

July 1, 2025

South Dakota Commission on Equal Access to our Courts
500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501-5070

Re: A2J, Inc./DPLS/ERLS Joint Grant Application

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of Access to Justice, Inc., East River Legal Services, and Dakota Plains Legal Services, we submit for your consideration the following joint application for funding from the Commission on Equal Access to our Courts for general program support. All three organizations have utilized the criteria of SDCL § 16-2-56.1 to develop our application.

Our joint application seeks funding to continue our civil legal work with veterans, the elderly, individuals with a disability, and/or victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking.

Access to Justice (A2J) is not seeking funding during this grant application period. In terms of the remaining \$250,000 in funding, DPLS and ERLS have not reached a mutual agreement as to the proportional split, but all three programs do agree to abide by the CEAC's decision as to the distribution amount of CEAC funding. DPLS formally requests \$125,000 of funding. ERLS formally requests \$125,000 of funding for civil legal services in the ERLS service area.

East River Legal Services intends to utilize all CEAC funding awarded during this grant cycle to support general operating of the ERLS program. ERLS currently provides efficient, effective and economical civil legal services to indigent South Dakota citizens by processing all applications through centralized intake (clients are contacted within one business day of submitting an application), connecting with community partners and unhoused clients through street outreach, and offering a range of legal services from advice to supported pro se services, to direct services in all substantive areas (housing, family law, consumer law, and public benefits). ERLS welcomes inquiry about the civil legal services provided.

Additionally, ERLS seeks \$1,000 to pay Sharon Chontos for facilitation services to assist the three programs when discussing the sdlawhelp.org application filters. The current filters were established in 2017 and include income, demographic, and geographic filters. Due to a breakdown in the communication between the programs, ERLS reached out to Ms. Chontos, who agreed to help facilitate a conversation about how the programs can work together towards our shared goal of providing civil legal services to indigent South Dakotans.

Dakota Plains Legal Services intends to utilize CEAC funding awarded this grant cycle in the manner as described in the attached proposal. Specifically, DPLS intends to use funds to hire a Central Intake Specialist as well as to support Justice Bus Personnel costs as set forth in our attachment. Any remaining funding would be used to support general operating of the DPLS program. DPLS fully supports ERLS's proposal for funding but does not support the request for a facilitator. DPLS has recently hired Mr. William Sulik, as Interim Executive Director. DPLS does not believe that, given the recent change in management, this would be a productive use of funds. Rather, CEAC should support fully funding both the ERLS and DPLS programmatic request as a means to encourage all three organizations to continue their productive collaboration. DPLS is entering a new chapter marked by renewed energy, fresh perspective, and a steadfast commitment to our mission of advancing civil legal aid. Under new leadership, we are reinforcing our organizational stability, strengthening internal systems, and hope to foster a culture of shared purpose.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this joint application and we look forward to hearing from the Commission. Please feel free to contact any of the organization representatives should you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Lori Stanford, Deputy Director, William Sulik, Interim Executive Director, Dakota Plains Legal Services
Denise Langley, Coordinator, Access to Justice, Inc.
Lea Wroblewski, Director, East River Legal Services