

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE

FILED

10/02/2026

Clerk of the
Appellate Courts

IN RE: AMENDMENT TO TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT RULE 50

No. ADM 2026-1453

ORDER

On April 3, 2009, the Court adopted Rule 50, Rules of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, establishing the Tennessee Access to Justice Commission (“ATJC”). Rule 50 directed the ATJC to develop a strategic plan to improve access to justice in Tennessee. The Court directed the ATJC to review and consider the 2007 report filed by the Task Force to Study Self Represented Litigants when creating this plan. The Court appreciates and applauds the dedicated work performed by the ATJC since 2009.

While great strides have been made, many Tennesseans still encounter challenges in accessing the civil justice system. For example, the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (“TALS”) concluded in its 2025 State of Tennessee Civil Legal Needs Assessment that 78.3 percent of surveyed residents experienced at least one civil legal problem in the last year, yet only 21.7 percent were aware of low-cost legal services in their area. TALS, *State of Tennessee Civil Legal Needs Assessment* (February 2, 2026), <https://perma.cc/2KLG-S7US>. Almost half of respondents with a reported legal need did not pursue legal action, and 31 percent pursued action without any legal assistance. *Id.* Respondents cited several barriers to access, namely prohibitive costs of legal services, lack of awareness of available resources, language barriers, and geographic and technological limitations. *Id.* These challenges are disproportionately felt by rural communities, which have significantly fewer legal aid resources than their metropolitan counterparts, and by vulnerable populations like seniors, people with disabilities, immigrant communities, and veterans. *Id.*

Tennessee courts play an important role in expanding access to justice and eliminating barriers. Accordingly, the Court finds it necessary to amend Rule 50 to reflect the current legal need, and to identify and expand ways in which barriers might be reduced or removed. The Court amends Rule 50 of the Tennessee Supreme Court Rules in the form set out in Appendix A to this Order. Appendix B to this Order is the Rule after the amendments have been incorporated.

The Clerk shall provide a copy of this Order to Lexis Nexis and to Thomas Reuters. In addition, this Order shall be posted on the Tennessee Supreme Court's website.

It is so ORDERED.

PER CURIAM

Appendix A

[New text is indicated by underlining. Deleted text is indicated by strikethrough.]

TN Supreme Court Rule 50

Section 1. Establishment of the Tennessee Access to Justice Commission

1.01. The Supreme Court of Tennessee hereby establishes the Access to Justice Commission (hereinafter referred to as the “Commission”).

1.02. The Commission shall consist of ~~ten members who shall reflect, to the extent feasible, the diversity of the ethnic, gender, and geographic communities of Tennessee~~ a total of fourteen members. There shall be ten voting members appointed by the Court. Additionally, the following individuals shall serve as non-voting ex officio members: the immediate past chair, the director of Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, and two judicial liaisons chosen by the Court.

1.03. The Supreme Court shall designate one member to serve as Chair of the Commission. Commission members shall elect a Vice-Chair to serve a one-year term and who is eligible to serve a total of three years.

1.04. All court appointed Commissioners shall serve for terms of three years. The initial term for each member shall be designated at the time of appointment. The Chair shall serve an initial term of three years. Three members shall be appointed for an initial term of three years; three members shall be appointed for an initial term of two years; and three members shall be appointed for an initial term of one year. Subsequent terms of all members shall be three years. No voting member may serve more than two successive three-year terms. Vacancies shall be filled by appointment of the Supreme Court. The Court may remove a Commissioner, with or without cause, at any time.

1.05. The Commission shall meet at least quarterly and at other times at the call of the Chair.

1.06. Six voting ~~Five~~ members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum. After a quorum is established, the Commission may act upon a majority vote of those present.

1.07. Members shall receive no compensation for their services but may be reimbursed for their travel and other necessary expenses in accordance with regulations adopted by the Judicial Branch.

1.08. A member of the Supreme Court will serve as liaison to the Commission.

1.09. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall staff the Commission.

