

Governor Janet Napolitano declares April "Access to Justice Month."

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The governor declared April "Access to Justice" month to raise awareness of the gap that still exists between those who have access to the legal system and those who don't. In Arizona, the poverty rate is higher than the national average. One in 7 Arizonans and nearly one in five children live in poverty. For these families, little is left over for emergencies after paying for basics like food and shelter, clothing, and transportation. When a pressing legal issue presents itself, hiring a private attorney is an unaffordable luxury and families are left with nowhere to turn. Whether facing eviction, emergency medical situations, or domestic violence, legal assistance from well-trained professionals may be the only hope for some Arizonans to be able to break out of the injustice which is burying them.

85 % of people seeking direct representation cannot be helped due to lack of resources, and only 25% of the schools in Arizona offer law-related education programs. "If one person does not have access to justice or knowledge of his or her legal rights, then the scales of justice have tipped for all," said Governor Napolitano.

One area of particular interest to the governor is combating domestic violence. She will be participating in the Walk to end Domestic Violence this Saturday to raise money for domestic violence programs and shelters. It is vital to raise money to fund programs helping domestic violence victims, but it is equally important to make sure those assisting victims have the best training available.

The Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education will host a statewide training this Friday for those assisting domestic violence victims under the Arizona Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project. Attending the training will be attorneys, legal lay advocates and others assisting victims through shelters and legal aid offices. The seminar will cover a variety of topics from housing concerns, child custody litigation and consumer issues. The training will feature workshops from Commissioner Hugh Hegyi and Todd Lang from the Attorney General's office.

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, please call 1-800-799-SAFE. For a statewide calendar of events or to find out how you can get involved and volunteer for access to justice. Visit the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education's website at www.azflse.org.