

Bridging the Gap, Fixing the Dam

An Essay on Limited Licensing for Legal Paraprofessionals in Florida

Florida is known as the Sunshine State. A place where 1,350 miles of coastline meet fresh orange groves, expansive theme parks, thriving Everglades, and the oldest city in the United States. Yet, beneath the beaming glow lies a persistent shadow: the underserved population within the Floridian legal system. Across the nation, states are pioneering licensing programs that empower legal paraprofessionals to support individuals in limited areas of law, aiming to bridge the extensive justice gap for those who are unable to afford legal representation. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. notably stated, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I believe Florida has the potential to bend that arc by modernizing the legal workforce, improving access to legal representation, and leading the movement toward a system that serves all.

There has been a push in some states to allow paralegals the right to practice law on a limited basis. States like Arizona and Utah have revolutionized what it is to be a legal paraprofessional. They have taken daring steps by allowing trained legal professionals to practice law on a limited basis. These professionals, armed with education and experience, are licensed to appear before a judge, make recommendations, negotiate rights, and even give legal advice; particularly in areas such as marriage dissolution, landlord-tenant disputes, and administrative law. Their work assists the underserved populations.

I believe Florida has great potential to lead this movement. By adopting a similar framework that licenses legal professionals to practice with a clearly defined limit, the state can increase access to justice without compromising legal integrity. For the underserved population, a licensed paralegal may be the only available help during their legal battle.

Protecting Floridians and upholding professional standards are a requirement and have to be at the forefront of this movement. Licensing boundaries must be clear, observed, and upheld. Paralegals should be accredited through training, certified by education, or licensed by examinations to engage in the limited practice of law. This practice is rendered within a defined scope including giving advice, opinions, and recommendations about legal rights, appearing before a court, and negotiating legal rights if operating under strict ethical and procedural guidelines. Florida can ensure that legal assistance remains both accessible and protected with the creation of a boundary with extreme structure, demanding standards, and reinforce it by supervision.

Limited licensing offers promising systematic benefits. By supporting overworked attorneys and the courts, efficiency within the judicial process will increase. Attorneys, clerks, and judges will have more time to focus on additional cases and concentrate on current cases.

Unauthorized and unrestricted practice of law is not a solution. The Florida Supreme Court must establish a framework that balances oversight with strict regulation. Florida could follow suit with Arizona and Utah by creating a limited scope of practicing law. By allowing Paraprofessionals to represent clients, negotiate, and provide advice, access to justice can serve the greater good. Justice cannot be an uncommon luxury; it must be a right. By empowering licensed paralegals to represent clients within defined boundaries, Florida can rise to meet the

growing population for legal services. The result will be a system that shines bright and serves all.

<https://www.utcourts.gov/en/about/miscellaneous/legal-community/lpp.html>

<https://www.azcourts.gov/cld/Legal-Paraprofessional>

<https://www.azcourts.gov/Portals/0/0/admcode/pdfcurrentcode/7-210%20Legal%20Paraprofessional%20Amended%2008-2024.pdf?ver=EzUU2uMO8k59V70-Jy2sWA%3d%3d>

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