“Many people who can’t afford an attorney don’t even conceive of the law as something that can help them. We need to train lawyers not only to address their problems, but to see the profession through the eyes of those outside it.”

—Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director of the Center for Access to Justice
Alternative Spring Break Trips Set for March

The center will host two Alternative Spring Break trips this year – one, in Atlanta, will examine how community-based lawyering positively impacts low-income children by stabilizing housing and reducing absenteeism. The other trip will take Georgia State Law students to Lumpkin, Georgia, to provide pro bono assistance to detained immigrants in the Stewart Detention Center. Two of last year’s Alternative Spring Break student leaders – Andrew Navratil (J.D. ’18) and McKinley Anderson (J.D. ’18) – received the State Bar of Georgia’s Law School Excellence in Access to Justice Award for designing one of the inaugural trips.

State of the South Conference

On Friday, Feb. 23, the center’s annual conference, State of the South, will examine the intersection between the civil and criminal justice systems, providing panelists and attendees from across the Southeast an opportunity to consider how practitioners operating in each system approach — or should approach — that overlap.

The conference begins with an opening reception on Thursday, Feb. 22, featuring food from celebrity chef Kevin Gillespie.

For more information and to register, visit law.gsu.edu/a2j.
For many lower-income people in the South trying to navigate the civil and criminal legal systems, justice can seem out of reach. Working with practitioners and scholars across disciplines to understand what defines and contributes to the justice gap, the Center for Access to Justice is taking steps to close it.

Highlights

The center regularly collaborates with legal services organizations, practitioners, student groups, and other university departments to examine issues of access to justice. This fall, the center:

• Held the first annual Public Interest Keynote, featuring Professor Stephen Bright, formerly of the Southern Center for Human Rights, who emphasized the impact a lawyer can have — particularly for people who, without counsel, would be unable to mount an effective criminal defense.

• Co-sponsored a panel, Beyond Death Row: Personal Stories from Those Closest to Georgia’s Death Row Inmates, featuring Jameca McGhee, whose father was sentenced to death; and Kayla Gissendaner, whose mother, Kelly, was executed in 2015 after serving nearly 20 years on death row.

• Invited prosecutors to share insight into the Prosecutor’s Role in Access to Justice and what they do to further justice through the exercise of prosecutorial discretion.

• Organized the second annual Public Interest Organizations Fair, bringing representatives from more than a dozen local legal services organizations to campus to discuss the ways in which students can get involved.

• Co-sponsored a panel, Keeping Kids in School: Housing, Health and Education, at which panelists described how community-based lawyering can improve housing conditions, leading to higher educational achievement.


• Co-sponsored the fourth annual Eliminating Barriers to Justice CLE, which focused on access to justice challenges in federal forums for persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency.
Research

Lauren Sudeall Lucas, faculty director, and Georgia State sociology Ph.D. candidate Ruth Richardson (Ph.D.’18) presented preliminary findings from their ongoing study of the civil legal needs of indigent criminal defendants at the University of South Carolina and the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology. Funded by the Charles Koch Foundation, the study explores public defender client needs in areas such as housing, education and family law, and instances in which they could have benefited from the assistance of a legal aid attorney. The project demonstrates the extent to which criminal defendants’ civil legal needs are underserved, even when compared to the general low-income population.

In partnership with a Georgia Institute of Technology professor and a Ph.D. student, the center published an interactive Access to Justice Map of Georgia showing county-level data regarding attorney availability and other factors bearing on an individual’s ability to meaningfully access justice. The map provides a visual representation of the ways in which demographic and geographic differences — even within a single state — can have a dramatic impact on lower-income litigants’ ability not just to secure legal counsel but even to identify and access the resources necessary to pursue a legal claim or defense.

The center, with assistance from fellow Jobena Hill (J.D. ’19), prepared an overview of national trends in misdemeanor bail reform and related litigation for the Georgia Judicial Council Committee on Misdemeanor Bail Reform, which is considering changes to pretrial and bail policy in Georgia.

Faculty News


• **Tanya Washington**, professor of law, co-wrote an amicus brief focused on the rights of children of LGBT parents in *Masterpiece Cakeshop LTD v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* before the U.S. Supreme Court.

• **Courtney Anderson**, assistant professor of law, published “Taking Flint” in the *Houston Journal of Health and Policy*, arguing that regulatory and physical takings claims provide damages for low-income residents impacted by the Flint, Michigan, water crisis.
This fall, the center launched the Public Interest Law and Policy (PILP) Certificate program, which provides students with the training and legal knowledge necessary to serve traditionally underrepresented individuals, communities and interests. By completing a set of curricular requirements and at least 40 hours of pro bono service, certificate students develop problem-solving skills relevant to working with and on behalf of underserved populations.

The center also added an innovative course to the College of Law curriculum, Access to Justice: Law Reform. Lucas and Darcy Meals, center assistant director, co-teach the yearlong seminar, which is designed to give students insight into low-income litigants’ experience with the civil and criminal justice systems. Through assigned reading, guest lecturers and court observation, students have identified a set of discrete access-to-justice problems for which they will work in teams to design potential solutions, and are writing policy papers that explore structural access-to-justice issues.

With the advent of the new Pro Bono Program, Georgia State Law students do pro bono work every day of the week. In just the first few months of the program’s existence, students have signed up to provide more than 200 hours of volunteer legal service. Working under the supervision of lawyers in 10 programs from organizations like Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation, Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Southern Poverty Law Center, the GSU Veterans Clinic and the Housing Court Assistance Center at the Fulton County Courthouse, students develop legal knowledge and skills to serve underrepresented clients.

For example, Adriana Heffley (J.D.’19) volunteers with the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative. With guidance from Carolina Antonini (J.D. ’96), adjunct professor, Heffley spent two weeks connecting with a detained immigrant’s family to gather details about his life and collect supporting documentation before drafting a motion requesting bond.

“As an evening student, I’m extremely grateful to the Pro Bono Program for connecting students with a project that can be completed remotely. SPLC’s bond project is invaluable to our community—with representation, detained immigrants are far likelier to receive bond than detainees without attorneys.”

—Adriana Heffley (J.D.’19), volunteers with the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative
Support the Center and Join Our Listserv

Visit law.gsu.edu/a2j to join our listserv, and click “Support the Center” to make a financial contribution. Your support ensures the center can continue to promote community education, engage in critical research, and train the next generation of lawyers to serve the public interest.

Lauren Sudeall Lucas  
Faculty director and associate professor

Darcy Meals  
Assistant director