https://doi.org/10.37420/j.mlr.2025.002

The Rising Group in Facilitating Access to Justice: An Introduction and Reference to the Reform of American Quasi-legal Profession

Jiamin Yin*

Institute of Evidence Law and Forensic Science, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China.

***Corresponding author, E-mail:2402260262@cupl.edu.cn**

Abstract

In recent years, the United States has carried out innovative reforms in the quasi-legal profession. Some states, by authorizing paralegals or creating new quasi-legal professional categories, allow them to practice independently within a certain scope after fulfilling some prerequisite training or examination requirements, instead of working traditionally supervised by lawyers. Due to their relatively low practice costs, these practitioners are also able to provide legal services to the public at a lower charging standard, which is of great significance for solving the "sandwich layer problem of access to justice". This paper introduces the quasi-legal profession reforms in some states of the United States and simultaneously summarizes six characteristics of these reforms. On this basis, it is proposed that other countries that also suffer from insufficient guarantee of the availability of lawyer services can critically draw on the innovative practices in the quasi-legal profession in the United States. By constructing an internal stratification mechanism for legal service providers, the goal of promoting access to justice can be achieved, enabling people to better feel fairness and justice.

Keywords

Paralegal, Quasi-legal profession, Access to justice, Unauthorized practice

1.Introduction

Legal service is a kind of professional service. In many jurisdictions around the world, providing legal services both inside and outside the court is the privilege of members of specific organizations that have specific qualifications. They are what we define as the legal profession. Unauthorized practice usually faces more or less severe punishments. Among the legal service providers in various countries, lawyers are basically the main members. Besides that, there are also market-oriented legal service providers such as legal executives, trademark agents, patent agents, notaries public, and conveyancers.[1] In addition, in order to meet the public's ever-increasing demand for legal services, many countries have also established public legal service providing systems, such as public defenders, public legal service centers, legal aid, judicial assistance and other legal service providers and legal service supply systems. However, even so, in many countries, there is still a significant gap between the availability of legal services and the ideal goal, and the public's need for access to justice remains unmet. The situation is no different in the United States, which boasts a high level of rule of law as

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

well as a highly mature legal service market. Legal Service Corporation is the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the nation. According to its report *The Justice Gap: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans* released in 2022, in the past year, 74% of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem, and 39% of low-income households have experienced more than five civil legal problems. Among these low-income Americans who have encountered legal problems, 55% said that these problems were problems that would have a substantial impact on their lives. But on average, for every four civil legal problems, they only sought legal help for one problem. Among those who did not seek legal help, about half of them said that cost anxiety was a reason for this situation, and they did not know if they could find a lawyer and afford the lawyer's fees.[2]

Like most countries in the world, the United States defines paralegals* as roles that assist lawyers in their work. Paralegals do not hold a lawyer's practice license, and usually they are required to conduct substantial legal work under the supervision and management of lawyers. If paralegals practice independently without the supervision of lawyers and without the authorization of the regulatory authorities, it will be regarded as unauthorized practice of law. In recent years, in order to meet the public's demand for legal services as much as possible and ensure the availability of legal services among low-income households, some states in the United States have allowed them to practice independently within a certain scope by creating new categories of quasi-legal professions or authorizing paralegals. That is to say, they can provide legal services to clients as an independent quasi-legal profession, instead of working for lawyers in the traditional way. This is the trend of facilitating access to justice in the quasi-legal profession in the United States. The innovative practice of the quasi-legal profession in the United States is not only helpful in alleviating the justice gap in its own country but also has reference value for the development of the legal profession in other countries. Therefore, this article endeavors to offer a brief introduction and evaluation of the reform concerning access to justice within the quasi-legal profession in the United States, with an aim to explore the insights and approaches that could potentially serve as valuable references for other countries.

2.An Introduction to the Innovative Practices in the American Quasi-legal Profession

Given that the United States operates under a federal system, significant disparities exist in the judicial systems and reform landscapes across different states. In light of this, this article will select some representative states in the United States as well as those states that are at the forefront in the reform of facilitating access to justice in the quasi-legal profession for a summary and introduction.

