

Every Law Firm Is Now an AI Firm, and That's Great News for Closing the Justice Gap!

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In the legal system, the biggest challenge often isn't the law itself. It's that most people simply can't afford a lawyer.

I'm not talking about isolated incidents. I mean the everyday cases most people face at some point—evictions, family court, small claims, and sometimes criminal court. In these situations, people often come to court scared and unprepared. It's not because they don't care, but because the system is expensive, confusing, and slow by design. Many never hire a lawyer because the cost is just too high. Others hire whoever they can afford and get such limited help that it likely won't make a difference. Sometimes, it's hard to say what's worse: going in alone or going in alone after spending money you couldn't spare.

There's data to support these claims. For example, a 2022 Legal Services Corporation (LSC) study found that low-income Americans got little or no legal help for [92% of substantial civil legal problems](#). This isn't a one-off issue; it's a problem with how the whole system is built.

After years in litigation, I've seen these bottlenecks firsthand. The legal field often blames "complexity," as if it's unavoidable, but much of it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Outdated processes, fragmented courts, overregulation, and old-fashioned paperwork slow everything down. Our courts still run on coal in the era of self-driving cars.

That's why I feel hopeful about AI in law, and why I'm frustrated by all the warnings and dismay. Today, every law firm is an AI firm, whether they want to or not. AI doesn't replace lawyers, but it does make legal work more scalable and accessible. If we use it wisely and policymakers don't overreach, AI can help make legal help and access to justice a reality for everyone.

Here's my main point: most legal work involves lots of repetitive tasks. Things like client intake, sorting facts, endless doc review sessions, researching, drafting, revising, organizing exhibits, and explaining options to clients who feel overwhelmed. These steps don't always need a lawyer's full expertise, but they do take time, and time is what the system often overcharges for.

AI can at least handle the first round of many legal tasks. It won't do everything perfectly, and it shouldn't work alone or without oversight. But it can still make a real difference. AI helps lawyers research faster, draft more efficiently, and explain things in ways clients can understand. It can help manage heavy caseloads and reduce backlogs without sacrificing quality. The lawyer still makes the key decisions: what matters, how to argue, when to file, what to concede, and what to fight. AI doesn't replace lawyers, but it does lower the cost of reaching a decision.

There's already early proof that AI in law isn't just hype. In a [Berkeley study](#), legal aid lawyers who tried AI tools reported big productivity gains, and many said they planned to keep using them. They

found AI especially helpful for research, drafting, and language tasks. But there's a risk: the profession and policymakers could still mess this up.

If we treat AI as a shortcut to competence (e.g., letting lawyers file unverified work or shift responsibility to an AI model) courts will sanction that, and they should. There have already been sanctions for lawyers who submitted filings with AI-generated, fake citations, like a [2023 case in the Southern District of New York](#). The quickest way to turn a promising change into a crisis is to let "legal AI" mean "machine-made." So yes, we need rules, but they must be the right ones.

We shouldn't aim to ban AI or shield the traditional legal market from change. Instead, we should raise standards and set best practices and accountability, so the benefits reach those who need them most. Here are three steps that would help.

First, modernize courts like the essential infrastructure they are. People shouldn't have to deal with broken websites, confusing procedures, or rules that keep out non-lawyers. If courts stay old-fashioned where it counts, AI will only help those with resources, not make access fairer for everyone.

Second, make it clear that core duties like competence, confidentiality, supervision, and truthful communications still govern, even with new tools like AI. Take the [California Bar's guidance](#) as a great example of focus on confidentiality and safeguards when using AI for legal work. Make that the standard: verify anything filed, protect client data, supervise use, and document processes.

Lastly, we should teach this openly. Law schools need to stop treating AI as off-limits and start teaching how to use it responsibly. How to test results, check citations, protect confidentiality, and use these tools to help more people instead of just cutting corners.

The real hope isn't just that lawyers work faster, it's that more people get real help they desperately need. We can keep a system where legal problems ruin lives because help is hard to find, or we can build one where lawyers, with the right tools, can meet people's needs.

The justice gap isn't something we have to accept. It's a choice, and now is the time to choose a better way.

Author's note: The framing here is inspired by Marc Andreessen's "[Why Software Is Eating the World](#)" and his later work "[The Techno-Optimist Manifesto](#);" any errors or conclusions are my own.