Happy Monday, ladies and gents. Several stories below focus on both public- and private-sector efforts to deliver legal aid to unaccompanied children who crossed the U.S. border and now face deportation proceedings. We are also tracking these developments here; please contact me if you have any news to add.

Before the ATJ news, some items for your consideration:

- Our inscrutable economic recovery:
  - A promising Dep’t. of Labor jobs report, issued last Friday. Here’s a Wall Street Journal summary. For nerds, here’s the Bureau of Labor Statistics detailed media release. IDEA! The BLS would do the nation – and its labor force – a service by hiring some people to better format that release.
  - Interestingly, job losses in the legal sector: the “U.S. legal services sector shed 4,600 jobs in September, the biggest one-month drop in employment for the field in nearly five years.” (WSJ/Law Blog)
  - A more concerning piece of long-run data: the trend used to be that, during periods of U.S. economic expansion, income gains would go more to the so-called
“bottom 90%” of earners. However, that trend has markedly reversed. And now those income gains go disproportionately to the top 10% of earners. (Vox)

- “In rural America, there are job opportunities and a need for lawyers.” (ABA Journal)

Okay, the ATJ news in very, very short:

- New, standardized family court forms online in PA;
- Canadian ATJ news potpourri
- Legal Services NYC on the importance of LSC
- CA State Bar wants to fund incubator programs
- $9m in federal grants for legal aid for unaccompanied minors
- Scrutiny of some legal-aid-sounding orgs in Houston
- More public and private solutions to helping unaccompanied minors in court alone
- NY’s top jurist conducting annual, statewide ATJ hearings
- Iowa Legal Aid’s use of LSC dollars
- An online, pro bono-advice model out of TN is being replicated in other states
- Indiana moves to required pro bono reporting (just reporting, not service)
- SCIENCE!

The summaries:

- 10.2.14 – “Free online information is available to assist the growing number of Pennsylvanians who want to file their own family law cases in courts across the state. Beginning today, standardized court forms for divorce and custody matters may be obtained on a dedicated page of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania’s website at http://www.pacourts.us/learn/representing-yourself and forms related to child support through a link from that page to www.childsupport.state.pa.us. (Media release) The “Representing Yourself” page is designed to provide a place for interested parties without the ability to retain counsel to explore resources needed to represent themselves in court.
- 10.2.14 – “Middle-class litigants were thrown a lifeline Thursday by the Supreme Court of Canada which stuck down court-hearing fees that block their access to justice. The [court said British Columbia’s] hearing-fee scheme is unconstitutional because it imposed undue hardship on ordinary people and impeded their right to bring…cases to court…. Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin said the exemptions for the indigent or needy do not provide sufficient discretion to trial judges to exempt litigants in appropriate circumstances. She said such levies are permissible only so long as they do not impinge on the constitutional jurisdiction of the courts by denying some people access.” (Vancouver Sun)
  - Speaking of Canada (a/k/a “America’s Hat”), here’s the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice’s Sept. newsletter.
  - More Canada! Supreme Court Justice Thomas Cromwell recently focused on civil ATJ issues, “[outlining] six ways to boost ATJ in the Canadian civil justice system, one of which involves creating provincial “ATJ Implementation Committees”…. These AJICs, said Cromwell, should be places where individual leaders from the legal profession and members of the public come
together. ‘Across the country we’re seeing different models set up,’ he said. “From quite small high-level committees to much larger more consultative groups’.” (The Metro)

- Alright Canada you’re wearing our your welcome. “As legal aid budgets are squeezed, more members of the public are looking for pro bono services…. Into that gap comes the recently formed Pro Bono Canada. Incorporated last fall, Pro Bono Canada is an initiative born out of the five provincial pro bono organizations in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec. It will be having it’s coming-out party at the National Pro Bono Conference in Regina this week…” (Canadian Lawyerblog)

- 10.1.14 – In the New York Law Journal, Legal Services NYC director Raun Rasmussen highlights’s LSC’s 40th birthday: “The Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which is marking its 40th anniversary this year, was created by the federal government to solve exactly these kinds of problems—those that prevent low-income Americans from gaining access to the essentials of life that are the core elements of a just society: shelter, safety, adequate health care and education, and income stability. Civil legal aid programs around the country carry out LSC’s important mission by providing legal counsel to millions of Americans each year, helping to level the playing field and improving the lives of ordinary people.”

- 10.1.14 – “The State Bar of California invites legal services programs, bar associations, law schools, lawyer referral services, and other not for profit entities in California that will provide legal services to people of low and moderate means to apply for a State Bar of California Modest Means/Incubator Project grant. Approximately three to five grants of $20,000 to $50,000 will be awarded…. Modest means incubator programs are programs that accomplish two primary goals:
  - Expand legal services for low and moderate income people; and
  - Assist California lawyers in establishing sustainable law practices that primarily serve low and moderate income people.”