2.1. Limited License Legal Technician of Washington State

Washington State is located on the northwestern border of the United States, with a population of over 7 million. Meanwhile, it boasts popular coffee chain stores, unique coffee culture, rich musical history and numerous renowned technology companies. The large population, diverse social activities and developed

* In fact, the terms “paralegal” and “legal assistant” are often used interchangeably, and there is a lot of overlap in their job responsibilities. However, they are not completely identical. Generally speaking, a “legal assistant” tends to refer to those who are engaged in administrative work in a legal setting, and their job mainly involves tasks like meeting preparation, schedule arrangement, and correspondence. On the other hand, what a “paralegal” usually does on a daily basis is more legal-related work, such as legal research, document drafting, and litigation preparation.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

economic industries have always led to a high demand for legal services in Washington State. In the courts of Washington State, there are numerous pro-se litigants who are ignorant of both substantive law and procedural law. This is especially the case in the field of family legal services where the divorce rate has been constantly on the rise. These litigants cannot afford to hire lawyers, so they sometimes obtain unauthorized and unreliable legal advice through web pages or other channels. Such a situation not only affects the interests of the litigants themselves but also seriously hinders or delays the litigation process, which has been a great headache for legal professionals including judges.

In an effort to mitigate this problem, the Supreme Court of Washington State adopted *Admission and Practice Rule 28* in 2012. Through this rule, Washington State created a brand-new category of legal service providers: Limited License Legal Technicians (LLLTs). Limited License Legal Technicians are licensed to provide legal services within a limited scope in the field of family legal services. Within this scope, Limited License Legal Technicians are also members of the legal profession, representatives of clients, and obligated to the quality of justice.

To become a Limited License Legal Technician, the following requirements must be met:

> *(1) Possess an associate degree or a higher degree; (2) Earn 45 credits from a program approved by the American Bar Association; (3) Receive education in specific practice areas; (4) Take and pass three exams, namely the Paralegal Core Competency Exam, the Practice Area (Family Law) Exam, and the Professional Responsibility Exam; (5) Have 3,000 hours of substantive law-related experience; (6) If one has a certain number of years of substantive law-related experience and passes some exams, one may be exempted from the requirements of the aforementioned associate degree and 45 credits of core education.[3]*

After becoming a Limited License Legal Technician, one can handle the following tasks:

> *(1) Obtain relevant facts, and explain the relevancy of such information to the client; (2) Inform the client of applicable procedures, including deadlines, documents which must be filed, and the anticipated course of the legal proceeding; (3) Inform the client of and assist with applicable procedures for proper service of process and filing of legal documents; (4) Provide the client with self-help materials prepared by a Washington lawyer or approved by the LLLT Board, which contain information about relevant legal requirements, case law basis for the client's claim, and venue and jurisdiction requirements; (5) Review documents or exhibits that the client has received and explain them to the client; (6) Select, complete, file, and effect service of forms that have been approved by the State of Washington, either through a governmental agency or by the Administrative Office of the Courts or the content of which is specified by statute; federal forms; forms prepared by a Washington lawyer; or forms approved by the LLLT Board; and advise the client of the significance of the selected forms to the client's case; (7) Perform legal research; (8) Draft letters setting forth legal opinions that are intended to be read by persons other than the client; (9) Draft documents beyond what is permitted in paragraph (6), if the work is reviewed and approved by a Washington lawyer; (10) Advise the client as to other documents that may*

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

> *be necessary to the client's case, and explain how such additional documents or pleadings may affect the client's case; (11) Assist the client in obtaining necessary records, such as birth, death, or marriage certificates; (12) Communicate and negotiate with the opposing party or the party's representative regarding procedural matters, such as setting court hearings or other ministerial or civil procedure matters; (13) Negotiate the client's legal rights or responsibilities, provided that the client has given written consent defining the parameters of the negotiation prior to the onset of the negotiation; and (14) Render other types of legal assistance when specifically authorized by the scope of practice regulations for the approved practice area in which the LLLT is licensed.[4]*

