

## **American Bar Association Task Force on Access to Civil Justice**

**Reliable studies have documented that 70 - 80 % of the legal needs of the poor in America go unaddressed year after year. Despite the best efforts of the organized bar, we have not made significant strides in serving the legal needs of those whom poverty drags down and keeps down. It is now evident that the problem of addressing unmet legal needs of the nation's disadvantaged is larger than the legal profession can solve by itself. It is also a fact that the U.S. lags far behind other major industrialized countries of the world in providing adequate funding to address the legal needs of America's poor. It is now time for a serious national dialogue on ways to provide access to the civil justice system for all in America.**

**In *Gideon v. Wainwright* in 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that an indigent criminal defendant has a *constitutional* right to counsel. But we have yet to recognize such a right for poor indigent Americans facing equally serious civil legal problems, problems that they cannot address without the help of counsel – problems that can imprison one in poverty or discrimination. It is time that we consider providing such a right – as many nations of the world have done – for serious civil matters that threaten the integrity of one's family, housing or health.**

**The new American Bar Association Task Force on Access to Civil Justice will lead this initiative. The Task Force is chaired by the Hon. Howard H. Dana, Jr., Associate Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, and former member of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation and the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association.**

**The Task Force will work to support and expand the existing network of state access to justice commissions. The Task Force will also carefully consider the issue of a defined right to counsel in certain serious civil matters. The Task Force will review existing ABA policies and programs to determine what new initiatives, policies and resources may be necessary to meet the ABA's goal of expanding access to civil justice in America, and will make policy recommendations to the ABA House of Delegates.**

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