TEXAS ACCESS to JUSTICE FOUNDATION

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Texas Access to Justice Foundation to receive $26.7 million from Supreme Court of Texas to launch Rural Justice Initiative

Historic funding will support once-in-a-generation effort to expand civil legal services across rural Texas

AUSTIN, Texas—Today, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, the largest state-based funding source for civil legal aid, announced that it has received $26.7 million in initial funding from the Supreme Court of Texas to launch the Rural Justice Initiative, a historic multi-year effort that will transform how Texans in rural communities access civil legal services. The initiative will establish a network of 170 rural legal outposts that will create a sustained legal aid presence in communities across the state.

The initiative is a coordinated effort between seven legal aid organizations, which will form a Rural Justice Coalition that includes Texas RioGrande Legal Aid; Lone Star Legal Aid; Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas; Disability Rights Texas; Family Legal Services of the South Plains; Texas Advocacy Project and Texas Legal Services Center. The coalition advances the Foundation's vision that all Texans should have equal access to justice.

The Rural Justice Initiative will address a persistent justice gap in rural Texas, where access to civil legal services can be limited by geography, connectivity and the availability of services. Currently, legal aid organizations staff offices in just 42 of Texas' 254 counties. Nearly half of Texas counties have fewer than one attorney per 1,000 residents, while many of the state's 190 rural counties are considered legal deserts. Geographic isolation and limited broadband access also create additional barriers for Texans seeking legal assistance.

"A strong justice system must be accessible to all Texans, including those who don't live near metropolitan areas," Texas Supreme Court Justice Brett Busby said. "This

investment will help begin the process of bringing legal assistance closer to rural communities and create more opportunities for Texans to access civil legal aid without having to travel far from home. By expanding access in rural communities, we can help ensure that geography is not a barrier to justice in Texas."

Using a hybrid legal services model, civil legal aid will reach rural Texas communities through in-person, virtual and technology-supported services. The coalition will establish rural legal outposts in trusted community spaces, deploy traveling attorneys and coordinate service routes to extend its reach across rural communities. Through community outreach, the organizations will connect eligible individuals and families with a full range of civil legal services.

"This is a generational investment in rural communities and an opportunity to fundamentally change how Texas families access civil legal services," Betty Balli Tores, executive director of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, said. "We are grateful to the Supreme Court of Texas for recognizing the importance of this work and making a transformative investment in access to justice for rural Texans. Over the next five years, our goal is to establish a trusted, consistent presence in rural communities and reach close to 38,000 additional Texans with civil legal services."

Eligible individuals and families across rural Texas will have access to a full range of civil legal services, with additional support tailored to certain populations, including veterans, people with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence. Throughout the initiative, additional services will be tailored to address the unique legal needs and barriers facing these populations in rural communities.

To learn more about the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, visit www.teajf.org.

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Texas Access to Justice Foundation

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation, created by the Supreme Court of Texas in 1984, is the primary state-based funding source for the provision of civil legal aid in Texas. The organization is committed to the vision that all Texans will have equal access to justice. The Foundation administers a variety of funding sources, which are earmarked to assist nonprofit organizations in providing legal aid to approximately 100,000 Texas families each year. For more information, please visit: www.teajf.org