

complete. As a result, studies have shown that 70-80% of the legal needs of the poor go unmet, leading to “justice, at a price”: those who can afford to pay for a lawyer are far more likely to have a successful outcome to their case.

Fortunately, there is a major movement underway to change this. In 2006, the American Bar Association unanimously adopted a resolution supporting a right to counsel in basic human needs cases, and the resolution was sponsored or subsequently endorsed by eighteen different state and local bar associations. The last ten years has seen a significant uptick in litigation and legislation to expand the right to counsel. Several states have sponsored heavily funded pilot projects to measure the effects of providing counsel in civil cases, including improving outcomes, boosting court efficiency, and saving money. Finally, numerous judges, bar associations, legal services organizations, nonprofits, academics, and the mainstream media have written extensively to call for the recognition of a right to counsel in at least some civil cases.

What Has The NCCRC Accomplished?

Although only in existence for roughly ten years, the NCCRC has made tremendous strides in laying the groundwork for a civil right to counsel. The crowning achievement to date has been the NCCRC’s critical role in the development of the American Bar Association’s 2006 policy resolution on the civil right to counsel, which “urges federal, state, and territorial governments to provide legal counsel as a matter of right at public expense to low income persons in those categories of adversarial proceedings where basic human needs are at stake, such as those involving shelter, sustenance, safety, health or child custody, as determined by each jurisdiction.” This policy resolution has spurred numerous state bars to either adopt the Resolution or establish their own, and was a resource for AB 590, California’s recently enacted civil right to counsel pilot program.

The NCCRC and its participants have also authored or contributed to amicus briefs for cases before several state supreme courts, provided litigation support to attorneys litigating key right to counsel cases, written cutting-edge law review articles on civil right to counsel issues, conducted social science research to support the legal arguments, presented numerous workshops at the annual NLADA conferences, Equal Justice Conferences, and other events, and engaged in extensive legal research on the status of the civil right to counsel nationwide.

How Do I Get Involved in The NCCRC?

To find out more about participating in the NCCRC, please email us at info@civilrighttocounsel.org and provide your full name, position/job title, employer/organization, address, phone, fax, email, and a few words about your interest in a civil right to counsel. For more information about obtaining assistance from the NCCRC with a civil right to counsel effort, please contact John Pollock, Coordinator of the NCCRC, at jpollock@publicjustice.org or 334-956-8308.