Although in 2020, the Supreme Court of Washington State suspended the Limited License Legal Technician program under the pressure from the State Bar Association, this was mostly the result of political and professional monopoly reasons rather than the ineffectiveness of the program. On the contrary, the program achieved excellent results in practice: Limited License Legal Technicians brought about a more efficient litigation process by reducing procedural errors, submitting high-quality work results, and helping clients prepare cases more effectively, which also enabled family law judges and officials to make better decisions. One judge once explained that the participation of Limited License Legal Technicians could save approximately one-third of the trial time because judges no longer needed to explain to the parties the information that would otherwise have to be explained.[5]

2.2. Limited Practice Officer of Washington State

In addition to Limited License Legal Technicians, the Supreme Court of Washington State also created Limited Practice Officers (LPOs) in accordance with *Admission and Practice Rule 12*. Limited Practice Officers can obtain a limited license for legal practice, but when providing legal services within the licensed area, they are required to comply with the same standard of care as lawyers.

To become a Limited Practice Officer, one must be at least 18 years old and pass the Limited Practice Officer exam. The LPO exam consists of three sections: a multiple-choice test, an essay test, and a performance test in which a sample closing transaction must be completed. The examination lasts for four hours, and the minimum passing score is 75% for each part. Applicants need to pass all three parts in order to be approved. In addition, applicants are also required to possess good moral character and the requisite fitness for engaging in legal work. To prepare for and pass the exam, applicants should have a thorough understanding and knowledge of the following aspects: real property and real estate law; the LPO scope of practice and conditions to render LPO services as set forth in *Admission and Practice Rule 12*; the LPO Rules of Professional Conduct; the suggested Study Topics; and forms for a closing transaction.[6]

Compared with the aforementioned Limited License Legal Technicians, the scope of practice activities of Limited Practice Officers is narrower, with a greater focus on the preparation of certain documents. According to Admission and Practice Rule 12, a person licensed as a Limited Practice Officer may handle the following tasks:

> *Select, prepare, and complete documents in a form previously approved by the LP Board for use by others in, or in anticipation of, closing a loan, extension of credit, sale, or other transfer*

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

of interest in real or personal property. Such documents shall be limited to deeds, promissory notes, guaranties, deeds of trust, reconveyances, mortgages, satisfactions, security agreements, releases, Uniform Commercial Code documents, assignments, contracts, real estate excise tax affidavits, bills of sale, and powers of attorney.[7]

In addition, there are certain conditions that need to be met and the following limitations apply when Limited Practice Officers prepare and complete the above-mentioned documents:

(1) Agreement of the Clients. Prior to the performance of the services, all clients to the transaction shall have agreed in writing to the basic terms and conditions of the transaction. In the case of a power of attorney prepared in anticipation of a transaction, the principal(s) and attorney(s)-in-fact shall have provided the limited practice officer consistent written instructions for the preparation of the power of attorney. (2) Disclosures to the Clients. The limited practice officer shall advise the clients of the limitations of the services rendered pursuant to this rule and shall further advise them in writing: (a) that the limited practice officer is not acting as the advocate or representative of either of the clients; (b) that the documents prepared by the limited practice officer will affect the legal rights of the clients; (c) that the clients' interests in the documents may differ; (d) that the clients have a right to be represented by lawyers of their own selection; and (e) that the limited practice officer cannot give legal advice as to the manner in which the documents affect the clients. The written disclosure must particularly identify the documents selected, prepared, and/or completed by the limited practice officer and must include the name, signature, and number of the limited practice officer.[8]

2.3. Licensed Paralegals of Oregon State

Adjacent to Washington State, Oregon enjoys a highly developed economy as well. In 2023, the state created a new type of legal license: the Licensed Paralegals (LP). Similar to Washington State, Licensed Paralegals in Oregon can provide some legal services in the fields of family law and landlord-tenant law that were previously only available from lawyers, so as to meet the civil legal needs of Oregon residents and offer legal assistance to those who cannot afford lawyer fees or have no access to legal aid.

