

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Salena Copeland
LAAC, Executive Director
510-599-6185 (cell)
SCopeland@LAACOnline.org

Dana Marquez Richardson
OneJustice, Program Director
415-834-0100 ext. 310 (office)
dmarquez@one-justice.org

Kate Crowley Richardson
Legal Link, Executive Director
415-851-1755 (office)
248-217-9548 (cell)
kate@legallink.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JUNE 23RD, 2026

California Supreme Court Opens Public Comment on Community Justice Worker Proposal to Expand Access to Legal Help

Berkeley, California — The California Supreme Court has taken the next step in considering a proposal to expand access to civil legal assistance. On Thursday, June 18th, the Court directed the State Bar of California to solicit public comment on a proposed rule authorizing Community Justice Worker (CJW) programs in California. [Here is the Court’s press release](#) and [the proposed rule](#). The State Bar has not yet opened public comment.

The proposed model would allow eligible legal services organizations to train and supervise Community Justice Workers—trusted community members, staff, and volunteers—to provide limited legal advice and assistance under the supervision of legal aid attorneys. The proposal is designed to help more Californians access reliable legal information and support while maintaining strong protections for clients, including attorney oversight and a prohibition on charging for services.

The proposed rule follows a petition filed in December 2025 by the California Community Justice Worker Working Group, including the [Legal Aid Association of California \(LAAC\)](#), [OneJustice](#), [Legal Link](#), and legal aid organizations from across the state. The petition asked the

California Supreme Court to authorize a carefully structured CJW model that would expand the capacity of nonprofit legal services organizations while ensuring quality, accountability, and consumer protection.

Community Justice Workers are part of a growing national movement to address the access-to-justice crisis. [Frontline Justice](#) has been a national leader in supporting this work, and its Director Nikole Nelson previously served as Executive Director of Alaska Legal Services Corporation when the Alaska Supreme Court authorized a similar model. In Alaska, CJWs have helped clients secure more than \$23.7 million in SNAP benefits. Other jurisdictions, including Arizona, Delaware, Hawai'i, and Utah, have developed Community Justice Worker programs demonstrating how trained nonlawyer advocates can help connect people with critical legal support, particularly in the areas of domestic violence and housing.

The California proposal reflects lessons learned from these programs and includes significant safeguards, including:

- CJW programs may only be operated by eligible nonprofit legal services organizations under attorney supervision.
- CJWs would provide assistance only within defined areas of legal need and with appropriate training and support.
- CJWs and legal services organizations would not be permitted to charge fees to the client for CJW-provided legal services.
- Participating organizations would be required to establish training, supervision, quality assurance, and accountability systems.

Overall, the proposal is intended to expand access to reliable legal help, not create a separate or lower standard of assistance. By allowing trusted community members to be trained and supervised by legal aid attorneys, the model could help nonprofit providers reach more people, identify legal problems earlier, and connect clients to the right level of help before issues become more serious.

"We are grateful that the California Supreme Court issued an order that advances the possibility of adopting a Community Justice Worker model here in California," said Salena Copeland, Executive Director of LAAC. "We know that there is a huge need for additional legal helpers. If adopted, this model will allow people who are already working in their communities, whether at domestic violence shelters, food banks, community health clinics, or at other community-based nonprofits, to do more."

"This is a milestone for access to justice in California, and we're grateful to the Court for taking this step," said Kate Crowley Richardson, Executive Director of Legal Link. "Trusted,

knowledgeable, community-embedded partners already exist in every neighborhood across this state, they just haven't had a formal, supervised pathway to do more. Legal Link has spent over a decade training exactly these partners, and this order is the next chapter, a move toward more inclusive, equitable access to legal protection for the people who've always needed it most."

"What this order recognizes is something legal aid organizations have known for years: the solution cannot come from lawyers alone. There are simply not enough of them available. What we do have — in abundance — are trusted people already working inside our communities. This order creates a supervised, accountable pathway for those individuals to do more. California can do this, and do it well," said Dana Marquez Richardson, Program Director at OneJustice.

The State Bar's 45-day public comment period is expected to open this week. The petitioners are planning an information session for the nonprofit legal services community to discuss the proposed rule, answer questions, and gather feedback to inform the public comment process. Additionally, the petitioners are planning listening sessions to hear from the broader nonprofit community, who may ultimately partner with legal services organizations in these projects.

While the proposed rule builds on the framework outlined in the petition, it is not identical to the model proposed by the Working Group nor our petition, making comment essential. The public comment period provides an important opportunity for legal services organizations, community partners, and other stakeholders to review the Court's proposed framework, identify areas where additional clarity or improvements may be needed, and help shape the implementation of a CJW model in California.

The working group has [created a website](#) with basic information on the petition, and have linked the original CJW [proposal](#) based on our working group's discussions. We will be updating the site soon with information on how to comment, along with some key points, and will continue updating and coordinating with our community during this exciting moment for access to justice in our state.

LAAC, OneJustice, Legal Link, and the Community Justice Worker Working Group welcome input from legal services organizations, community partners, and other interested stakeholders as California considers this potential new approach to expanding access to justice.

###

ABOUT LAAC

The Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) is the statewide membership organization of legal services nonprofits. Over 100 nonprofit organizations around the state are members of LAAC. These nonprofit member organizations provide critical legal assistance to low-income Californians and ensure equal access to justice. LAAC serves and strengthens its members through advocacy, training, and support.

laaconline.org

ABOUT LEGAL LINK

Legal Link's mission is to remove legal barriers that prolong poverty by adding critically needed capacity to the legal ecosystem. Founded in 2015, we have certified over 4,000 community partners in our unique Legal First Aid® curriculum across 7 states and growing. These trained partners, like case managers, community health workers, and social workers, identify legal issues early and connect families to the legal protections they need. Legal Link strengthens this frontline through training, technical assistance, and web-based tech tools that bring legal resources directly to community partners, closing the justice gap where people already are.

legallink.org

ABOUT ONEJUSTICE

OneJustice's mission is to strengthen the expertise and capacity of legal services organizations and volunteers that help more than a million individuals each year throughout California and nationwide. OneJustice provides analysis, training, and consulting to the legal services sector to improve outcomes for low-income families and communities and bring us closer to our vision of a just and equitable society.

onejustice.org