

Justice Dept. Office to Make Legal Aid More Accessible Is Quietly Closed

By [KATIE BENNER](#) FEB. 1, 2018

Photo



The Office for Access to Justice's stated mission was to “deliver outcomes that are fair and accessible to all, irrespective of wealth and status.” Credit Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has effectively shuttered an Obama-era office dedicated to making legal aid accessible to all citizens, according to two

people familiar with the situation.

The division, the Office for Access to Justice, began as an initiative in 2010 under former Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. to increase and improve legal resources for indigent litigants in civil, criminal and tribal courts. Though the head of the office reports directly to the associate attorney general, it never gained much visibility within the Justice Department because it did not oversee a large staff of prosecutors.

While Attorney General Jeff Sessions cannot close the office without notifying the Congress, he can sideline it by moving its resources elsewhere. Its offices now sit dark on the third floor of the Justice Department building. The staff of a dozen or so has dwindled and left the department over the past few months, the people said. Maha Jweied, the acting director of the department, left this month to start a consulting business, according to her LinkedIn profile.

The Justice Department did not respond to repeated requests for comment, and Ms. Jweied did not respond to an emailed request for comment. Career prosecutors emphasized that new administrations reshuffle the Justice Department's priorities, de-emphasizing or shuttering projects that previous administrations had supported to devote resources to their own agendas. [READ MORE](#)

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