



Colorado Equal Justice Authority

Annual Report to the Colorado General Assembly
January–December 2025

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Equal Justice Authority Board of Directors

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Executive Summary

The Colorado Equal Justice Authority, established through House Bill 24-1286, formed a 7-person Board of Directors in January 2025 through its statutory appointment authorities. This marks the Authority's first year of operation and its inaugural annual legislative report. In 2025, the Board of Directors established a governance structure, developed and facilitated administrative grant processes, and successfully awarded its first round of grant funding.

The Colorado Judicial Branch is responsible for collecting the Equal Justice Fee on a monthly basis from the courts, then sending that revenue to the Equal Justice Authority. Between January 2025–November 2025, the Equal Justice Authority received \$3,611,651.84 from the Judicial Branch. Money from December 2025 is still being collected and is not reflected in the numbers below. The breakdown by fiscal year is as follows:

- FY2024-2025 (includes fees collected January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025): \$1,750,955.00
- FY2025-2026 (includes fees collected July 1, 2025 - November 30, 2025): \$1,857,336.84

The Equal Justice Authority Board of Directors distributed \$1,700,347 to 27 grantees on July 1, 2025. In compliance with statute, 67% of funds were awarded to Colorado's federal Legal Services Corporation grantee, Colorado Legal Services, totaling \$1,139,232. The remaining 33% was distributed between 26 grantees, totaling \$561,115. At the time of this report—5 full months into the grant cycle—\$1,031,000 out of \$1,700,347 of awarded funds remain unspent by grantees. This amounts to approximately 40% of funds being spent down by grantees within the first five months of the grant period with seven months remaining. All grantees reported that they anticipated no difficulty spending the funds down by the end of the grant period on June 30, 2026.

Grantees delivered a wide range of civil legal aid services to low-income Coloradans, including full legal representation, education on legal rights, and brief-legal services that were case specific. These services spanned issues such as housing, family law, protection orders, immigration, public benefits, disability rights, consumer issues, and tax-related disputes.

The breadth and depth of services provided by grantees in the first five months of the grant period demonstrates a robust statewide civil legal aid response that spans community education and support, systems and process navigation, and impactful litigation. Equal Justice Authority grant funding addresses a critical need, as many legal aid organizations are guided by funding requirements that focus assistance to individuals at or below 150% of the poverty level. The EJA grant significantly expanded the capacity for legal aid services to Coloradans living at or under 250% of the poverty threshold, strengthening both the quality and reach of services statewide for underserved populations.

Funds distributed in the first grant cycle reflect only a partial year of Equal Justice Fee revenue collection and grantees expressed that the funding arrived at a critical time when other grant sources have been reduced, eliminated, or remain at risk due to budgetary cuts. The Board anticipates that the success of this pilot year will generate increased interest from additional qualified applicants and further expand impact across the state.

Background & Legislative Context

Purpose of HB24-1286

HB24-1286, signed into law on June 3, 2024, established the Colorado Equal Justice Authority (hereinafter “EJA”) as a special purpose authority responsible for distributing the Equal Justice Fee for the purpose of advancing access to civil legal aid and to improve the efficiency of the Colorado court system for all court users.

The statute recognizes that inadequate access to civil legal justice has serious social, legal, economic, and political consequences for Coloradans; as such, funding access to justice reaffirms Colorado’s commitment to promoting equitable access to legal support and reducing barriers for low-income individuals and families.

Statutory Requirements

This report is submitted in accordance with C.R.S. §13-5.7-207 to meet EJA’s statutory obligation to provide an account of Equal Justice Fee revenues and their impact annually on January 1. The four reporting requirements are as follows:

1. How much money was collected in Equal Justice Fees and deposited into EJA’s account in the preceding year;
2. How much money the Colorado recipient of a federal Legal Services Corporation field grant (Colorado Legal Services) and other qualified civil legal aid providers received from the collected equal justice fees in the preceding year;
3. The amount of money received from the collected Equal Justice Fees that remained unused by the Colorado recipient of a federal Legal Services Corporation field grant (Colorado Legal Services) and the qualified civil legal aid providers at the conclusion of the preceding year;
4. The types of legal services provided to individuals who received legal services from the Colorado recipient of a federal Legal Services Corporation field grant (Colorado Legal Services) and other qualified legal aid providers that received money from the collected Equal Justice Fees.

Governance & Administration

Board of Directors & Governance Structure

The board of directors (hereinafter “the Board”) was formed on January 1, 2025, in conjunction with the imposition of the Equal Justice Fee on statutorily specified civil court filings. The

Colorado Equal Justice Authority Board of Directors is composed of seven members. Terms are varied by appointee to stagger board member turnover.

