

**Justice Action Group  
JAG Executive Committee**

**September 18, 2023 – 2:00 p.m.  
Feeney Conference Room - Portland**

**MINUTES**

**Participants:** Justice Mead, Magistrate Judge Wolf, Barbara Cardone, Alyson Cummings, Janis Cohen, Barbara Cardone, Michelle Draeger, Chris Lewis, Chris Northrup, Charlie Dingman, Ellen Gorman, Tom Fritzsche, and Stacy Stitham  
**By telephone:** Jason Jabar

**I. Welcome/Introductions**

**II. Approval of Minutes** from May 15, 2023. Minutes accepted and made a part of the permanent record. No additions/corrections. No additions/corrections noted for the inventory list.

**III. Report from Chair – J. Mead**

- a. Update on Odyssey progress (Barbara Cardone and Alyson Cummings): Barbara discussed the new “Lunch and Learn” program being offered by the Judicial Branch for court personnel, particularly the clerks, that will feature various topics including introductions to Maine’s civil legal services providers.

Barbara discussed the Odyssey case management/e-filing system rollout to Lewiston/Auburn that is expected to take place on October 23. Judicial Branch Administrative Order JB-20-03 and recent RECS rules amendments will govern access and e-filing procedures as the Odyssey system evolves.

- b. MSBA Rural Access to Justice Task Force: Stacy Stitham spoke about changing the perception of rural practice. She discussed possibly having a rural recruiter tasked with getting attorneys to practice in rural areas. The MSBA will be dedicating the November Bar Talks around rural practice issues.

- c. MSBA meetings/Jonathan Dunitz letter: Justice Mead reported that he and Magistrate Wolf will be meeting with incoming MSBA President Jonathan Dunitz on October 12 to discuss Jonathan's plans to make access to justice a major theme of his presidency.
- d. Pro Bono Fair: Justice Mead mentioned that the MSBA New Lawyers Section is again presenting a pro bono fall fair on October 18th hosted by Verrill Dana from 5:30 to 7:30. He and Judge Wolf both hope to be attending.
- e. Colorado ATJ Commission Strategic Vision Report: <https://www.coloradoaccesstojustice.org/2023-2024-strategic-vision-report>: Justice Mead directed the group's attention to the Colorado ATJ Commission's impressive strategic vision report.
- f. Retrospective view: We are almost ten years out from the 2014 JAG Summit: Justice Mead convened that gathering of providers and other interested individuals and organizations to review and reimagine JAGs role and plan for the future. The post-2014 reconfigurations and initiatives have generally worked well, but Justice Mead asked the group to consider whether a similar gathering should be held in the near future. Of particular concern is that JAG has had no funding for an Executive Coordinator or staff.
- g. ABA 2023 National ATJ Chairs Meeting (Nov. 1-2): Justice Mead will not be attending due to scheduling conflicts, but will Zoom where possible and obtain the conference materials.

**IV. Vice Chair's Report and Pro Bono Committee Report – J. Wolf:** Judge Wolf provided background and historical information on the pro bono committee for new attendees at this meeting. Rural access to justice continues to be a main focus for the group. Their goal is to increase pro bono engagement by lawyers throughout the state. She reported that following the Access to Justice Summit last fall, two pro bono round-table meetings have taken place with mid-sized law firms and corporate counsel being the focus. The Committee hopes to convene a corporate counsel fair and a large firm round-table on pro bono in the near future. Magistrate Judge Wolf also discussed the federal POWER Act which requires all federal courts to hold an event once per year with the

volunteer lawyers project in that district. The POWER Act program will take place on October 20th this year. The objective is to encourage pro bono engagement on behalf of victims of domestic violence. The Maine district is going to have a tribal component every year and not just every other year as required by the Act. The committee continues to work with the Board of Overseers for a rule change to allow CLE credits for pro bono work. Clerk Christa Berry at the federal court, (207) 780-3356 can provide a web link and information on the POWER Act program.

- V. ACP Chair's Report – Chris Lewis:** Chris Lewis reported (to the great acclaim of the EC members in attendance) that retired Associate Justice Ellen A. Gorman has agreed to serve as counsel to the ACP.

The Department of Justice Office of Access to Justice is coming to Fort Kent, Maine, with another event in Presque Isle. Also, 10/17/23 is a big day for the ACP.

