

# ***Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in the Maryland Courts***

**— FISCAL YEAR 2025 —**



***Access to Justice – Maryland Judiciary***



## Our Mission

The Maryland Judiciary provides fair, efficient, and effective justice for all. The Judiciary's Access to Justice Department supports this mission by developing, consolidating, coordinating, and implementing initiatives to expand access to and enhance the quality of justice in civil legal matters.

- We enhance meaningful participation for all in the courts.
- We develop innovative tools, resources, practices, and programs to address barriers to justice.
- We assist the courts in their goal to provide fair, effective, and efficient justice in a diverse and changing world.

## Judiciary Vision

The Maryland Judiciary advances justice for all who come to Maryland's courts. We are an efficient, innovative, and accessible court system that works collaboratively with justice partners to serve the people with integrity and transparency.

## Judiciary Strategic Goals

1. Promote accountability and public trust.
2. Improve access to justice.
3. Foster a healthy, diverse, and productive workforce.
4. Encourage a service-oriented approach to court operations.
5. Use technology effectively and responsibly.



# A Strategic Approach to Access to Justice

The Maryland Judiciary prioritizes resources and services strategically designed to achieve the goal of access to justice. These efforts are possible because of the support of Judiciary leadership, effective and innovative management strategies, attentiveness to key partner and stakeholder relationships both within the Judiciary and with justice system partners, a willingness to evaluate and iterate to improve program performance, and an organizational commitment to ensuring equal justice for all.

## Ensuring Accessible Facilities

Access to Justice provides equipment, policy advocacy, and subject matter expertise to enhance the ability of the courts to respond effectively to the needs of persons with disabilities, and to ensure courthouses and courtrooms are accessible.

## Helping the Unrepresented Navigate the Court System

Maryland Court Help Centers are a national model and realize the Judiciary's statewide commitment to supporting those who must use the courts without counsel. The Maryland Court Help Video Library and related web content continue to grow to further aid users looking for online information and support.

## Supporting Community Programs

The Judiciary cannot deliver on the promise of access to justice alone. The Maryland Judiciary sets an example of how state justice systems can support a healthy civil legal aid delivery system through grantmaking, collaboration, and innovative strategies.

## Innovating through Technology

The Maryland Judiciary capitalizes on the promise of technology to leverage public resources to deliver information, resources, and services to the public to advance access to justice. Access to Justice authors document assembly interviews to aid the public in identifying and completing court forms, provides the Maryland Court Help App, and collaborates with other Judiciary teams on a range of technology projects to enhance the public's access to the courts.

## Identifying and Removing Communication Barriers

The Judiciary's commitment to language access is expressed in the work of the Court Interpreter Program, translation services, and a commitment to harnessing the talents of court staff members to further promote access for those with limited English proficiency.







## **Providing Educational Programs to Enhance Access to Justice**

Through a robust program of educational opportunities, the Judiciary engages judges, magistrates, and court professionals in building the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to respond effectively to the needs of court users – whether those are persons with limited English, persons with disabilities, or those navigating the courts without counsel.

## **Reducing Financial Barriers**

Participating in the justice system can be costly. Those costs may limit how well or effectively Marylanders can avail themselves of the protection of Maryland law. The Judiciary evaluates and addresses these barriers through rule and process innovations, and by piloting new practices to alleviate the financial burden of engaging with the courts, especially for low-income Marylanders.

## **Fostering a Healthy, Diverse, and Productive Workforce**

The Maryland Judiciary recognizes it will better serve all Marylanders when our workforce reflects those we serve. Examining our commitment to employment diversity will have important benefits for equal justice.

## **Promoting Accountability and Public Trust**

The courts deliver effective justice when they have the public's trust and confidence. Trust is built on accountability and transparency. Key initiatives allow the public to get a close-up look at the resources and services designed to support access to justice.



# Ensuring Accessible Facilities

## Assisted Listening Devices

Assisted Listening Devices (ALDs) are tools that aid persons who are hard of hearing when participating in or observing court proceedings. They work by transmitting the judge's, attorneys', or witnesses' voices directly to the listener through a headset or compatible hearing aid, reducing background noise and improving clarity. For court visitors, these devices are essential to understanding testimony, arguments, and rulings, allowing them to effectively engage in their case, communicate with their attorney, and exercise their rights without being disadvantaged by hearing difficulties.

