

December 15, 2018

South Dakota Commission on Equals 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 previously awarded grant funds have been expended on program support costs. All three organizations have utilized the criteria of HB 1083 to develop our application which will prioritize funding to work with South Dakota veterans and continue the work of a collaborative, statewide Veterans Legal Services Program.

Veterans often face unique or greater barriers to access to justice. Legal assistance is often necessary to meet veterans' and servicemembers' essential or otherwise unmet needs. Serving the legal needs of South Dakota veterans continues to be a gap in current programs. Additionally, many of the legal issues veterans face require attorneys be trained to both work with veteran populations, many of whom have experienced trauma, and identify issues that may garner federal and state protections. Our joint application includes funding to be used for representation of veterans and a small, but essential, stipend to train staff, cover administrative costs and allow attorneys to travel to remote locations for legal representation and outreach.

Although our organizations will prioritize applications and assistance to veterans, we want to ensure the Commission that we will continue to serve the elderly, individuals with disabilities, victims of violence as well as those who fall below 125% of the federal income poverty guidelines and may utilize EAC funds to do so. We explain this in more detail in our grant narrative.

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,

Tom Mortland, Interim Executive Director, Dakota Plains Legal Services
Denise Langley, Co-Coordinator, Access to Justice, Inc.
Elizabeth Overmoe, Co-Coordinator, Access to Justice, Inc.
Brent Thompson, Director, East River Legal Services

Encl.