



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Request for Proposals Program Evaluation January 2022

Introduction

The mission of Maryland Legal Services Corporation is to ensure low-income Marylanders have access to stable, efficient and effective civil legal assistance through the distribution of funds to nonprofit legal services organizations. Through the passage of [House Bill 18](#) during the 2021 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly named MLSC the administrator of the new Access to Counsel in Evictions Program. MLSC seeks proposals to evaluate various aspects of the Program. **Please submit proposals by February 15, 2022** to Deb Seltzer at dseltzer@mlsc.org.

More information about MLSC is available at www.mlsc.org.

Background

Prior to the pandemic, Maryland averaged more than 650,000 failure-to-pay-rent eviction filings per year, while the state has only around 800,000 renter households. This high filing rate results in part from several process factors unique to Maryland, including a low filing fee (\$25 in Baltimore City, \$15 in all other jurisdictions) and the right of tenants to redeem the property by paying all due amounts before the execution of the eviction several times (four times per 12 months in Baltimore City, three times per 12 months in all other jurisdictions).

Failure-to-pay-rent filings have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Other eviction case types (tenant holding over and breach of lease), while much fewer in number than failure-to-pay-rent cases, have increased significantly above pre-pandemic levels.

Failure-to-pay-rent cases are filed in the District Court of Maryland. While the District Court is a unified court, each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions (23 counties and Baltimore City) may have different procedures for handling such cases. For example, some high-volume jurisdictions may have rent court dockets every day or in multiple courthouses, while lower-volume jurisdictions may hear failure-to-pay-rent cases only one day per week. Similarly, the jurisdictions may have differing levels of existing collaboration among court staff, legal services providers and the sheriffs' offices charged with posting summonses and executing evictions.

HB18 established the Program, through which eligible tenants (those from households at [less than 50% Maryland median income](#)) in Maryland shall have access to legal representation "for a judicial or administrative proceeding to evict or terminate the tenancy or housing subsidy" of the tenant. In the preamble to the bill, the General Assembly noted several important points:

- "A study of eviction actions in [Baltimore City] found that while only 1% of tenants are represented in eviction proceedings, approximately 96% of landlords are represented by an attorney or specialized agent in eviction proceedings."

- “Evictions have a disparate impact on black and brown households in the State.”
- “The General Assembly seeks to end the disparate impact of evictions based on race and gender.”

MLSC will make grants to legal services organizations to provide the legal services called for in the statute and, as also called for in the statute, will contract with community groups to perform tenant outreach and education.

HB 18 also created the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force, which began work on October 1, 2021, to make recommendations on implementation, outreach and assessment, and funding for the Program. The Task Force submitted [its initial report](#) to the governor and General Assembly on January 3, 2022. Materials and minutes from the Task Force and its committee meetings are available at www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/A2C/index.aspx. In addition to MLSC’s use for implementation and program administration, the assessment will be a key tool for the Task Force, which is charged with recommending necessary policy or statutory changes.

As the Program does not yet have a dedicated funding source, services have not yet been implemented, though some legal services are currently provided with other, mostly one-time funding. The legislation states a goal of full statewide implementation by October 1, 2025. When implementing the Program, MLSC is required to prioritize local jurisdictions that have also dedicated their own funding to eviction prevention legal services.

Scope

MLSC seeks an evaluator to perform process evaluation and outcomes evaluation. We envision the assessment will start by assessing the baseline, current state of evictions, including actions related to failure-to-pay-rent, tenant holding over, breach of lease and termination of housing subsidy. Process evaluation over the implementation period would include identifying opportunities for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of the Program and would include evaluating attorney caseload and identification of barriers to Program success.

Outcomes evaluation would study and report on data points such as effectiveness in preventing evictions or otherwise preventing disruptive displacement, effectiveness of outreach and education efforts, and demographic information necessary for equity analyses. This portion of evaluation would be ongoing through implementation, with various reports produced at agreed-upon intervals. After full implementation, we envision occasional assessments to ensure the Program continues to meet its objectives.

The evaluator will work closely with MLSC, the legal services providers and the community groups contracted to perform tenant outreach. These organizations will collect some client data, while other data may come from publicly available sources. We seek an evaluator that will work collaboratively with stakeholders who are on-the-ground experts to develop the evaluation while bringing in their own expertise and best practices related to design, instruments, data collection, analysis and reporting.

Proposal Requirements

Please address the following elements:

- **Organization Background:** company overview, profiles of key staff, description of experience performing evaluations for nonprofit organizations/government-funded services (including legal services, if applicable), description of experience evaluating disparate impact/performing equity analyses, etc.
- **Proposed Program Design:** proposal to meet stated needs, including process for collaborating with MLSC and service providers, anticipated format of reports, etc.
- **Proposed Timeline:** anticipated timeline for process and outcomes evaluations (note that referencing time periods [ex. three months after launch] is acceptable rather than listing specific months due to the uncertain nature of the funding and project progression)
- **References:** names and contact information for three references, as well as a link to or copy of a relevant final evaluation report, if available

Budget

As noted, the Program does not yet have dedicated funding. While funding is sought, MLSC has approximately \$250,000 in one-time funding available for the assessment process. Please include a line-item budget and describe any assumptions that affect costs, as well as any aspects of the evaluation that could be scaled up or down depending on availability of funds.

Submission and Inquiries

Please direct questions and submissions to:

Deb Seltzer, Executive Director
Maryland Legal Services Corporation
dseltzer@mlsc.org

The proposal submission deadline is February 15, 2022. Please submit proposals and supporting documents as PDFs.