If so, is there a strategy to overcome such inequalities?**

We do feel that there has been an improvement in the equal justice delivery capacities throughout the state. Our branch offices are strategically located all over the state of Arkansas. But, since the state of Arkansas is mostly rural, it is hard to reach everyone. Unfortunately, some of the rural areas aren't equipped to receive some of the technologically savvy innovations. Delivering our services to the rural areas is still a priority that we work on constantly.

To ensure that relative equity in access is achieved, we have implemented a statewide Helpline that can be called by anyone in the state. Potential clients are

then directed to the legal services office closest to them. Moreover, our website can be accessed at www.arkansaslegalservices.org to receive helpful information regarding various matters.

Our pro bono attorneys have provided organized, consistent and comprehensive civil legal assistance. Both programs are working hard to recruit attorneys in rural areas where traditionally less pro bono assistance has been provided. The strategy is to recruit more rural attorneys. In order to regain volunteers and expand the Panel's participation, recognition and support initiatives will be implemented. The Task Force is addressing the sticking points that occur in pro bono programs after merger. Steve Scudder, American Bar Association Staff Counsel of the Standing Committee for Pro Bono and Public Services, is coming to the state conference to address these issues. We have also applied for LSC's Technology Initiative Grant and received grants from VOCA, VAWA, and the United Way.

Definitely, there had been a disproportionate lack of resources in the delivery of services in some corners of the state, but the mergers are helping use overcome such inequalities. We are also confident that the Access to Justice working group will be provide many strategizing opportunities for different kinds of people to brainstorm possible solutions to these challenges and to determine how best to allocate our resources.

6) **Does this legal services delivery system operate efficiently? Are there areas of duplication?**

The newly formed, two-program, state structure is operating efficiently. We have eliminated needless administrative duplications; created a second program in the state with sufficient size and depth to function as a major law firm in Arkansas; released leadership talent from bureaucratic humdrum for reassignment to advocacy and policy leadership; consolidated local advocacy around judicial districts that have been previously split among several programs; and helped the advocates in all the offices of LAA to improve the quality and effectiveness of their advocacy through co-counseling and team work on cases. The two programs in the state are complementing each other, creating a dialogue about maximizing the potential of the state system, and competing usefully to outdo one another in the excellence of their advocacy.

7) **Has the system expanded the way it involves private lawyers in the delivery of essential services to low-income persons? Does the system effectively and efficiently use the private bar to deliver essential services to low income people?**

Our legal services programs are striving to expand the way we involve private attorneys in the delivery of services to the poor. We held a session at our statewide conference for pro bono coordinators to exchange ideas for increasing

participation in pro bono activities. The session was well attended and highly rated.

We have also created a statewide pro bono coordinators' task force. The task force is working to solve current problems that the programs are experiencing in recruiting new pro bono attorneys. This group is working to establish a framework for a coordinated statewide approach to promotion of all pro bono efforts. We will continue to recruit pro bono attorneys and provide low cost regional training events.

The statewide pro bono coordinators' task force will work with program directors on presentations to local bar association meetings regarding our efforts to strengthen and reinvigorate our state's pro bono system and call for participation by the local bar. We will work to have a local judge participate in these presentations as well. We are constantly working hard to utilize the private bar effectively and efficiently in delivering services to low-income people.

Are the best organizational and human resource management configurations and approaches being used?

1) **For calendar year 2002, what is the current configuration of programs (LSC and non-LSC) that deliver services to low-income clients – i.e., what are the components (size, areas of responsibility, governance) of the delivery system? What are the funding sources and levels for each of these components of the delivery system?**

Two LSC-funded programs deliver services to low-income clients. The Center for Arkansas Legal Services serves 44 of Arkansas' 75 counties accounting for 59.60% of the state's poverty population. The remaining 31 counties are served by Legal Aid of Arkansas, which accounts for 40.40% of the state's poverty population. The Center's main office operates out of Little Rock with six branch offices. Legal Aid's main office is situated in Fayetteville, also with six branch offices. Each program has a Board of Directors and an Executive Director.

The funding sources for 2002 are as follows:

Center - $2,262,779 LSC Basic Field; $177,502 LSC Special Grants/Interest Income; $41,700 Older Americans Act; $12,150 State Grants; $9,000 Local Grants; $33,663 United Way Grants; $515,700 IOLTA Grants; $133,333 DOJ-VAWA Funds; and $174,540 Private Bar/Other Contributions; $214,520 Other Non-LSC Funds/Interest ; Total Funding: $3,574,887

LAA – $1,532,520 LSC Basic Field; $291,694 IOLTA Basic Field; $58,000 IOLTA Pro Bono; $56,968 DOJ-VAWA (remaining from current grant); $1,752 AR Dept. F&A; $21,918 VOCA; $20,000 IOLTA Merger Grant; $171,478 DOJ-VAWA (pending new grant); $70,000 HUD (pending); $6,000 United Way (pending); Total Funding: $2,210,330

2) **Since October 1998, what other configurations and/or approaches have been seriously explored? Were any adopted? Were any rejected? Are any changes contemplated in the coming year?**

The Arkansas programs explored other configuration alternatives. These options included a one-program model and a three-program model. We considered judicial districts, poverty populations, the Delta possibility, existing political boundaries, demography and geography. By merging into two programs, we have also consolidated local advocacy around judicial districts that have been previously split among several programs. We feel the two-program model is working well and it is the best model for Arkansas.

3) **Is there any identifiable duplication in capacities or services in the state? How many duplicative systems – accounting systems, human resources management systems, case management systems, etc. – currently exist? Does the service delivery system now in use minimize or eliminate duplications that existed prior to October 1, 1998?**

There is minor identifiable duplication in capacities or services in the two programs because both programs have separate accounting, human resource management, and case management systems. But further consolidation would produce little savings as each program is at an efficient size. The two-program state structure has resulted in an elimination of needless administrative duplications, which were caused by our previous six-program structure.

4) **Since October 1998, what innovative service delivery systems/mechanisms/initiatives been adopted in the state? Have any been explored and then rejected?**

The Access to Justice Symposium is an initiative that was adopted fairly recently in our state. The Symposium provided a forum in which many voices and institutions could speak candidly and be heard clearly on the most important equal justice challenges facing Arkansas. As a follow-up to that, we are currently working to establish an Arkansas Access to Justice Commission working group for the purpose of guiding the further development of a comprehensive, integrated, client-centered statewide delivery system.

The statewide Helpline is another system that has been adopted since 1998. The Helpline is a centralized intake, legal advice, referral and delivery system. It is offered to all clients in Arkansas by providing a toll-free 800 number from which any client/applicant can obtain legal advice or apply for services. The Helpline is and will continue to be a great innovation in providing legal assistance to our clients.

As previously mentioned, the program mergers have been quite successful. With the two-program state structure, we have created a second program in the state with sufficient size and depth to function as a major law firm in Arkansas. The new northern program is large enough to be efficient without being so large that distance and size impose unnecessary bureaucracy or dilute the role of minority leadership in the board and the staff. Furthermore, we have released leadership talent from bureaucratic humdrum for reassignment to advocacy and policy leadership.

In conclusion, the two programs in the state complement each other, create a dialogue about maximizing the potential of the state system, and compete usefully to outdo one another in the excellence of their advocacy. The move to the greater efficiency and effectiveness of a complementary, two-program state delivery system has provided a steady foundation on which to build a better, more effective, high quality, client-centered legal services for the new millennium.