~~**1.10.** The Supreme Court shall review the Commission every five years to determine if the Commission continues to serve the purposes for which it was created.~~

Section 2. Duties and Authority

2.01. The Commission shall ~~develop a strategic plan for improving access to justice in Tennessee that shall include education of the public concerning the need for legal representation to meet the ideal of equal justice under law, identification of the priorities to meet the need of improved access to justice, and recommendations to the Supreme Court of projects and programs the Commission determines to be necessary and appropriate for enhancing access to justice in Tennessee. The Commission shall submit a strategic plan to the Court within twelve months of the filing of this Order and shall update the strategic plan every two years thereafter.~~ review, study, and develop projects and recommendations for the Supreme Court to affect the following:

(a) Increase access to legal information. All court users should have access to understandable legal information and resources so that they may understand and navigate the legal system. This should include, but is not limited to, increasing access to information about the courts, providing information and education on the role of the legal system and resources available, and providing or promoting self-help resources.

(b) Increase access to legal advice. As many court users as possible should have access to legal representation or legal advice. This should include, but is not limited to, increasing the availability and accessibility of pro bono services, limited scope and reduced fee representation, and civil legal aid. It should also include ideas and strategies to identify and ameliorate legal deserts.

(c) Increase access to court proceedings and services. Court proceedings and services should be accessible to all. This should include, but is not limited to, reducing logistical, financial, technological, psychological, and other barriers that limit participation in court proceedings.

(d) Simplify and modernize court rules, procedures, and requirements. To increase access and efficiency and lower costs, the Commission should review court rules, procedures, and requirements and recommend changes, if appropriate. This should include, but is not limited to, proposing steps to simplify and streamline court procedures that reduce logistical burdens on all court users, and promoting and developing technology to do the same. Any such recommendations or projects should increase efficiency and understanding for all court users, while preserving due process and substantive and procedural fairness.

(e) Educate the legal community, elected officials, and the public on the need for access to justice work and affordable, widely available legal representation. This should include the collection and analysis of available data to identify gaps or disparities in access to justice, measure the impact of any such gaps or disparities, and measure the effect of any reforms.

(f) Create partnerships. The Commission should partner and facilitate coordination with legal aid entities, bar associations, nonprofit organizations, courts, and other government agencies to accomplish the above goals.

(g) As used in this rule, “court users” includes: litigants, attorneys, mediators, the judiciary, court staff, and the public.

2.02. The Commission may create committees comprised of commission members to focus on each of the above goals, and any other committees as it may determine. The Commission may also create advisory committees and sub-committees as needed to study specific issues identified by the Commission and to make recommendations to the Commission ~~as the members of the advisory committees deem appropriate.~~

2.03. The Commission may invite non-commission members, including representatives from other branches of government, lawyers, and members of the public, to attend meetings and to participate as members of advisory committees and sub-committees as needed to help further the work of the Commission.

2.04. The Commission shall: develop a project and focus plan every two years that shall clearly identify the scope of its work for that term. This plan shall be guided by the goals set forth in Section 2.01. Said plan shall be submitted to the Court for review and approval.

~~(a) Review the report filed with the Court by the Task Force to Study Self Represented Litigants and consider the recommendations contained therein.~~

~~(b) Encourage state and local bar associations, access to justice organizations, pro bono programs, judges, and court clerks across the state to promote and to recognize pro bono service by lawyers across the state;~~

~~(c) Encourage state and local bar associations, access to justice organizations, pro bono programs, judges, and court clerks across the state to encourage full and limited scope legal representation at reduced fees;~~

~~(d) Encourage the Alternative Dispute Resolution Commission and other groups to provide pro bono and reduced rate mediation services to self represented litigants and to litigants who, although represented, have modest means or who are pro bono clients;~~

~~(e) Address existing and proposed laws, rules, procedures, and policies that are barriers to access to justice for low income Tennesseans and to consider the role of community education and increased availability of technology in reducing these barriers.~~

~~(f) Develop and recommend initiatives and systemic changes to reduce barriers to access to justice and to meet the legal needs of:~~

~~(1) Persons who do not qualify for existing assistance programs by reason of their incomes but whose access to civil justice is limited by the actual or perceived cost of legal services;~~

~~(2) Persons with disabilities who do not qualify for existing assistance programs by reason of their incomes;~~

~~(3) Persons in language minorities; and~~

~~(4) Persons whose legal needs may not be met due to restrictions on representation by legal aid programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation.~~

~~(g) Promote increased understanding of the importance of access to justice and of the barriers faced by many Tennesseans in gaining effective access to the civil justice system; and~~

~~(h) Study and recommend strategies to increase resources and funding for access to justice in civil matters in Tennessee.~~

2.05. The Commission has no independent authority to adopt or implement recommendations.

Appendix B

TN Supreme Court Rule 50

Section 1. Establishment of the Tennessee Access to Justice Commission

1.01. The Supreme Court of Tennessee hereby establishes the Access to Justice Commission (hereinafter referred to as the “Commission”).

