



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Request for Proposals Tenant Outreach & Education, Access to Counsel in Evictions November 2023

Introduction

The mission of the 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 tenant outreach and education services across Maryland. **Please submit proposals by December 15, 2023** 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.

Although failure-to-pay-rent filings have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, they are on the rise. 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 Access to Counsel in Evictions Program, through which eligible tenants (those from households at [less than 50% of 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. The legislation states a goal of full statewide implementation by October 1, 2025.

MLSC made grants to legal services organizations to provide the legal services called for in the statute in eleven jurisdictions in FY23 and expanded to all remaining jurisdictions in July 2023. Accordingly, legal services under ACE are currently available statewide.

Development of a statewide coordinated intake system for the Program is underway. Coordinated Intake formally launched as a pilot in Baltimore City in October 2023 and is expected to expand to the rest of the state over the next two years. In the meantime, tenants may contact 211 for referral to legal services providers in their jurisdiction.

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 has submitted two reports to the governor and General Assembly in January 2022 and 2023. Materials and minutes from the Task Force and its committee meetings are available at <https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/A2C/index.aspx>.

Scope

MLSC seeks proposals from nonprofit community groups to provide tenant outreach and education services in all 23 counties in Maryland and Baltimore City beginning in January 2024.

The ACE Task Force identified several guiding principles for tenant outreach and education that should be incorporated into all proposals. First, outreach and education should be conducted by “trusted messengers” with established relationships and networks in the communities they serve. MLSC is looking for organizations who can communicate creatively and effectively with tenants about why eviction is a legal problem and how a lawyer can help. Second, outreach and education should be targeted to those tenants who are most likely to be eligible for legal services provided through ACE. This includes, but is not limited to, tenants living in areas with high numbers of eviction filings, tenants facing utility shut-offs, and applicants for public benefits. MLSC is also open to proposals targeting specific at-risk populations, including tenants with disabilities, non-English speaking tenants, tenants who identify as LGBTQ or gender non-conforming, senior or youth tenants, and tenants living in subsidized housing.

Third, outreach and education should be multi-modal and account for the different ways in which eligible tenants get information and the reality of the digital divide. MLSC is interested in proposals that include a diverse mix of print and digital tactics, as well as significant direct in-person outreach and door-to-door canvassing. Fourth, outreach and education should be coordinated and done in partnership with legal services providers and other organizations that are already serving at-risk populations. Key partners include state and local housing departments, social service organizations, continuum of care coalitions, public schools, faith-based leaders and organizations, grassroots tenant and community groups, food pantries, and public libraries.

MLSC is open to awarding individual contracts but also welcomes proposals involving partnership or collaboration between or among different organizations. Please discuss these details in your proposal.

MLSC, in conjunction with an initial group of seven outreach providers, and with assistance from the United Way of Central Maryland, has created a standard set of ACE outreach materials. Following execution of contracts, these materials will be provided to selected outreach providers in an amount requested. ACE outreach providers are also welcome to supplement with additional materials targeted to specific localities in which they work.

MLSC currently hosts monthly Zoom meetings for outreach providers to refine messaging and outreach strategies. Attendance at these monthly meetings is mandatory.

Proposal Requirements

Please address the following elements:

- **Organization Background:** organization overview; profiles of key staff; description of experience providing outreach and education services to tenants or others; a description of experience incorporating principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into such work; experience serving clients in different languages; and experience working collaboratively with legal services providers and other social service providers.
- **Proposed Program Design:** detailed proposal for the provision of tenant outreach and education services, including how you propose to target outreach and education efforts (whether by population, geography, etc.), how you plan to reach tenants and what specific strategies you are proposing (door-to-door canvassing, mailings, presentations, etc.), and what other organizations you plan to partner with and engage in your outreach and education efforts.
- **Proposed Timeline:** anticipated timeline for rollout of outreach and education services, including hiring of additional staff if needed.
- **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 outreach materials) that will assist us in evaluating your proposal.

Budget

This round of funding will cover January 2024 through December 2024. Tenant outreach and education will be an ongoing aspect of the Program. Please include a line-item budget and describe any assumptions that affect costs, as well as any aspects of the proposal 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 December 15, 2023. Please submit proposals and supporting documents as PDFs if possible.