

JUSTICE FOR ALL

NEW MEXICO ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Michelle Cortez



Access to Justice recognizes attorney and mediator Michelle Cortez as a Champion this month. Michelle grew up in Nebraska and received her law degree in 1995. She practiced in the fields of divorce and custody law before directing her practice to mediation and founded ABQ Facilitation in 2022.

Michelle's practice, ABQ Facilitation, believes that everyone deserves reliable legal help regardless of income but also recognizes that it cannot always occur. Given that reality, Michelle has found ways to provide opportunities for the resolution of family law matters without protracted litigation by providing free mediation services weekly at Mediation Mondays at the Second Judicial District Court. She also volunteers at the many legal fairs held by the Second Judicial Pro Bono Committee, and she bakes amazing cakes, which she generously shares with the staff at the Second Judicial District Court.

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Providing legal help to those who need it most ensures that equal justice under the law is a right, not a privilege. This month, we spotlight New Mexico Legal Aid (NMLA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit law firm dedicated to serving low-income clients and groups throughout New Mexico.

With ten offices spread across the state, NMLA has been a pillar of support since its establishment in 2003, following the merger of the New Mexico Legal Aid Society of Albuquerque with other civil legal aid providers across the state.

NMLA's mission is deeply rooted in the belief that every individual deserves equal access to justice, regardless of their socioeconomic status. In a state where nearly half a million residents live below the poverty line, NMLA serves as a lifeline for those facing significant legal challenges.

The organization provides not only direct legal representation but also education, resources, and legal clinics across the state. NMLA was instrumental in creating the New Mexico Landlord Tenant Guide, striving to promote family and economic stability.

NMLA's services cater to individuals at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, ensuring they have access to benefits and can protect their rights. Their comprehensive support spans various areas of law.

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Want to highlight your civil legal service program? A pro bono event? ATJ efforts in your district? Tell us about it! atj@nmcourts.gov

By dedicating herself to Mediation Mondays, Michelle assists participants in engaging in a process that may result in a negotiated settlement. A byproduct of such a resolution is that some of the pressure on the family court dockets can be alleviated.

Michelle has found that mediation can lead to better results as it encourages communication and cooperation and can lead to creative solutions where the participants can have greater control in the very personal arena of ending a marriage or resolving the sharing of custody. To learn more about Mediation Mondays, please visit the Second Judicial District's Family Court Clinic website.

To learn more about Michelle Cortez and ABQ Facilitation, please visit her website at www.abqfacilitation.com/.



NEW MEXICO ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION



Additional information about Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs connected with New Mexico Courts can be found on the [Alternative Dispute Resolution website](#) and at the following links:

[First Judicial District Family Courts Services & Mediation Program](#)

[Third Judicial District Domestic Relations Mediation Program](#)

[Sixth Judicial District Domestic Relations Mediation Program](#)

[Thirteenth Judicial District Domestic Matters Mediation Program](#)



ATJ COMMISSION 2024 MEETING SCHEDULE

Please pre-register for in-person attendance

June 7, 2024/Retreat
September 13, 2024
December 6, 2024

Their four primary practice groups are Housing Law, Interpersonal Violence and Family Law, Consumer Law, and Economic Security. They also offer specialized services for the LGBTQ+ community, veterans, Native Americans, low-income taxpayers, migrant farmworkers, and disaster victims. These services reflect NMLA's commitment to ensuring that justice is accessible to all, particularly to New Mexico's most vulnerable populations. Additionally, NMLA is home to the Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP), which increases access to justice by connecting low-income New Mexicans with pro bono attorneys for direct representation and brief advice through legal clinics and fairs.

NMLA's dedication to equal justice is evidenced by its wide range of services, which are aimed at helping New Mexico's most vulnerable populations. By ensuring that legal representation and resources are accessible to all, NMLA upholds the principle that justice should be a fundamental right for everyone.