The following conditions need to be met for applying to become a Licensed Paralegal: (1) at least eighteen years old; (2) obtain one of the following degrees: (a) graduate of approved paralegal program; (b) graduate with bachelor degree from higher learning institution; (c) graduate from an ABA accredited law school; (3) complete 20 hours of professional education courses; (4) have certain substantive paralegal work experience (meeting certain conditions can also be used to waive the degree requirement); (5) have work experience in the field of family law or landlord-tenant law for a certain period of time; (6) pass the learning and ability assessment; (7) pass the character and fitness assessment; (8) Licensed paralegals who are in good standing, active, and have provided at least 1,000 hours of legal services each year in two of the past three years can submit an exemption application form to waive some requirements.[9]

After becoming a Licensed Paralegal in Oregon, the following services can be provided in the fields of family law and landlord-tenant law:(1) meet with clients to understand their needs and goals and offer them

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

advice; (2) enter a contractual relationship with clients (in family law cases, only natural persons can be represented, while in the field of landlord-tenant law, either natural persons or entities can be represented); (3) assist clients in preparing relevant documents;(4) file relevant documents and pleadings with the court; (5) attend depositions related to family law and landlord-tenant law cases, but not take or defend them; (6) assist clients in reaching settlements, prepare judicial settlement conferences, offer clients advice on options and discuss various plans; (7) assist clients in preparing for hearings and trials; (8) attend court appearances to provide assistance regarding procedural and ex parte matters; (9) review opinion letters, court orders, and notices with a client, and explain how they affect the client, including the right to appeal; (10) refer the client to relevant attorneys for tasks or subject matters outside the scope of practice for the Licensed Paralegal, and so on.[10]

2.4. Legal Paraprofessionals of Arizona State

Arizona is located in the southwestern part of the United States and is the sixth largest state in the country. In 2021, the Arizona Supreme Court amended the *Arizona Code of Judicial Administration* and created a new quasi-legal profession category: Legal Paraprofessional (LP). Meanwhile, a Legal Paraprofessional Fund and a Non-Lawyer Legal Service Provider Commission were established correspondingly to support the operation of this newly created quasi-legal profession. Article 7-210 of the *Arizona Code of Judicial Administration* outlines the requirements and responsibilities for becoming a Legal Paraprofessional, as well as the continuing education requirements for obtaining and maintaining a license.

To apply to become a Legal Paraprofessional in Arizona, the following conditions need to be met: (1) Is a citizen or legal resident of the United States; (2) Is at least twenty-one years of age; (3) Has not been denied admission to the practice of law in Arizona or any other jurisdiction; (4) Has not been disbarred or suspended from the practice of law in Arizona or any other jurisdiction unless the applicant requests an exception that is approved by the supreme court; (5) Meet certain educational background or work experience requirements; (6) Have substantive law-related experience; (7) Has achieved a passing score on the legal paraprofessional examination; (8) Is of good moral character; (9) Complies with the laws, court rules, and orders adopted by the supreme court governing legal paraprofessionals in this state.[11]

Applicants can apply to become Legal Paraprofessionals in one or more of the following fields: family law, civil law, criminal law, administrative law, and juvenile law. After that, they are entitled to provide these services within a limited scope of the licensed fields without the supervision of lawyers:

> *(1) Prepare and sign legal documents; (2) Provide specific advice, opinions, or recommendations about possible legal rights, remedies, defenses, options, or strategies; (3) Draft and file documents, including initiating and responding to actions, related motions, discovery, interim and final orders, and modification of orders, and arrange for service of legal documents; (4) Appear before a court or tribunal on behalf of a party, including mediation, arbitration, and settlement conferences where not prohibited by the rules and procedures of the forum; and (5) Negotiate legal rights or responsibilities for a specific person or entity.[12]*

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

2.5. Licensed Paraprofessionals of California State

In 2019, the State Bar of California completed a study of California's justice gap. The research report showed that a large portion of California residents' civil legal service needs remained unmet. After learning about the access-to-justice initiatives in other jurisdictions, the State Bar believed that it was necessary to create a category of legal paraprofessionals to further alleviate the problem of access to justice. Subsequently, the State Bar formed a working group and conducted research on this issue. In 2021, the California Paraprofessional Program Working Group released the *Report and Recommendations*,[13] which preliminarily constructed the Licensed Paraprofessionals in California.