- VI. Justice Systems Committee Report – Jaye Martin:** Previously mentioned by AMM.

a. Report/Minutes of 7/26/23 meeting.

- VI. Legislative Committee Report – Charlie Dingman:**

a. Update on legislative goings-on/status of JAG/providers' initiatives: The Hall of Flags has been reserved for the first week of April for ATJ Day. Legislature is expected to be in session. Planning for the event has begun.

- VII. Executive Committee Organization Updates:**

- Maine Judicial Branch: Justice Mead referenced his earlier comments.
- Volunteer Lawyers Project: Justice Mead indicated there is a real need for training on domestic violence, protections from abuse, evictions, and small claims. These case types frequently appear in the VLP's referral queue. Lawyers who would otherwise be willing to provide pro bono services may be uncomfortable in taking on these cases if their areas of

practice and experience do not include them. Training opportunities offered by the VLP and other organizations should be coordinated for maximum effect and geographical coverage.

- Maine Justice Foundation (Michelle Draeger):

COFFIN FELLOWSHIP Michelle reported that Coffin Fellowship: Applications are due October 6, 2023. With the passing of Charlie Miller, they are recruiting for new hiring committee membership. If anyone has suggestions, please contact Michelle.

IOLTA: IOLTA income is stronger than ever with rising interest rates resulting from rate compliance efforts of the Foundation. Grants to the providers will be materially greater in FY24 with a likely additional distribution from positive returns at FY23 end. Distribution will take place after the Foundation's financial statements have been audited in early 2024.

RACIAL JUSTICE FUND: A third round of grant applications will be sought in October.

CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE: The current fundraising is going well. Administration of the Campaign for Justice will shift to the providers in 2024. As the providers' operations have grown, they are now in a place to administer the Campaign directly. This is a successful transition of a collective effort under the Foundation's leadership raising more than \$10 million over the last 19 years. To the average donor, this transition will be largely behind the scenes.

MAINE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND COMMISSION HEARING ON FUNDING FOR 2024 AND 2025: The Commission will hold a public meeting beginning at 9:00 a.m. until finished on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, to make final decisions regarding awards for 2024 and 2025. The meeting will be held in Room 208, Burton M. Cross State Office Building, 111 Sewall Street, Augusta, Maine 04333.

- Maine State Bar Association/Lawyers in Libraries: Stacy Stitham reported the Lawyers in Libraries program did not survive COVID, but New Lawyers Section of the MSBA may bring it back at some point.
- Maine Trial Lawyers Association: Jason Jabar reported that the MTLA is going to be discussing the possibility that juror questionnaires might be able to be filled out in advance of jury service to save prospective jurors from coming into courthouses to fill them out. Jason has spoken to Justice McKeon about it.
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance: Tom Fritzsche referenced a grant that Pine Tree recently received from the Housing and Urban Development Administration related to eviction prevention work. It is a two-year grant with no guarantee of renewal. This grant is helping PTLA to reach out to smaller court locations that they have been unable to reach in the past. Over the past year, PTLA has increased their eviction representation in every county; the counties with the biggest increase have been Waldo, Aroostook, Piscataquis, and Penobscot.
- Law School/Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic: Professor Chris Northrup reported that they have changed the model of attorney supervision in the Fort Kent clinic; they have gone to using legal fellows. They have also hired a recent grad who is working full time. And retired Judge David Soucy is currently contributing ten hours per week.

**VIII: Other Business:** None noted. Justice Mead reiterated that if any providers wish to have representatives attend EC meetings, they are more than welcome to attend (although they may be invited to provide an impromptu report on goings-on in their organizations!). He noted that the providers do designate a rotating representative to attend the EC meetings. Providers submit semiannual reports in advance of JAG Board meetings in June and December. [NOTE: Justice Gorman reported that the ACP is working on a simplified standard template for the reports.]

**IX: 2023 JAG Executive Committee and Board meeting dates:**

JAG Board (Feeney Conference Room – Cumberland County Courthouse, Portland):

**December 18, 2023 – 3:00**

Executive Committee meeting dates (SJC Conf. Room – Capital Judicial Center, Augusta):

Nov. 13, 2023 – 2:00

**Meeting adjourned at 3:32 p.m.**