

October 20, 2015

On behalf of the 21st Judicial District Access to Justice Committee, we offer this letter in support of your efforts to evaluate the need for Limited License Legal Technicians (“LLLT”) in the State of Colorado. We had been studying this issue as a subcommittee within our local committee when we learned that this was also being evaluated state-wide.

Our local Access to Justice Committee was formed in 2010 to evaluate the needs in our community, look for ways to expand access to legal resources, and enhance the services which are available. The 2014 Report of the Colorado Access to Justice Committee shows the following problem still exists: there is a lack of legal resources. In our community alone, the Mesa County Pro Bono Project and Colorado Legal Services do not have adequate funds or personnel to fully meet the need. Local needs must be prioritized and focus is generally on Domestic Relations matters, despite there being significant needs in other areas, such as Landlord/ Tenant and protection orders that are not related to domestic issues, and yet are equally lacking in access to any meaningful justice.

According to the 2014 report, state-wide 50% of civil litigants and 76% of domestic relations litigants are unrepresented. This is consistent with Mesa County, where in 2013, 81% of Domestic Relations litigants were pro se; 47% of civil litigants were pro se; and 68% of county court litigants were pro se.

Our local self-help center was opened in June of 2013, to help bridge this gap. While the center provides tutorials on a variety of legal matters, such as filing a protection order, or an allocation of parental responsibilities case, there are no lawyers who can provide legal advice to the litigants. As informative and helpful as our Sherlock (Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator) is, she is limited in the assistance she is able to provide, in particular, even though she may know what the litigant needs to say in order to properly represent their position, she is unable to advise them without crossing the line into practicing law.

Pro se litigants are often overwhelmed by the process, and frustrated by this lack of understanding, particularly when faced with an opponent who does have legal representation. Access to legal representation at a rate affordable to the citizens of Mesa County has been difficult for parties who have employment, but do not earn enough to pay legal costs. Even if they qualify for legal resources such as Colorado Legal Services, local funds continue to be cut, and are often severely restricted as to what type of litigants may be assisted. Currently there are three attorneys at the local Colorado Legal Services office. This is not nearly enough to serve

the number of people who need such services. The Mesa County Pro Bono Project uses volunteer attorneys to match up with litigants who need assistance. However, the greatest need remains in the domestic relations area and the same few attorneys are called upon again and again to assist. Even with their efforts, a need remains, and those whose issues do not include domestic matters are often left on their own.

While there may be self-help resources available to file documents, there are no such resources to assist in court. It is easy to forget how intimidating the court process can be, particularly when the language and the procedure is so very unfamiliar.

It was this realization that started the investigation into the LLLT. A subcommittee was formed from the Access to Justice Committee, along with local paralegals. This group reviewed information for approximately a year. We held meetings, talked with practitioners in Washington and Nevada, and reviewed Washington's rules and regulations. We brought findings back to the local Access to Justice Committee, and then reported to the Mesa County Bar Association. While there were some concerns, the response was mostly positive.

We recognize that LLLT's may not be a perfect solution. However, in our community, resources are more limited than in the larger jurisdictions. We believe looking beyond traditional legal practitioners is necessary to meet the growing need for services. Our subcommittee would be happy to speak to our findings and support of this proposal to your larger group if you wish.

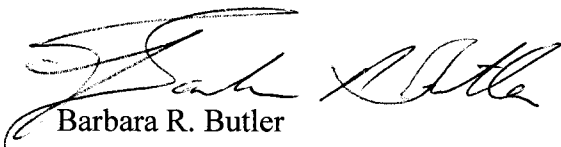
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Velvet Johnson

President, Mesa County Access to Justice Committee



Barbara R. Butler

Chair, Mesa County Access to Justice Committee Subcommittee on Paralegal Licensing