The working group recommended that people with certain educational backgrounds, having completed practical training and examination requirements, and possessing good moral character could obtain the license of paraprofessionals to provide the following legal services for clients:

> *(1) The practice area of collateral criminal, including (a) Expungement and reclassification of convictions; (b) Infractions. (2) The practice area of consumer debt/general civil, including (a) Consumer debt and creditor harassment; (b) Enforcement of judgment; (c) Name and gender change. (3) The practice area of income maintenance, including (a) Wage and hour cases; (b) Unemployment insurance proceedings; (c) All public benefit proceedings. (4) The practice area of family, children, and custody, including (a) Most family law matters; (b) Most uncontested adoptions; (c) Most uncontested conservatorships and guardianships; (d) Most violence prevention hearings; (e) Not authorized to act as appointed counsel in any cases. (5) The practice area of housing, including (a) Most residential landlord-tenant matters; (b) Lien clearing.[14]*

3.Summary of the Characteristics of the Innovative Practices of American Quasi-legal Professions

3.1. The purpose of the reforms is all to improve access to justice

"Access to justice" is a judicial reform concept first put forward by the Italian jurist Mauro Cappelletti. Centering on this concept, Western countries have carried out many judicial reforms. These reforms all aim to enable the public to obtain judicial resources equally, conveniently and efficiently by optimizing litigation procedures, reducing litigation costs and constructing diversified dispute resolution mechanisms. In recent years, the reforms in various states of the United States, either by creating a new type of quasi-legal profession or by authorizing paralegals to provide legal services for clients within a certain scope, are also aimed at improving access to justice. They are also intended to meet the local people's legal service needs by reducing the cost of legal services and enriching the providers of legal services. For some examples: A couple in Phoenix wanted to divorce due to marital discord, but they hoped to ensure that their children could get the best outcome. A criminal defendant in Tucson was charged with a misdemeanor, and if convicted, paying the fine would bring a heavy financial burden to him. A tenant in Flagstaff had been calling his former landlord, trying to get his deposit back, but to no avail. Before the reforms, these people would

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

almost certainly hear the same advice over and over again: "Find a lawyer." What was their likely response? "I can't afford it." Lawyers and bar associations, when faced with the issue of access to justice, advocated "There should be more lawyers." However, from the public's perspective, the goal is to have greater access to the law, not necessarily to lawyers.[15] Fortunately, after the reforms, all these people in need may be able to take advantage of the new mechanisms to obtain some more affordable and cost-effective legal services.[16]

3.2. The biggest breakthrough of the reform is independent practice

Traditionally, paralegals can provide legal services to clients, but only on the condition that they are under the supervision of a practicing lawyer. Otherwise, non-lawyer personnel providing legal services may potentially constitute unauthorized practice. Observing the quasi-legal profession reforms in the above-mentioned states in the United States, it is worthy to note that the biggest breakthrough is that these practitioners no longer need to be supervised by practicing lawyers. That is to say, their independence and autonomy have been greatly strengthened. This characteristic of being free from lawyers' supervision and practicing independently is also the prerequisite for achieving the above-mentioned purpose of improving access to justice.

Amber Labadie is a legal paraprofessional. She has a 40-year career as a paralegal. She hopes to use her new license to help ordinary people deal with complex issues that may not be cost-effective for lawyers but cannot be handled without professionals: "Many times, lawyers quote clients a fixed fee like $5,000 or $10,000. Since I'm not a lawyer, I can do this at a lower cost."[17]

3.3. The scope of licensed practice predominantly lies in civil law, which is characterized by a high volume of cases

Limited License Legal Technicians in Washington State are permitted to provide legal services within a limited scope in the field of family legal services, while Limited Practice Officers in Washington State focus more on the preparation of some documents. Licensed Paralegals in Oregon are licensed to practice in the fields of family law and landlord-tenant law. Legal Paraprofessionals in Arizona are licensed to practice in one or more of the following fields: family law, civil law, criminal law, administrative law, and juvenile law. Licensed Paraprofessionals in California are licensed to practice in the fields of collateral criminal, consumer debt/general civil, income maintenance, family, children, custody, and housing. It can be found that in the quasi-legal profession reforms in these states, the licensed practice fields are mostly limited to some common fields with relatively large demand but not extremely high professional requirements. The most common ones are the fields of marriage and family law, housing and rental law, etc.