In fiscal year 2025, Access to Justice replaced 19 old or malfunctioning receivers and outfitted four new courtrooms with 24 new receivers in the Circuit Courts for Caroline, Worcester, Harford, and Calvert counties. Access to Justice also replaced an older system in the District Court in Garrett County.

## Promoting Consistency in Court Accessibility: Revised Accommodation Rule

In 2025, the Supreme Court of Maryland adopted revisions to the rule that directs courts in the handling of accommodation requests. The revised rule defines key terms including what a reasonable accommodation may include, provides for flexibility in the timing of accommodation requests, clarifies that the request should trigger an interactive process to address the requestor's needs, includes factors to guide the court in its determination, clarifies how accommodation requests can be administered, and directs the Judiciary to collect and publish anonymized data on accommodation requests. The revised rule took effect October 1, 2025.





## Accessibility Toolkit

The Judiciary supports judicial officers and court professionals in their efforts to create an accessible court experience for all. One key strategy has been Access to Justice's creation and maintenance of the Accessibility Toolkit. The Toolkit brings together in one location resources courts can use to respond effectively to the needs of persons with disabilities. The Toolkit is housed on the Judiciary's intranet site, Courtnet, among other internal resources.

The Toolkit includes a range of items including reference resources on disability law, tip sheets on accessibility topics, instructions on using the accessibility features in key programs, policy statements and guidelines, and sample signage and posters. With the assistance of Web Services, the display was revised with accordion links to permit easier search and review.

### Accessibility Toolkit

Find tools and resources for working with persons with disabilities and providing ADA accommodations at your court.



#### Entrance

There are many ways to greet individuals with disabilities and make them feel welcome to your court. The public may begin their court experience at the front door, on the phone, or through a web page. This section has links to resources including signs and other tools for the "entrance" to your court, accessibility tools for your web page, and other resources.



#### Clerk's Office

If you work in the clerk's office with members of the public who have disabilities, you receive ADA inquiries every day. This section contains information and resources to help you help the public.



#### In the Courtroom

Common courtroom needs for ADA accommodations include juror requests, and the need for assistive technology for court users with disabilities. Find these and other resources for the courtroom here.

#### [12 - Tips - Working with ASL and CDI Interpreters in the Courtroom \(PDF\)](#)

This printable Tip Sheet includes information to help you make the best use of American Sign Language (ASL) or Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) in the courtroom. Where should the interpreter stand to be most effectively? How do ASL-CDI teams work and what do I need to know when a CDI interpreter is involved? This Tip Sheet will help you address issues that arise in the courtroom on the spot.

#### [13 - Tips - Person with Mobility Limitations in Court \(PDF\)](#)

Not everyone with a mobility limitation requests an accommodation. This printable Tip Sheet provides guidance on how you can assure your court and courtroom are truly accessible to seniors and others with mobility limitations.

#### [14 - Tips - Persons with Sensory Impairments in Court \(PDF\)](#)

Persons who are blind, or deaf, or who have low vision or impaired hearing can do anything when provided the proper form of assistance. This printable Tip Sheet provides information you should know to ensure the courtroom is accessible to persons with sensory impairments, whether they are parties, attorneys, jurors, witnesses or visitors.

