

**Justice Action Group  
JAG Executive Committee**

**May 15, 2023 – 2:00 p.m.**

**Via Zoom**

**MINUTES**

**Participants:** Justice Mead, Magistrate Judge Wolf, Michelle Draeger, Charles Dingman, Judith Fletcher Woodbury, Thomas Fritzsche, Robyn Merrill, and Christopher Northrup

**By telephone:** Stacy Stitham

- I. **Approval of Minutes** from March 13, 2023. No additions/corrections noted. None noted. Minutes made a part of the permanent record.
  
- II. **Report from Chair – J. Mead:** Justice Mead commented on the inventory. It appears up-to-date. [NOTE: The ACP has been seeking new counsel.]
  - a. MSBA Rural Access to Justice Task Force: Justice Mead reported that this initiative, which consists of representatives of various organizations and institutions interested in access to justice in underrepresented areas, is up and running. It is a multi-disciplinary group and is just getting started. The group’s first step was to identify the various efforts and programs designed to encourage greater numbers of lawyers to offer legal services in rural areas. That effort is largely complete and next steps will be to identify areas where the various members of the task force can collaborate and share resources to create greater efficiencies of scale and avoid duplication of effort.

The discussion at the task force meetings included various strategies to motivate lawyers to locate their practices to rural areas. It was noted that one of the primary selling points that should be underscored is the quality of life that can be had in small town settings.
  
  - b. Colorado ATJ Commission Strategic Vision Report:  
<https://www.coloradoaccesstojustice.org/2023-2024-strategic-vision-report>: The Colorado ATJ Commission produced an excellent report detailing their efforts.

- c. Update on Odyssey progress: Justice Mead reported on progress on the Odyssey case management and e-filing system that has taken place since the Berry Dunn report and involvement. Things are moving forward in the Region V and BCD pilot sites. The JB is reviewing and reassessing the RECS rules. Any proposed modifications will be posted for public comment.

**III. Vice Chair's Report and Pro Bono Committee Report – J. Wolf:**

Magistrate Judge Wolf reported on recent activity in the Pro Bono Committee including the MSBA Rural Access to Justice Task Force (see item II(a), above).

The committee continues to work with the Board of Overseers to support a proposed rule amendment which would allow CLE credit for pro bono work. On May 10th, the committee held a second pro bono round table geared toward in-house corporate counsel. The response was excellent. Attendance far exceeded the actual invitation numbers, and a future fair is planned for September for both in-house counsel and law firm counsel.

- IV. ACP Chair's Report – [Rotating Provider Representative]:** Robyn Merrill reported that the providers continue to communicate and collaborate, but there have been no major developments to report since the last meeting. Justice Mead reported that the ACP continues to actively seek counsel for the group.

- V. Justice Systems Committee Report-Jaye Martin:** Justice Mead commented once again that this committee continues to be an effective and productive real-time communications conduit between the providers and the courts.

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

- a. Update on legislative goings-on and status of JAG/providers' initiatives: Charlie reported they are continuing to work on the bill that Senator Carney introduced seeking a substantial increase in general fund appropriation for the Maine Civil Legal Services fund. Unfortunately, the request was not included in the Governor's change

package. Additional work will be undertaken as the focus turns to the Appropriations Committee.

- b. The Request for 2024 ATJ Day at the Legislature must be made at 8:00 a.m. on Sept. 5th. We need to clarify our date preferences and designate a person or persons to make the request.

Charlie commented that the dates will be scheduled through an online portal that will need to be accessed as expeditiously as possible at 8:00 a.m. on September 5 by perhaps two people to secure a date for ATJ Day in 2024. Ideally, we would prefer a Tuesday or Thursday in February or March. We should return to this issue shortly before the September 5 date to make sure that we have everything in order. The MJF offered to spearhead this effort as it has done in the past.

## **VII. Executive Committee Organization Updates:**

- Maine Judicial Branch: Justice Mead reported earlier.
- Volunteer Lawyers Project: Justice Mead reported that VLP is seeking to gain approval under Rule 90 to allow law students to serve as representatives under supervision. They submitted a proposal to the SJC which is presently pending.
- Maine Justice Foundation: Michelle Draeger reported that the annual IOLTA report was submitted to the Court. IOLTA is trending upwards due to positive interest rates. The MJF was able to make an additional distribution to the providers in March. Next years' grants will likely be the largest over the last 13-15 years. The MJF conducted an IOLTA interest rate compliance survey project which resulted in 11 banks increasing their rates.

The application process for the second year of the Access to Justice Tax Credit application is fast approaching. The program will be publicized in the Maine Lawyers' Review and other information portals. Attorneys that received the tax credit last year can reapply and seek a recertification of their qualification and five new certifications are available.

- The MJF is currently accepting LGBTQ+ fund applications for 2023 grants. The application period opened on May 9th and will close on May 23rd. More information can be found on the MJF website. The CFJ is on track and on a great start trending at the same level as the

- last two years. They had a successful phone-a-thon last week. She believes the count from last week's phone-a-thon was over \$45,000.
- Maine State Bar Association/Lawyers in Libraries: No report
  - Maine Trial Lawyers Association: No report
  - Pine Tree Legal Assistance: Tom Fritzsche reported that PTLA is likely to exceed the numbers of last year's inquiries from potential clients around the state. They have seen a significant uptick in FED filings.
  - Law School/Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic: Professor Northrup reported the clinic will have a replacement for Toby Jandreau, who was the clinical professor for the rural practice clinic. Former District Court Judge David Soucy will be announced as his replacement. If the SJC approves the VLP's Rule 90 proposal, Maine Law may be able to provide some of the supervision. MCLS has some interest in seeing if they can come up with a system where certified student attorneys can be placed in some law firms to do this work.
  - Legal Services for the Elderly: No report
  - Maine Equal Justice: Robyn Merrill reported that housing is a huge need that continues to grow. There is a lot of activity at the Legislature working with many others to try and address the issue with policy change. Maine Equal Justice has partnered with PTLA to take some of the landlord/tenant cases that PTLA cannot take due to immigration status.
  - Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project: No report

**VIII: Other Business:**

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

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

June 20, 2023 – 3:00 – Portland – Feeney Conference Room  
Dec. 12, 2023 – 3:00 – Portland – Feeney Conference Room

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

Sept. 18, 2023 – 2:00 – Augusta – SJC Conf. Room  
Nov. 13, 2023 – 2:00 – Augusta – SJC Conf. Room

**Meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.**