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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE EVOLVING ROLE OF LAW LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Washington, DC – Law libraries can continue to play an integral role in the courts and justice system in the 21st Century, but only if they change their orientation towards helping the public access the legal system. A new report released by Zorza & Associates today, titled “The Sustainable 21st Century Law Library: Vision, Deployment and Assessment for Access to Justice,” notes the vast changes to the law library landscape over the past twenty years and the potentially critical new role they can play as an access to justice resource for people without lawyers.

The Report was commissioned by a number of bar and legal groups from around the country, with the assistance of the American Bar Association Resource Center on Access to Justice and input from staff at the U.S. Department of Justice Access of Justice Initiative.

The Report acknowledges law libraries’ changing demographics: the number of lawyers and court staff visiting law libraries is decreasing at the same time that an increasing number of people are approaching law libraries for help. As the number of people without lawyers coming to law libraries increases, law libraries must adjust the delivery and availability of their services, and the Report identifies the broad potential of law libraries to make the judicial system more user-friendly and accessible for people without lawyers and makes a series of recommendations.

“Law libraries are a huge untapped resource with massive potential to increase access to legal information and assistance for people without lawyers,” said Richard Zorza, who researched and authored the report for the report’s cosponsors. “Because they have a

long tradition of providing reference information to patrons, those law libraries that adapt to play a more significant role in access to justice efforts will find themselves at the core of a vibrant and critical system. Those that fail to rise to the challenge may find themselves doomed to irrelevance by changes in technology, constituencies, funding pressures and the law and its institutions.”

There are many examples of law libraries across the country that have already embraced this role, and now make a major contribution to access to justice. The Report identifies best practices from those law libraries, and makes a series of recommendations for law libraries making this transition.

Cosponsors of the Report include: the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission, the California Commission on Access to Justice, The Chicago Bar Foundation, the Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law, the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission, the Washington Access to Justice Commission, and the Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission

The full text of the report is available at www.zorza.net.

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