



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Request for Proposals Coordinated Intake System, Access to Counsel in Evictions - PILOT April 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 for a coordinated intake system pilot. **Please submit proposals by May 9, 2022** to Karen Wabeke at ace@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). There is often a period of several weeks or months between the filing of an eviction action and the execution of the eviction.

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.

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.

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 organization or organizations to design, build, operate and manage a coordinated intake system for the Program that will simplify the process for eligible tenants to seek and obtain legal assistance in eviction cases. The coordinated intake system should include the following components: (1) one centralized telephone number for tenants facing eviction across the state of Maryland to connect with counsel, (2) a web-based client portal for intake and to guide people to the appropriate help, and (3) an electronic referral system among all organizations involved that creates a closed loop for data and reporting, with the ability to track an individual from the time the individual enters the system through the termination of services. The client portal will be housed on a website managed by MLSC and should be compatible with WordPress.

The coordinated intake system should also fully integrate local legal services providers, who often have a better understanding of the needs of their clients and the communities they serve. It should provide for immediate transfers and warm handoffs to local legal services providers and should be equipped to serve clients in different languages. In addition to good coordination and collaboration within the legal services delivery system, it is also critical to coordinate with other social service providers, nonprofits, and hotlines to encourage connectivity and early referrals to the centralized intake system.

The organization(s) selected will work closely with MLSC, legal services providers, and the community groups contracted to perform tenant outreach on the design and implementation of the coordinated intake system. We envision periodic meetings with these groups for discussion and troubleshooting aimed at improving the effectiveness of the coordinated intake system.

The initial phase of the coordinated intake system will be conducted as a pilot with primary focus on Baltimore City. The coordinated intake system will subsequently be scaled up during the implementation period, building upon the success of the pilot and making adjustments as needed based on lessons learned.

MLSC is open to awarding individual components of the project, as outlined above, to different organizations. MLSC also welcomes proposals involving partnership or collaboration between or among different organizations.

Proposal Requirements

Please address the following elements:

- **Organization Background:** organization overview; profiles of key staff; description of experience managing and overseeing all parts of the coordinated intake system that you are proposing to manage; description of experience incorporating principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into such systems; experience serving clients in different languages and with varying abilities; and experience working collaboratively with legal services providers and other social service providers
- **Proposed Program Design:** proposal to meet stated needs for any of the three parts of the coordinated intake system you are proposing to manage; process for collaborating with MLSC and services providers, etc.
- **Proposed Timeline:** anticipated timeline for development and implementation for any of the three parts of the coordinated intake system you are proposing to manage (note that referencing time periods [ex. three months after launch] is acceptable)
- **References:** names and contact information for three references, as well as a copy of or link to any relevant and publicly available materials (e.g., past website projects) that will assist us in evaluating your proposal

Budget

Please include a line-item budget and describe any assumptions that affect costs, including a breakdown of one-time/start-up costs and ongoing costs (e.g., staffing, maintenance). Please also discuss organizational capacity and any aspects of the coordinated intake system that could be scaled up or down depending on availability of funds.

Submission and Inquiries

Please direct questions and submissions to:

Karen Wabeke, Program Manager – Access to Counsel in Evictions
Maryland Legal Services Corporation
ace@mlsc.org

The proposal submission deadline is May 9, 2022. Please submit proposals and supporting documents as PDFs.