1.02. The Commission shall consist of a total of fourteen members. There shall be ten voting members appointed by the Court. Additionally, the following individuals shall serve as non-voting ex officio members: the immediate past chair, the director of Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, and two judicial liaisons chosen by the Court.

1.03. The Supreme Court shall designate one member to serve as Chair of the Commission. Commission members shall elect a Vice-Chair to serve a one-year term and who is eligible to serve a total of three years.

1.04. All court appointed Commissioners shall serve for terms of three years. No voting member may serve more than two successive three-year terms. Vacancies shall be filled by appointment of the Supreme Court. The Court may remove a Commissioner, with or without cause, at any time.

1.05. The Commission shall meet at least quarterly and at other times at the call of the Chair.

1.06. Six voting members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum. After a quorum is established, the Commission may act upon a majority vote of those present.

1.07. Members shall receive no compensation for their services but may be reimbursed for their travel and other necessary expenses in accordance with regulations adopted by the Judicial Branch.

1.08. A member of the Supreme Court will serve as liaison to the Commission.

1.09. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall staff the Commission.

Section 2. Duties and Authority

2.01. The Commission shall review, study, and develop projects and recommendations for the Supreme Court to affect the following:

(a) *Increase access to legal information.* All court users should have access to understandable legal information and resources so that they may understand and navigate the legal system. This should include, but is not limited to, increasing access to information about the courts, providing information and education on the role of the legal system and resources available, and providing or promoting self-help resources.

(b) *Increase access to legal advice.* As many court users as possible should have access to legal representation or legal advice. This should include, but is not limited to,

increasing the availability and accessibility of pro bono services, limited scope and reduced fee representation, and civil legal aid. It should also include ideas and strategies to identify and ameliorate legal deserts.

(c) *Increase access to court proceedings and services.* Court proceedings and services should be accessible to all. This should include, but is not limited to, reducing logistical, financial, technological, psychological, and other barriers that limit participation in court proceedings.

(d) *Simplify and modernize court rules, procedures, and requirements.* To increase access and efficiency and lower costs, the Commission should review court rules, procedures, and requirements and recommend changes, if appropriate. This should include, but is not limited to, proposing steps to simplify and streamline court procedures that reduce logistical burdens on all court users, and promoting and developing technology to do the same. Any such recommendations or projects should increase efficiency and understanding for all court users, while preserving due process and substantive and procedural fairness.

(e) *Educate the legal community, elected officials, and the public on the need for access to justice work and affordable, widely available legal representation.* This should include the collection and analysis of available data to identify gaps or disparities in access to justice, measure the impact of any such gaps or disparities, and measure the effect of any reforms.

(f) *Create partnerships.* The Commission should partner and facilitate coordination with legal aid entities, bar associations, nonprofit organizations, courts, and other government agencies to accomplish the above goals.

(g) As used in this rule, “court users” includes: litigants, attorneys, mediators, the judiciary, court staff, and the public.

2.02. The Commission may create committees comprised of commission members to focus on each of the above goals, and any other committees as it may determine. The Commission may also create advisory committees and sub-committees as needed to study specific issues identified by the Commission and to make recommendations to the Commission.

2.03. The Commission may invite non-commission members, including representatives from other branches of government, lawyers, and members of the public, to attend meetings and to participate as members of advisory committees and sub-committees as needed to help further the work of the Commission.

2.04. The Commission shall develop a project and focus plan every two years that shall clearly identify the scope of its work for that term. This plan shall be guided by the goals set forth in Section 2.01. Said plan shall be submitted to the Court for review and approval.

2.05. The Commission has no independent authority to adopt or implement recommendations.