For more information about NMLA and how you can support its mission, visit its website at newmexicolegalaid.org. New Mexico, through collaboration and the efforts of organizations like New Mexico Legal Aid, can ensure that justice is accessible to all New Mexicans.



NEW MEXICO NEWS

On May 7, 2024, the New Mexico Bar welcomed the admission of 116 new attorneys. Justice Bacon of the New Mexico Supreme Court addressed the applicants and encouraged them to reach out and volunteer with the Volunteer Attorney Program and participate in other activities. Representatives for the Access to Justice Commission were present and provided interested attendees with information on how to get involved with the Commission and activities around New Mexico. Newly sworn-in attorneys were invited to join us at the upcoming Commission meeting on June 7th and all future meetings. So keep an eye out for our new participants at future events. Please visit the Judiciary's YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29_qlAxGCKk

The NM Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ) is an independent, statewide body dedicated to expanding and improving civil legal assistance in the state.

ATJ ACTIVITIES

2024 National Center for State Courts Legal Deserts Summit

New Mexico was able to send a team to the inaugural Legal Deserts Summit, presented by the National Center for State Courts and held in Nevada from May 20th through May 22nd. New Mexico was one of fourteen teams present, with eighty representatives in attendance.



Participants at the Summit were from the courts, state bar organizations, educational institutions, libraries, civil legal service providers, public defenders, and Access to Justice Commissions, with the National Center for State Courts organizing and providing experts to guide states in planning and refining their next steps. The Summit focused on the growing need nationwide to implement innovative solutions to increase access to justice resources with an emphasis on how states can collaboratively leverage resources and Access to Justice Commissions.

New Mexico's team included Justice Vargas, Justice Bacon, Judge O'Connell, Judge Mowrer, New Mexico State Bar President Erin Atkins, UNM Law Associate Dean, Professor Sherri Thomas, New Mexico Legal Aid Director Sonya Bellafant, and Access to Justice Program Director Twila Hoon (not pictured).



Topics included the utilization of GIS mapping, and the NCSC provided each state with a GIS resource map. Discussions included the benefits and parameters of justice workers and paraprofessionals, leveraging collaborative efforts via Access to Justice Commissions and alternative admissions to law practice. Justice Bacon also presented with Wyoming's representatives regarding attorney shortage incentive programs to engage future attorneys in rural areas.

New Mexico's robust participation would not have been possible without the generous support of the New Mexico State Bar.

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Mexico Legal Aid Landlord-Tenant Workshop

FREE online-only open to the public
June 6, 2024 5:30 - 7:00 PM
<https://newmexicolegalaid.org/event/free-online-landlord-tenant-law-workshop/>

SBNM Bankruptcy Virtual Workshop

Each month, on the 4th Wednesday,
from 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
To register, call 505-797-6094
For more information, call 505-797-6000

SBNM Divorce Virtual Workshop

Each month, on the 1st Wednesday,
from 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
To register, call 505-797-6094
For more information, call 505-797-6000

Legal Resources for the Elderly Program (LREP) Virtual Workshop

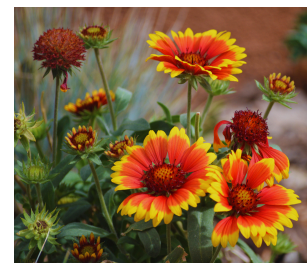
Each month, on the 2nd Tuesday,
beginning at 11:00 AM
To register, call 505-797-6006 or
1-800-876-6657

NMILC Wednesday Workshop

Each month, on the 3rd Wednesday,
the NM Immigrant Law Center hosts a walk-in
workshop focused on DACA and Green Cards.
visit: <https://www.nmilc.org/daca>

Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court

Each month, on the 2nd Friday, Metro holds Teleclinics.
To participate, parties can call the Self-Help Office at
505-841-9817



Questions, submissions, and requests
for accommodations can be sent to
Tessa and Twila at atj@nmcourts.gov