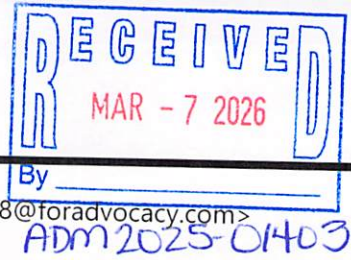


Kim Meador



From: Kennetha Patterson <Kennetha.Patterson.1392873698@foradvocacy.com>
Sent: Saturday, March 7, 2026 3:20 PM
To: appellatecourtclerk
Subject: Expand Legal Help in Tennessee: Comments on No. ADM2025-01403

Warning: Unusual sender <kennetha.patterson.1392873698@foradvocacy.com>

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Dear Clerk Hivner and Honorable Justices of the Tennessee Supreme Court,

I am writing in response to the Court's request for comments on the regulation of the legal profession and Tennessee's access-to-justice crisis. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue. Across our state, people struggle to access the legal assistance they need; lawyers are too expensive for most people, and many counties are classified as legal deserts because there just aren't enough lawyers to go around.

I strongly endorse the Court's suggestion that people without law degrees could deliver legal services and support authorizing legal helpers to assist with basic civil legal needs. This is a smart, compassionate, and practical way to make justice more accessible.

Bridging the Gaps: Expanding Legal Help and Elevating Lived Expertise to Prevent Homelessness in Tennessee

Every day, Tennesseans face civil legal issues involving housing, family law, debt, benefits, and more — yet most cannot afford a lawyer. In many communities, especially rural areas, there simply aren't enough lawyers to go around. People are left to navigate judges, attorneys, and complicated legal processes alone. The Tennessee Supreme Court has acknowledged this crisis and is asking the public for ideas to make legal help easier to access.

One solution is clear:

Tennessee must allow trained Peer to Peer legal helpers, especially those whom have survived these systems so brutally without law degrees to assist with basic civil legal needs. With short, accessible training, these helpers could support people with common, low-risk issues such as filling out forms, understanding court procedures, and preparing for hearings. They could offer help through trusted community spaces libraries, nonprofits, churches, and community centers bringing support closer to home instead of creating new barriers.

This approach is not only practical; it is essential. Civil legal issues, especially evictions, are one of the fastest pathways into homelessness. Prevention is only possible when people have timely, affordable help. Without it, families fall through gaps that should never exist.

And this is where Tennessee's homelessness response system reveals another truth:

Peer-to-peer support and lived expertise are the missing capacity our state has never fully recognized or compensated.

Those who have experienced homelessness firsthand carry insights that illuminate the real barriers in our systems — barriers that data alone cannot capture. As the HUD Nashville-Davidson County Continuum of Care (CoC) strategic plan emphasizes, individuals with lived experience must be fully integrated into decision-making, leadership, and system design. True progress cannot happen while structural, procedural, or cultural barriers keep them from shaping solutions.

By prioritizing inclusion, equity, and direct engagement, Tennessee can build a justice and homelessness response system guided by the people who understand it best. This means:

- Investing in eviction prevention through accessible legal help
- Funding real Meaning accessible like criminal rights to counsel, Eviction Right to Counsel
- Paying lived-expertise leaders as essential contributors and co author's
- Embedding peer-to-peer support into every stage of the system
- Removing procedural roadblocks that silence the voices of those most affected

Homelessness in Nashville is a reality we cannot ignore, with more than 3,400 individuals families with children single male fathers currently unhoused.

Rising living costs, limited affordable housing, and gaps in support systems all contribute to this crisis. But when people lose their housing because they had no legal help, no advocate because we're unpaid we exist now, and no guide that is a preventable failure.

By addressing these issues with honesty and urgency, we create space for healing and real change. Through community-driven efforts, policy advocacy, and compassionate action, we can build remedies that restore trust, dignity, and stability.

The path forward is clear:

Tennessee must expand access to civil legal help and elevate lived expertise as a cornerstone of homelessness prevention. These two efforts are not separate they are inseparable.

Today, we call on the Tennessee Supreme Court, policymakers, service providers, and community members to take action.

Let us build a system where justice is accessible, homelessness is preventable, and the people who know the system best are leading the way.

Urging the Court to act. Together, we can create a more compassionate, practical, and effective system of care for all Tennesseans.

I urge the Court to focus on low-barrier approaches that expand access to basic help now. Authorized legal helpers could receive short, modular, and accessible subject-matter training, and work under the

supervision of non-profits, libraries, community and religious centers, and legal businesses. Licensure that requires extensive training or costly credentialing risks recreating the lawyer-only bottleneck under a different name, while there are countless routine, low-risk legal needs that could be met today by a neighbor who has undergone a short online course.

The Court should also consider clear carveouts from Unauthorized Practice of Law rules for low-risk legal assistance, like helping individuals understand court processes and filling out paperwork, which should not be treated as the practice of law. Tennesseans who would receive this help are already protected by existing consumer protection laws, negating the need for the enforcement mechanism that comes with licensure.

Allowing legal helpers would put help directly where people need it—in libraries, churches, and community centers—and ensure that people are not shut out of our justice system simply because of where they live or how much money they have.

I'm grateful that the Tennessee Supreme Court is leading this effort to reform and modernize our legal system. I encourage you to authorize the delivery of legal services by legal helpers and continue exploring ways to ensure that every Tennessean can get the legal guidance they need, when and where they need it.

Sincerely,

Kennetha Patterson
Nashville, TN