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## Headline

Task Force Promotes Non-Lawyer Legal Advocates to Improve Access to Justice in Rural Areas

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Across the U.S., millions of people face urgent civil legal problems — from eviction and debt to domestic violence and denial of benefits — without access to affordable help. In Wisconsin, over 90% of civil legal problems go unmet, a figure that mirrors the national crisis. Despite a fourfold increase in lawyers over the past five decades, the system remains out of reach for many rural and low-income Americans, leaving them to navigate life-altering challenges on their own.

### A Community-Based Solution: Justice Workers

To address this gap, Frontline Justice has launched the National Community Justice Worker Task Force in partnership with Ascendium Education Group and the Education Design Lab. The initiative is developing training, credentialing, and pathways for a new category of legal helpers: community justice workers. These trained, community-rooted advocates provide practical assistance with everyday civil legal issues, helping people resolve problems before they escalate. Unlike traditional law degrees, community justice worker training is built on micro-credentials and stackable skills tailored to adult learners, making it both accessible and scalable.

### The Human Side of Justice Reform

Community Justice Worker Hayden Ramsey of Montana draws on her years of experience as a domestic violence prevention advocate and her local knowledge of community resources in her new role. She has combined those skills with basic legal training, which empowers her to help people resolve simple legal problems that affect their financial stability. She explained that a big part of her job is preventing someone from needing civil legal services in the first place. “Being in a courtroom is scary,” Ramsey said. “I come in to help stop problems from escalating.”

Nikole Nelson, founding CEO of Frontline Justice, said: “The National Community Justice Worker Task Force marks an important step toward building a more accessible, people-centered justice system. Community justice workers expand the reach of justice — bringing it home. This task force ensures their impact grows nationwide.”

Explore more stories from community justice workers across the county [here](#).

### A Blueprint for Action

The work of the task force builds on the blueprint outlined in [“The Justice Crisis: A Blueprint for How Community Justice Workers Can Help Fix It,”](#) a report released by Frontline Justice in partnership with Ascendium in January 2025. Together, these efforts demonstrate how community-based, non-lawyer advocates can expand access to justice, much as community health workers have transformed access to basic healthcare.

“Community justice workers are a creative and practical way to increase access to justice in rural areas and beyond,” said Rebecca Rapp, General Counsel and Chief Privacy Officer of Ascendium, who also serves as a member of Frontline Justice’s National Leadership Council. “As trusted members of the communities they serve, community justice workers can expand the reach of civil legal help in ways attorneys alone cannot. This is particularly true in rural areas like those in Wisconsin that have been coined ‘legal deserts’ due to their lack of attorneys or other legal professionals.”

### **Spotlight Events in Madison**

Momentum behind the community justice worker movement will be highlighted in two related but distinct events in Madison, Wisconsin, on Oct. 29-30, 2025. The first, [Rural Reach: Access to Justice That Meets People Where They Are](#), held by Legal Services Corporation in partnership with Ascendium and Quarles & Brady LLP at the Overture Center on Oct. 29, will feature panels, demonstrations, and networking opportunities for over 150 participants, including judges, legal aid providers, policymakers, educators, and community leaders. The second, a closed-door meeting of the National Community Justice Worker Task Force on Oct. 30 at Ascendium’s Madison headquarters, will bring together national leaders, community justice advocates, and design partners to review progress, exchange insights, and shape the next phase of the movement. Together, the events aim to showcase justice workers as a “right-sized” solution to the rural justice gap while highlighting Wisconsin’s emerging role in national justice reform.

By training and credentialing trusted community advocates, and by pursuing regulatory reforms to allow them to practice effectively, the National Community Justice Worker Task Force is charting a path toward a future where every American — regardless of income or geography — has access to timely, meaningful legal help.

### **About Frontline Justice:**

Frontline Justice is a national, non-partisan organization with a mission to mobilize, support, and equip trusted community advocates to become frontline legal helpers — justice workers who ensure that all Americans have access to affordable and effective support for accessing justice on everyday matters.

### **About Ascendium:**

Ascendium Education Group is committed to making education and training after high school a reality for learners from low-income backgrounds. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we fund initiatives across the U.S. that help learners from low-income backgrounds achieve upward mobility; provide student and employee success solutions to colleges and businesses; invest in education-focused innovations to improve learner outcomes; and provide information, tools, and counseling to help millions of borrowers successfully repay their federal student loans. While we have many roles, we have one goal — elevating opportunity by creating a world where everyone can rise to their highest potential. To learn more, visit [ascendiumeducation.org](https://ascendiumeducation.org).

**About Legal Services Corporation:**

[Legal Services Corporation \(LSC\)](#) is an independent nonprofit established by Congress in 1974. For more than 50 years, LSC has provided financial support for civil legal aid to low-income Americans. The Corporation currently provides funding to 130 independent nonprofit legal aid programs in every state, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.