3.4. Comply with Professional Ethics Parallel to Lawyers' Ethics

When the states license the quasi-legal profession practitioners that are allowed to practice independently within limited fields, they have basically established the practice rules and professional conduct rules for these practitioners accordingly. These rules require the quasi-legal professionals who are licensed to provide legal services to comply with the same professional ethics requirements as lawyers. In some states, they

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

even make minor adjustments directly on the basis of the local lawyers' professional ethics and use them as the professional ethics for the newly established quasi-legal professions. That is to say, although the access requirements for the legal profession have been relaxed for the purpose of improving access to justice, the practice standards and professional requirements after access have not been lowered.

3.5. Approved for Independent Practice after Completing Certain Preliminary Procedures

Passing relevant exams is a mandatory requirement for quasi-legal professionals to be granted permission to practice independently. For example, Limited License Legal Technicians in Washington State need to pass the Paralegal Core Competency Exam, the Practice Area (Family Law) Exam, and the Professional Responsibility Exam. Limited Practice Officers in Washington State need to pass the Limited Practice Officer exam, which includes a multiple-choice test, an essay test, and a performance test. Licensed Paralegals in Oregon need to pass the learning and ability assessment. Legal Paraprofessionals in Arizona need to obtain a passing score on the legal paraprofessional examination. Likewise, Licensed Paraprofessionals in California also need to complete practical training and examination requirements. It can be found that the examination contents for these quasi-legal professionals mainly cover the following aspects: professional knowledge in the applied practice area, professional ethics requirements, and the scope of practice. Besides the examination requirements, applicants for these quasi-legal professions also need to meet the requirements in terms of education, experience, etc. Moreover, after obtaining the license, these quasi-legal professionals usually need to receive continuing education on a regular basis.

3.6. Courts, Bar Associations or Industrial Organizations Are the Entities Responsible for Assessment and Management

In Arizona, the state Supreme Court has inherent regulatory power over all lawyers or non-lawyer personnel who provide legal services to the public. Meanwhile, matters such as the licensing of legal paraprofessionals are mainly handled by the Board of Nonlawyer Legal Service Providers. In Oregon, the Rules for Licensing Paralegals were also promulgated by the Oregon Supreme Court, and the Oregon State Bar is specifically responsible for the examinations, admissions and other matters related to licensed paralegals. Similarly, in Washington State, an industrial organization, namely the Limited License Legal Technician Board, has been established. This board consists of 11 voting members appointed by the Supreme Court and is responsible for handling matters such as admission appeals, discipline and continuing education of limited license legal technicians. Therefore, among the states in the United States that have carried out innovative practices in the quasi-legal professions, most of them regard these newly established quasi-legal professions as part of the legal profession and entrust state courts, state bar associations or specialized industrial organizations with their assessment and management.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

4.The Reference Significance of the Innovative Practices of Quasi-legal Professions in the United States for Other Countries

The providers of medical services include doctors, physician assistants, community health clinic doctors, nurses and other personnel. Among them, nurses are responsible for providing some preventive care and less complicated medical services. The providers of accounting services include certified public accountants, intermediate accountants, junior accountants and other personnel. Among them, junior accountants are responsible for some relatively basic accounting work. Should the providers of legal services, that is, the legal profession, also implement an internal hierarchical mechanism like other professions?

Traditionally, only lawyers were able to independently provide legal services to the public. However, multiple factors conspire to set the floor for lawyers' fees in providing legal services. The intense competition to get into law schools, the expensive fees of legal education, the formidable challenges posed by the bar examination, and the steep rents for law firm offices all combine to form significant upfront costs that inevitably dictate the minimum amount lawyers must charge. Precisely because of this, in many countries, although the number of lawyers is quite large, the public's demand for legal services remains unmet. Although most countries have made numerous efforts to solve this problem, such as establishing legal service supply guarantee systems like legal aid, judicial assistance, and the lawyers' contingent fee system. Nevertheless, even so, it can be observed in various countries that the "sandwich layer problem of access to justice" still prevails. The so-called "sandwich layer problem of access to justice" refers to the existence of a certain intermediate group in society, who have limited financial resources, neither wealthy enough to afford legal fees without hesitation nor poor enough to meet the conditions for legal aid. Meanwhile, due to the litigation disputes they face not conforming to the applicable case types of the contingent fee system, which leads to the phenomenon that such a large intermediate group has difficulties in accessing justice.