- 9.30.14 – “The federal government says it will provide $9 million to two refugee organizations that give legal assistance to unaccompanied children who have streamed across the southern border. The Department of Health and Human Services said the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants will receive the supplemental funds through the Unaccompanied Alien Children’s program, which it oversees. The funds will be split between the current fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, and the 2015 fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, and will initially help 2,600 undocumented minors who face deportation.” (Wall Street Journal)

- 9.30.14 – the Houston Press looks into a consortium of legal businesses with very legal-aid-sounding names: “The office contains multitudes: Organizations operating there include “America Family Law Center,” “Texas Volunteer Attorneys,” “Fathers For Equal Rights,” and “Children First Always.” Ostensibly, they all offer access to family court attorneys and ill-defined “resources.” But first, you must buy a membership, which isn’t disclosed in any of the advertisements we’ve seen. And things just get weirder from there. Documents provided to the Houston Press show how the businesses worked as of July 2013: Regardless of what organization’s advertisement draws the person to the office, the client buys a membership with America Family Law Center. A contract we have shows the person paid $350 for a three-month membership.”

- 9.27.14 – “California Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill providing $3 million in legal services for unaccompanied minors arriving illegally in the state from Central America. The bill also eliminated what Brown called ambiguity regarding the jurisdiction of state courts to make findings necessary to enable the federal government to grant the children special immigrant juvenile status.” (Bloomberg News)
Also in CA, “Sonoma County supervisors…unanimously approved a plan would tap county attorneys to provide legal help to unaccompanied immigrant children who are in the Bay Area facing deportation proceedings.” (Press Democrat)

While we’re on the topic, this Reno Gazette-Journal piece lays out the need for volunteer lawyers to represent kids in the immigration system, and highlights both public- and private-sector work underway – including efforts “from White Plains, N.Y., to New Orleans to train attorneys at private law firms on the country’s byzantine immigration laws and how to work with traumatized, Spanish-speaking children, many of whom are fleeing violence — a far cry from the corporate clients most deal with on a daily basis.” The piece mentions the work of the American Immigration Lawyers Association – “[a]bout 800 immigration lawyers have signed up to volunteer on the cases – Kids in Need of Defense, and others.”

A true public-private partnership in NYC: “The NY City Council and two…foundations are combining forces to provide legal representation and other services to some 1,000 unaccompanied immigrant children facing possible deportation under a new accelerated court process. The Council on Tuesday is to earmark $1 million, officials said; the Robin Hood Foundation is committing $550,000, and the New York Community Trust, $360,000.” (New York Times)

9.23.14 – “Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman heard testimony…on how the state’s civil court system can improve its representation of lower-income and indigent New Yorkers…. Lippman spoke on Monday about the need to re-frame the argument for providing quality legal services to the poor as an economic issue, saying the task force had found that for every dollar invested in providing such services, taxpayers see a return of six dollars in money not spent on incarceration, social services and other state-funded operations. An estimated 2.3 million people go through the state’s legal system without representation, he said, and three out of four persons who approach the Legal Aid Society get turned away due to a lack of resources.” (Capital New York)

9.25.14 – piggybacking on LSC’s 40th anniversary, Iowa Legal Aid exec. director Dennis Groenenboom reviews the organization’s Hawkeye State contributions: “In 2013, Iowa Legal Aid closed 18,127 cases, serving an estimated 43,200 Iowans, 18,580 of whom were children. Approximately 30 percent of the cases involved family law matters, such as domestic abuse protective orders, custody and divorce. Another 30 percent were housing related, including foreclosure and landlord/tenant matters, and about 15 percent were consumer cases, including consumer fraud and unfair debt collection. Older Iowans were 21 percent of the clients served. Through the efforts of volunteer attorneys around the state, over 3,500 Iowans were provided services. The value of those donated services was nearly $2.5 million in 2013.” (Des Moines Register)

9.23.14 – from my colleague Bill Jones: “Online TN Justice  is a website that allows qualified users to post legal questions to their passworded account on the website and receive free legal advice from an anonymous, volunteer attorney. This is usually not a real-time exchange but, rather, an asynchronous one. The client logs back in to view their answer and to post any follow-up questions. Online TN Justice…was developed by IT staff in the Baker Donelson Memphis office and has been described as a “virtual walk-in clinic”…. Five other states have launch[ed] customized versions of the Tennessee software for their own pro bono work:

- West Virginia [http://www.wvonlinelegalhelp.org/](http://www.wvonlinelegalhelp.org/) (currently they are only taking on volunteer attorneys before opening to the public).

[Mississippi and Montana are close to adopting the software. Other states have expressed an interest—Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, New Mexico, Texas and Utah.]
9.8.14 – “Starting Jan. 1, 2015, Indiana attorneys will be required to report the number of hours they provide free legal assistance to indigent clients. The Indiana Supreme Court has approved a mandatory pro bono reporting requirement to be amended into Rule 6.7 of the Rules of Professional Conduct. Issued Sept. 2, the amendment explains the reporting requirement and defines what constitutes pro bono service.” (Indiana Lawyer)

SCIENCE!!! If you’re going to think less of me because of my interest in deep-ocean cartography, maybe just jump down to the music….. Still here? We know astonishingly little about our ocean floor, with its diving trenches and soaring peaks and volcanoes. But new technology, which ironically is based far away in space, has allowed us to create a map that is leaps and bounds beyond its predecessor. Behold.