1. Matthew Baca–Appointed by the Colorado Lawyer Trust Account Foundation (3 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2027)
 - a. Matthew Baca is the Executive Director of Colorado Legal Services.
2. Allison Esser–Appointed by the Colorado Supreme Court (3 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2027)
 - a. Allison Esser is a District Court Judge for the 19th Judicial District.
3. Cesar Jimenez–Appointed by the Colorado Access to Justice Commission (2 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2026)
 - a. Cesar Jimenez is the Vice President of Housing and Supportive Services at the Community Economic Defense Project.
4. Toni-Anne Nunez–Appointed by the Colorado Access to Justice Commission (2 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2026)
 - a. Toni-Anne Nunez is the Director of Development at CASA of Jefferson & Gilpin Counties.
5. Lauren Peach–Appointed by the Colorado Attorney General’s Office (3 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2027)
 - a. Lauren is an Of Counsel attorney at Littler Mendelson.
6. Renzo Reategui Walton–Appointed by the Colorado Access to Justice Commission (2 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2026)
 - a. Renzo Reategui Walton is a DOJ Accredited Representative at Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center.
7. Charlie Willman–Appointed by the Colorado Bar Association (3 Year Term: January 1, 2025–December 31, 2027)
 - a. Charlie Willman is the President of the Colorado Bar Association.

At its inaugural meeting on January 6, 2025, the board elected its leadership, appointing Matthew Baca as Chair, Toni-Anne Nunez as Vice Chair, and Charlie Willman as Secretary-Treasurer, each to serve one-year terms.

Administration

The board exceeded the statutorily required number of meetings (4) in 2025. All Board of Director meetings were conducted in compliance with the Colorado Open Meetings Law and were held virtually via Zoom, ensuring consistent attendance from board members from across Colorado, supporting accessibility for all participants, minimizing overhead costs, and allowing the board to respond efficiently to the evolving needs of grantees and the community. One meeting was held in-person and simultaneously offered virtually via Zoom. Meeting announcements, agendas, and minutes were posted on the Colorado Access to Justice Commission website from January through October. With the launch of EJA’s own website, all

meeting information, announcements, links, agendas, and minutes are now posted to www.coloradoeja.org.

The aforementioned EJA website, launched in October 2025, serves as a central resource for Board of Directors meeting documentation, grant program information, and public updates. It will also house application information for the spring 2026 grant cycle.

To support effective governance, the Board adopted Rules of Procedure and Internal Controls. The Board also executed a contract with the Colorado Access to Justice Commission for administrative and fiscal staffing services and secured necessary and appropriate insurance coverage.

Fiscal Overview

Equal Justice Fee Revenue

At the time of this report, EJA has collected Equal Justice Fee revenue between January 2025–November 2025, totaling \$3,611,651.84. The breakdown by fiscal year is as follows:

- FY2024-2025: \$1,750,955.00
- FY2025-2026: \$1,860,696.84

Fiscal Administration

Colorado judicial districts send Equal Justice Fee revenue to the EJA monthly via electronic transfer or physical check, in accordance with the capability and process of each judicial district. EJA receives these funds from all 23 judicial districts and the Court of Appeals. Through its staffing contract with the Colorado Access to Justice Commission (hereinafter “ATJC”), all funds are deposited in a timely manner.

Fiscal oversight is facilitated under the leadership of EJA Board Secretary-Treasurer, with administrative support from ATJC. All financial documentation is securely stored and accessible for viewing and additional oversight by all seven EJA board members. Funds are held in interest-bearing accounts with a daily sweep that keeps overnight deposits below the FDIC insurance threshold.

EJA strives to minimize overhead costs while remaining an effective entity. Staffing costs and other expenses—reimbursements, website setup, banking fees, and insurance—were approximately 4% of the budget from January 2025–November 2025, allowing for 96% of funds to be available for grant distribution.

Equal Justice Fee revenue collected from January 1, 2025–May 31, 2025 was available for grant distribution on July 1, 2025. As funds are received from judicial districts anywhere between 1-3 weeks after the close of the month, five months of revenue was available for distribution for the first grant cycle.

2025 Grant Cycle

Process & Timeline

The EJA Board of Directors distributed \$1,700,347 to 27 grantees on July 1, 2025. Per statute, 67% of funds were awarded to Colorado’s federal Legal Services Corporation grantee, Colorado Legal Services, totaling \$1,139,232. The remaining 33% was distributed between 26 grantees, totaling \$561,115.

From January–April 2025, the board instituted governance processes and prepared for its first grant cycle. Preparation included establishing a grant evaluation formula per statutory requirements, developing a grant application in an accessible and easy-to-use format, and creating grant review and oversight processes.

To raise awareness about this new grant opportunity, EJA compiled an email listserv of legal aid nonprofits and encouraged these organizations to consider and share this new opportunity. EJA also held two live Grant Information Sessions with two board members and one ATJC staff member to present on the 2025 EJA grant application and answer any grant-related questions. A video of one of the information sessions was posted to the Colorado ATJC website during the grant application period.