The economic situations of parties who resort to justice are diverse, and the institutional construction of a country to ensure that parties can obtain professional legal services provided by lawyers should also be diversified. In other words, it is necessary to establish corresponding guarantee systems for the availability of lawyer services respectively for those who have different economic conditions and demand legal services, so as to cover the demand market for legal services to the greatest extent. Moreover, various specific systems should be connected and complementary to each other.[18] The innovative quasi-legal profession practices implemented in various states of the United States mentioned above are the guarantee mechanisms for the availability of lawyer services constructed for the social sandwich group, and also an internal hierarchical mechanism for the providers of legal services. They aim to create a new type of quasi-legal profession subject with relatively low entry thresholds, limited entry costs and practice costs. They can provide legal services in the daily life fields where disputes are common but the professional requirements are not extremely high. In this case, the control of practice costs leads to friendly service prices, and in this way, there is hope for meeting the unmet legal service needs of a large number of the public.

When various countries construct this internal hierarchical mechanism for the providers of legal services, there may be doubts from two aspects, which need to be responded to in advance. Firstly, when quasi-legal

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

profession practitioners independently provide legal services, will it have a huge economic impact on the legal profession and make the income situation of some lawyers increasingly difficult? The service targets of quasi-legal profession practitioners are those in the "sandwich layer" group regarding access to justice. Limited by their economic situations, most of them would not hire lawyers when encountering disputes. Now that quasi-legal profession practitioners provide services for them, naturally there will not be a situation where they massively encroach on the lawyers' market and affect the business of lawyers. Furthermore, this argument of professional monopolism based on self-interest should not be a legitimate reason for negating the internal hierarchical mechanism for the providers of legal services. Secondly, a concern that arises is whether the service quality of quasi-legal profession practitioners can reach the required standards when they practice independently. The service quality of the providers of legal services is related to elements such as the legal education and training they have received, their previous relevant work experience, entrance examinations, daily management, and continuing education. Moreover, the practice areas of quasi-legal profession practitioners are mostly in mature, common, and simple business fields. Therefore, after setting appropriate entrance conditions to assess their basic professional abilities and supplementing it with a continuous and reliable post-entrance service quality supervision measures, the service quality of quasi-legal profession practitioners will also be guaranteed just like that of the legal profession.

5.Conclusion

In the current era, the pursuit of fairness and justice has already become one of the core tenets of global social development. And the continuous advancement of access to justice is the only way to fill the gap that lies between the public and justice. Upon careful examination of the current global situation, it is not difficult to find that all countries generally face such a thorny problem: a considerable portion of the social masses, due to limited economic conditions, are firmly bound by heavy financial burdens. So much so that at the critical moment when they encounter disputes and urgently need professional legal assistance, they are unable to afford the high legal fees and thus have difficulty obtaining effective help from lawyers. This dilemma not only prevents the timely protection of the legitimate rights and interests of the people but also weakens the credibility of the judicial system in society to a certain extent. At this crucial moment, it is advisable to turn our attention to the reform trends of quasi-legal professions emerging in some states of the United States in recent years. These regions no longer confine themselves to the traditional thinking mode and consider problems solely from the perspective of lawyers as the sole provider of legal services. Instead, they boldly innovate and shift their perspectives to conduct in-depth explorations from the perspective of stratifying the entire legal service providers. They realize that in addition to the professional lawyers, there are other potential forces in society that can provide legal services for the public. By reasonably excavating, integrating, and regulating these forces, a multi-level and diversified legal service provision system can be constructed. In this way, perhaps the "sandwich layer problem of access to justice" can get a solution and be effectively alleviated. Those social masses in the sandwich layer will also be expected to break free from their dilemma and truly obtain legal services that are more cost-effective, conforming to their own economic situations and meeting their legal needs.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

References

[1]Legal executive is a type of legal service provider in the UK, who can exercise the right to speak in court and preside over oaths. Conveyancer is a kind of legal service provider in New Zealand, capable of providing services for the transfer of real estate property rights. See Wang Jinxi, A Comparative Study on the Lawyer Management System, 1st ed.; China Legal Publishing House, Beijing, China, 2021; p82 and 192; ISBN: 978-7-5216-2366-6.