October 20

This week’s news in Access to Justice:

- New director of USDOJ’s ATJ program
- U. of Texas School of Law’s pro bono program receives huge gift
- NY’s top judge concludes statewide hearings on ATJ and the civil justice gap
- Arkansas ATJ Commission report on legal aid’s economic benefits
- Corporate donation bolsters New Orleans’ courthouse self-help center
- Legal aid awareness-building campaign launches in Ohio
- Pilot pro bono program seeks volunteer lawyers to serve as Social Security representative payees
- New report on implementing a civil right to counsel in Maryland
- the NC Equal Access to Justice Commission’s achievements from 2009-14
- New report from Statewide Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts
- NLADA launches new legal aid research database
- Review of state-bar innovations in efforts to narrow the justice gap

The summaries:

- 10.16.14 – “Attorney General Eric Holder announced on Thursday Lisa Foster as the Director of the Access to Justice Initiative (ATJ). Founded in 2010 by Attorney General Holder, ATJ seeks to address the access-to-justice crisis in the criminal and civil justice system by working within the department, across federal agencies, and with state, local and tribal justice system
stakeholders to increase access to counsel and legal assistance and to improve the systems that serve people who are unable to afford lawyers.”

- 10.16.14 – “Houston trial lawyer Richard Mithoff and his wife, Ginni, gave $1 million to the University of Texas School of Law to support the school’s pro bono program, bringing the couple’s total donation to $2 million. The Mithoffs gave $1 million five years ago when the program was founded. With the second $1 million donation, which will increase the endowment, the program will be renamed the Richard and Ginni Mithoff Pro Bono Program.” (Texas Lawyer)

- 10.14.14 – “The gap in access to legal aid between the wealthy and the poor in New York has significant costs to society, according to Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, who presided over the last of four public hearings to discuss the importance of legal aid providers and hear accounts of how legal aid saved the lives of several New Yorkers. The hearing was held at the New York State Court of Appeals in Albany on Oct. 6.” (Legislative Gazette)

- 10.8.14 – “The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission has just published its final report analyzing the economic impact of civil legal aid in Arkansas…. Significant findings included the following:
  - In 2013, Arkansas’s two legal aid providers—CALS and LAA—served nearly 12,000 clients in 2013 at a cost that was $2.4 million less than the equivalent cost of such services in the private legal market.
  - Legal aid saved clients an estimated $3.4 million in costs for nonlawyer legal document services.” (Arkansas ATJ Commission website)

- 10.8.14 – “The Louisiana Civil Justice Center is expanding its support network to provide free legal advice to individuals in need. The LCJC announced that a $25,000 donation from Entergy Corp. will allow it to improve its Self-Help Resource Center at the Orleans Parish Civil District Court. The center is staffed by LCJC attorneys and volunteer lawyers who provide individuals representing themselves in court with information, court forms and other resources to navigate complicated issues.” (New Orleans City Business)

- 10.3.14 – as part of an awareness-building campaign, “[t]he Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation launched its “Voices for Justice” Campaign on October 1 to illustrate the types of legal services the nine Ohio affiliated state and regional organizations provide.” (Court News Ohio website)

- 10.2.14 – “Implementation of a pro bono pilot in Maryland for attorneys interested in being a representative payee for a Social Security beneficiary was announced today by Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security. Representative payees, she said, provide crucial help to the most vulnerable individuals in our community with their Social Security and Supplemental Security Income payments.” (SeniorJournal.com)

- 10.1.14 – the Task Force to Study Implementing a Civil Right to Counsel in Maryland, which was created by the legislature and supported by the state’s ATJ Commission, has issued a final report summarizing its research and conclusions. From the exec. summary: “Providing low-income Marylanders a lawyer when critical needs are at stake is good public policy. When we provide low-income Marylanders a right to counsel in key civil case types, we give poor people and their families a tool they can use to leverage their rights under existing law. Public interest lawyers are often able to help their clients avoid problems that, if unchecked, can cascade into a negative spiral of other difficulties that affect not only these individuals and their families, but impact the State as a whole.”

- October, 2014 – the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission has released a report highlighting its accomplishments over the last five years.

- October, 2014 – the Boston Bar Association’s Statewide Task Force to to Expand Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts has released “Investing in Justice: A Roadmap to Cost-Effective Funding of Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts.”
  - Coverage from the Boston Globe
  - Coverage from the Milford Daily News
- October, 2014 – the Nat’l. Legal Aid & Defender Association has launched the legalaidresearch.org site, which is “a research database providing free access to research reports and other documents about evidence-based practices and research results on civil legal aid.”

- October, 2014 – This broadly-ranging ABA Bar Leader piece looks at ABA and state-bar level work to address the justice gaps in meeting the legal needs of low- and moderate-income persons. Covered: Washington State’s Limited License Legal Technician program; California’s move to require 50-hours of pro bono service of bar admitees as part of a larger experiential-learning requirement; various ABA initiatives.