Eligibility, Selection & Compliance

The grant application opened on April 15, 2025 and closed on May 15, 2025. EJA received a total of 33 applications, however six applicants did not meet one or both statutory requirements for funding:

1. Must be a 501(c)3; and,
2. Provides legal representation and advice to people in Colorado who are at or below 250% of the federal poverty guideline.

The Board developed a statutorily-required formula for grant distributions. After considering applications thoroughly and applying the formula, EJA notified grantees and provided a grant agreement which had to be signed and returned in order for funds to be distributed on July 1, 2025. By accepting 2025 Equal Justice Authority grant funds, grantees agreed to follow all applicable federal, state, and municipal laws and regulatory requirements. The grant agreement

stipulated that grant funds must not be used, either directly or indirectly, for lobbying or for political activities.

Financial oversight is upheld through detailed grantee certification requirements that attest to adherence to all statutory funding restrictions. In their mid-year report, all grantees certified the following:

- Their organization has and would continue to use 2025 Equal Justice Authority grant funds to advance the purpose of the Equal Justice Authority, to provide legal assistance to low-income people in Colorado and, by doing so, to promote court efficiency;
- That they are using grant funds in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and municipal laws and regulatory requirements;
- That they have not and will not be used—either directly or indirectly—for lobbying or for political activities, such as supporting candidates for public office, advocating for ballot initiatives or measures, facilitating voter registration or transportation, or contributing to political campaigns;
- Nor have they or will they be used for gambling, liquor, entertainment, or personal purposes that do not clearly advance the purpose of the grant.

2025 Grant Awards & Impact

Grant Recipients

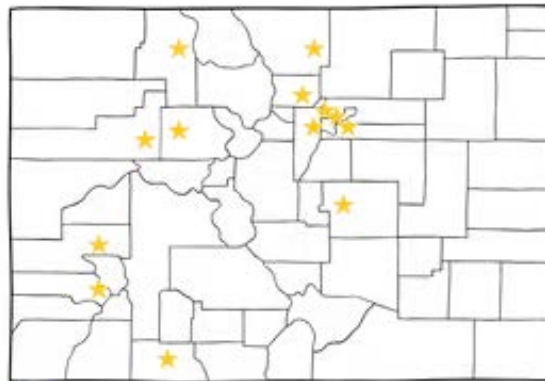
2025 EJA grantees are as follows:

1. Alpine Legal Services
2. Bridge to Justice
3. Bright Future Foundation for Eagle County
4. Catholic Charities of Denver
5. Catholic Charities of Central Colorado
6. Center for Immigrants and Immigration Services
7. Church World Services
8. Colorado Center on Law and Policy
9. Colorado Homeless Legal Project
10. Colorado Legal Services
11. Colorado Poverty Law Project
12. Comunidad Integrada Integrated Community
13. Community Economic Defense Project
14. Denver Asset Building Coalition
15. International Rescue Committee Denver
16. Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center
17. Justice for the People Legal Center
18. Metro Volunteer Lawyers
19. The Justice Center
20. Project Safeguard
21. Rise Above Violence
22. Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
23. Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center
24. Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley
25. Transformative Justice Project of Colorado

26. Tri-County Health Network

27. Uncompahgre Volunteer Legal Aid

Of the 27 funded organizations, 12 have a significant presence in rural areas and/or legal deserts, 10 primarily serve urban areas, and 5 operate statewide. 2025 EJA grant awardees bring a wide range of expertise—including housing, financial services, support for victims and survivors, immigration, family law, protection orders, public benefits, disability rights, and consumer issues—working to close the justice gap for individuals and families across Colorado.



★ Colorado counties with grantee office headquarters

EJA collected mid-year grantee reports between November 1 - December 1, 2025. At the time of this report—5 months into the one-year grant cycle—\$1,031,000 out of \$1,700,347 remains unused by grantees. This amounts to approximately 40% of funds being spent down within the first five months of the grant period. Eight grantees have used their EJA grant funds in their entirety, while other awardees are either utilizing other time-sensitive grant funds first, or are spreading their EJA grant award out over the course of the 12-month grant period. All grantees reported that they anticipated no difficulty spending the funds down by the end of the grant period on June 30, 2026.

Statewide Impact

Grant funds have been used to deliver a broad spectrum of legal services statewide and have expanded grantees' capacity to serve low-income Coloradans in all parts of Colorado. These services have been organized into three categories for reporting and tracking purposes:

1. Full Representation: Represented an individual on a specific case.

Some grantees provided full representation in cases involving complex civil legal issues. Full-scope services included protection order litigation, eviction defense, housing

habitability cases, guardianships, custody and divorce matters, public benefits appeals, and mobile home park rights enforcement.