[2]See Legal Services Corporation, The Justice Gap: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans, April 2022, pp7-8, available online: https://lsc-live.app.box.com/s/xl2v2uraiotbbzrhuwtjlgi0emp3myz1, accessed on 30 August 2024.

[3]See Steve Crossland, Paula Littlewood, Ellen Reed, The Limited License Legal Technician Program: History, Progress, and Upcoming Developments, ACLEA 52nd Annual Meeting, July 30th – August 2nd, 2016, available online: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aclea.org/resource/collection/88C82694-55F0-4CB9-B357-992D9E274436/Monday-C1-Limited-license-Legal-Tech.pdf, accessed on 9 September 2024.

[4]See Limited Practice Rule For Limited License Legal Technicians, F. Scope of Practice Authorized by Limited Practice Rule.

[5]See Jason Solomon, Noelle Smith, The Surprising Success of Washington State's Limited License Legal Technician Program, April 2021, p2, available online: https://clp.law.stanford.edu/publications/the-surprising-success-of-washington-states-limited-license-legal-technician-program/, accessed on 9 September 2024.

[6]See Washington State Bar Association, Become a Limited Practice Officer, available online: https://www.wsba.org/for-legal-professionals/join-the-legal-profession-in-wa/become-an-lpo, accessed on 25 September 2024.

[7]Admission and Practice Rule 12 - Limited Practice For Limited Practice Officers, (d)Scope of Practice Authorized by Limited Practice Rule.

[8]Limited Practice Rule For Limited Practice Officers, (e)Conditions Under Which Limited Practice Officers May Prepare and Complete Documents.

[9]See Rules For Licensing Paralegals In Oregon, Section 4 Qualification Of Applicants.

[10]See Rules For Licensing Paralegals In Oregon, 11.1 Family Law Endorsed Licensed Paralegals - Scope of Practice, 11.2 Landlord-Tenant Endorsed Licensed Paralegals - Scope of Practice.

[11]See Arizona Code Of Judicial Administration, Part7: Administrative Office of the Courts, Chapter 2: Certification and Licensing Programs, Section 7-210: Legal Paraprofessional, E. Licensure.

[12]See Arizona Code Of Judicial Administration, Part7: Administrative Office of the Courts, Chapter 2: Certification and Licensing Programs, Section 7-210: Legal Paraprofessional, F Conduct of Licensees.

[13]The State Bar of California, California Paraprofessional Program Working Group Report and Recommendations, September 23, 2021, available online: https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/publicComment/2021/CPPWG-Report-to-BOT.pdf#:~:text=In%20March%202020,%20the%20Board%20of%20Trustees%20appointed%20the%20California, accessed on 1 October 2024.

[14]The State Bar of California, Frequently Asked Questions: California Paraprofessional Program, available online: https://www.calbar.ca.gov/paraprofessionals-FAQ, accessed on 25 September 2024.

[15]See Deborah L. Rhode, The Trouble With Lawyers, Translated by Wang Jinxi, 1st ed.; Peking Universi-

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ty Press, Beijing, China, 2024; p79; ISBN: 978-7-301-34771-3.
[16]See Claire Newfeld, Closing the “Justice Gap”: The First Ten Legal Paraprofessionals Receive Licensure in Arizona, Arizona State Law Journal, 03 Feb 2022, available online: https://arizonastatelawjournal.org/2022/02/03/closing-the-justice-gap-the-first-ten-legal-paraprofessionals-receive-licensure-in-arizona/, accessed on 28 September 2024.
[17]Claire Newfeld, Closing the “Justice Gap”: The First Ten Legal Paraprofessionals Receive Licensure in Arizona, Arizona State Law Journal, 03 Feb 2022, available online: https://arizonastatelawjournal.org/2022/02/03/closing-the-justice-gap-the-first-ten-legal-paraprofessionals-receive-licensure-in-arizona/, accessed on 28 September 2024.
[18]Wang Jinxi, Zhang Ling, On the Institutional Guarantee of the Availability of Lawyer Services, Chinese Rule Of Law 2010, Issue 6, p59.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)