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Justice we can believe in

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Contact: Kelsey Montague

Associate Director of Marketing and Public Relations, IAALS

303-888-0393

kelsey.montague@du.edu

IAALS LAUNCHES *ALLIED LEGAL PROFESSIONALS* PROJECT IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE ACCESS TO QUALITY LEGAL SERVICES AND HELP REDUCE BARRIERS TO REPRESENTATION

DENVER, CO (April 7, 2022)—IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver, announced today that it is launching [*Allied Legal Professionals*](#). With generous support from the Sturm Family Foundation, this project seeks to help standardize a new tier of legal professionals nationally—to increase the options for accessible and affordable legal help for the public.

Up and down the income scale, the legal needs of people in this country are going unmet. The inability to afford a lawyer, among other factors, has led to ballooning rates of self-representation in our justice system, with over 70 percent of civil and family cases including a party without a lawyer. People in these situations are not only facing life-altering challenges such as child custody hearings or landlord/tenant issues alone—they also face disproportionately bad outcomes in their cases.

“We have a societal misconception that *only* low-income populations face issues when it comes to accessing justice,” says IAALS Manager Michael Houlberg. “But, according to the World Justice Project, in 2021 the United States ranked 126 out of 139 countries for accessibility to court and legal services, and the problem reaches far up the income scale. Around 40–60% of the middle class have legal needs that remain unmet. The reality in America today is that people either need considerable money to retain legal assistance, or they need to have so little money that they qualify for the limited legal aid available.”

Allied legal professionals hold a key to bringing more accessible and affordable legal help where it is needed most. Like data we have on nurse practitioners, research on allied legal professionals is beginning to show great potential for excellent public service. While this new tier of providers is a fairly nascent development, these programs are spreading quickly across the country. The limited research we have shows that these licensed and regulated professionals—who are not lawyers—can nevertheless represent clients as well as or better than lawyers in the limited matters they handle.

IAALS’ *Allied Legal Professionals* project will establish national best-practice thinking around allied legal professional programs by:

- Analyzing existing and proposed programs, the limited empirical research available, and similar experiences and programs from other countries and other professions (like nurse practitioners);
- Creating a framework for evaluating the relative advantages and challenges in the different models that exist;
- Convening diverse leaders and stakeholders to review the data and experiences, and establish recommendations and best practices; and
- Building a model for states to follow when considering and establishing allied legal professional programs in the future.

“We are excited to continue our work in thoroughly exploring all models that can help increase access to justice in America. This project is particularly important, given the reach of the justice crisis, affecting people across income levels,” says Natalie Knowlton, IAALS Director of Special Projects. “The IAALS’ [*Cases Without Counsel*](#) study revealed that people who need legal help are open to receiving it from qualified and authorized providers who are not lawyers. The response in favor was overwhelming, and we listened. The voices of the public—who are often left out of these critical conversations—are one of the reasons we felt compelled to launch *Allied Legal Professionals*.”

IAALS seeks to facilitate the adoption of allied legal professional programs around the country and assist states in making informed decisions on how to structure these efforts. This summer, IAALS will publish a preliminary compilation of existing programs, presented across a framework that allows for comparison between and among the various state and international efforts. A convening of experts in November will build from this paper to develop best practices and key considerations for allied legal professional programs. Finally, in early 2023, IAALS will release final recommendations and considerations for states interested in implementing or amending such a program.

“Just as people have come to understand and respect nurse practitioners,” says Janet Drobinske, IAALS Legal Assistant, “we hope the development of a national model will create the foundation to bring understanding and respect to allied legal professionals, both within the legal profession and in the eyes of the public.”

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About IAALS

IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver, is a national, independent research center dedicated to facilitating continuous improvement and advancing excellence in the American legal system. Our mission is to forge innovative and practical solutions to problems within the American legal system.