2. Brief Services (Unbundled or Limited Scope Representation): Provided case-specific advice or offered limited assistance on a case - e.g. helping an individual complete paperwork.

Grantees delivered brief legal services statewide, including consultations, legal advice, issue-spotting, paperwork assistance, strategy guidance, and referrals. These services were provided virtually, on-site, in clinic settings, and at community partner locations. Assistance included helping tenants file paperwork and complete forms, supporting pro se litigants in protection order cases, providing technical guidance, and offering legal analysis. Many organizations highlighted improved multilingual capacity and interpretation services that increased access for non-English-speaking clients.

3. Educational: Provided general education on a topic that is not case specific - e.g. know your rights clinics or educational materials.

Grantees provided legal education through Know Your Rights workshops, community trainings, legal information materials, and community presentations. Educational programming covered topics such as protection order processes, tenant rights, public benefits, elder legal planning, and financial or tax-related rights. Some grantees reported that they used grant funding to develop specialized curricula—including multilingual materials, civil protection order resource guides, and housing-specific worksheets.

Due to the loss of other funding sources, several grantees reported that the EJA grant arrived at a pivotal time, as they would have had to cut back on services to low-income Coloradans without this new funding source. One grantee shared that the EJA grant allowed them to continue offering legal services as other funding sources diminished, while another grantee shared that many of their clients are survivors of labor exploitation, domestic violence, or family separation and now have legal pathways to stability and safety because of the funding they received from the EJA grant.

Colorado Legal Services (hereinafter “CLS”)—Colorado’s statewide legal aid nonprofit—received 67% of awarded funds, as required by statute. They reported that EJA’s inaugural year of funding had a transformative impact on their organization and the thousands of Coloradans who rely on civil legal aid. CLS allocated their funding primarily toward personnel costs, enabling 15 dedicated staff—including attorneys, paralegals, intake specialists, and a language access coordinator—to provide critical legal assistance in rural, suburban, and urban areas statewide. EJA funding strengthened CLS’s ability to provide low-income and senior

clients with vital legal assistance—resulting in a 10% increase in cases in their rural offices compared to last year. Beyond casework, CLS conducted outreach events during this time period and shared vital legal information with Coloradans through digital campaigns. These investments have produced life-changing outcomes, from securing protection orders for domestic violence survivors to winning Medicaid appeals for children with special needs to keeping Coloradans housed to helping Coloradans who have been unfairly denied access to identification documents, among many other practice areas. In a time of fiscal uncertainty and decreases in federal funding, EJA funding has been indispensable in preserving and expanding high-quality legal services for Colorado’s most vulnerable residents via Colorado’s statewide legal aid provider, Colorado Legal Services.

EJA funds expanded grantees’ capacity to serve rural legal deserts and rural areas by supporting legal clinics and services in counties outside of the Front Range. Grantees provided services throughout Colorado, including Routt, Moffat, Kit Carson, Garfield, Eagle, Prowers, Logan, Lake, Costilla, Elbert, Mesa, Gilpin, San Miguel, Montrose, Delta, Ouray, Teller, and Yuma counties. Other rural legal services provided by grantees included supporting intake, referral and client services; facilitating pro bono coordination and training; and expanding interpretation and translation legal services.

Many organizations used the grant to hire or expand hours for legal staff, allowing them to take on more rural cases, conduct virtual representation, and manage the coordination required for remote services. Several grantees noted that they were able to resume or initiate services in regions such as the Western Slope, the San Luis Valley, Northwest Colorado, and the Eastern Plains. Importantly, grantees highlighted in their mid-year reports how they partnered with community entities, such as libraries, schools, and nonprofits, to spread the impact of their funding.

Lastly, grantees shared anonymous client experiences in their mid-year report, undergirding the impact EJA funding had on the lives of the Coloradans who access civil legal aid services at their organizations. Examples of direct impact included supporting clients to avoid eviction and remain housed, assisting with protection orders and custody matters involving domestic violence and/or youth, assisting clients who were crime victims obtain a U-visa, helping with guardianship issues, providing immigration assistance, supporting families through bankruptcy-related matters, and more. Grantees explained that additional funding allowed them the time, capacity, and staff to appear in court to support clients, enhanced their ability to provide culturally-sensitive services and language translation, and expanded their geographic reach to rural communities.

Looking Ahead

The first year of the Colorado Equal Justice Authority marks a significant milestone in expanding access to civil legal aid across the state. Early outcomes demonstrate that this funding has already strengthened the legal aid ecosystem by increasing service capacity to low-income Coloradans and supported the expansion of services into rural communities. EJA is well-positioned to build on its inaugural year successes and continue to support the vital nonprofits that provide direct legal aid services across our state.