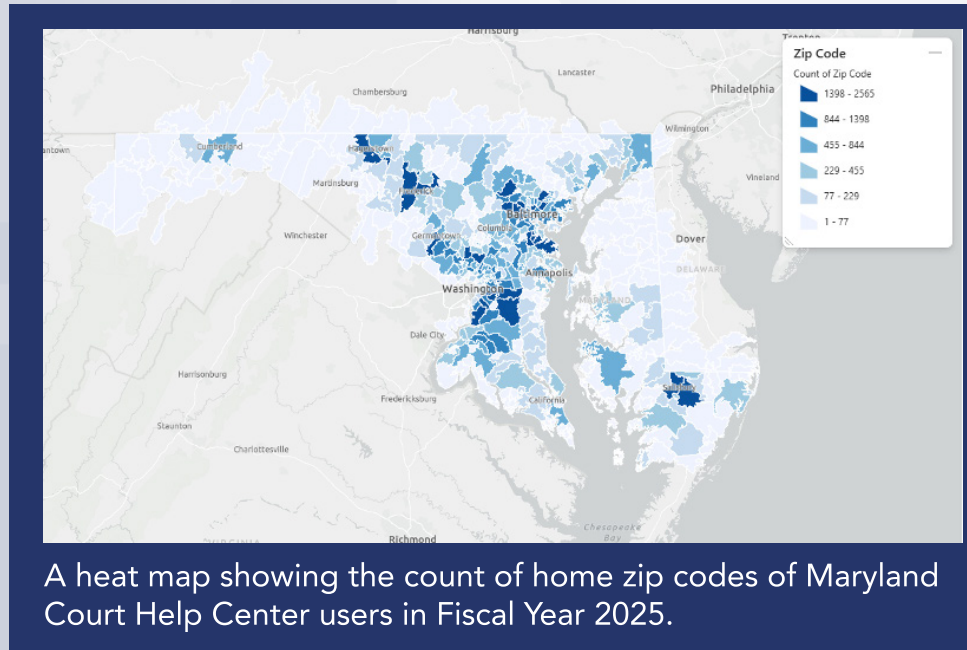
# Helping Unrepresented People Navigate the Court System

## Providing Legal Help: Maryland Court Help Centers

As part of its commitment to improving access to justice, the Maryland Judiciary provides Marylanders with the opportunity to consult with a lawyer regarding their civil legal issues. Maryland Court Help Center attorneys are trained to provide brief legal advice on all civil case types heard in the Maryland courts. The Judiciary contracts with the Maryland Center for Legal Assistance, a subsidiary of Maryland Legal Aid, to operate 10 walk-in locations serving District Courts, as well as a statewide call center providing remote help services to Marylanders in all jurisdictions. Walk-in help centers in District Court locations provide help in District Court case types (landlord-tenant matters, small claims, peace & protective order cases, for example). Two of the walk-in locations (those co-located with circuit courts) and the call center provide help in all civil case types.\*

\* In addition to the District Court centers and the call center, the Maryland Judiciary operates a network of Family Court Help Centers. These centers are operated by local circuit courts under grants from Juvenile & Family Services, Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts.

**Who Do Help Centers Serve?**  
 Help center services are available to all Marylanders regardless of income. A plurality of help center visitors are women of color. The highest percentage have a high school education and an annual household income of less than \$50,000 per year – less than half the “survival income” for a family of four in the state (See the [State of Alice in Maryland: 2025 Update on Financial Hardship](https://www.unitedforalice.org/key-findings/maryland) available at <https://www.unitedforalice.org/key-findings/maryland>). Maryland Court Help Centers ensure that low-income Marylanders have an opportunity to avail themselves of the protection of the law and the courts. With support and advice from a help center attorney, these Marylanders can understand the court process. With assistance they are better equipped to present their case and advocate for themselves.



## Lots of Ways to Get Help

Maryland Court Help Centers offer a variety of ways to speak with a lawyer: face to face, by phone, by live chat, or through a video call. Services are available to all Marylanders regardless of whether they reside in large population centers or Maryland’s rural regions such as in Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, or the Eastern Shore.

### Maryland Court Help Center – Instances of Service – FY2025



**In-Person**  
**49,682**



**Phone**  
**88,585**



**Chat**  
**26,521**



**Email**  
**8,534**



**Video Call**  
**470**

**TOTAL INSTANCES OF SERVICE IN FY25: 173,792**







## Supporting the Public with Educational Webinars Live and On-Demand

In addition to providing direct legal assistance, Maryland Court Help Center attorneys offer live and on-demand webinars on a broad range of legal topics. The on-demand video library is especially useful for individuals whose schedule may not permit them to attend a live event. Webinars can last for an hour or more and provide in-depth information that may not be available in web content or from other media. During the live webinars, attorneys field questions from participants. Once recorded, they are made available for viewers to watch at their convenience. Key topics are presented in Spanish as well as English.

On-demand titles are especially popular. In fiscal year 2025, on-demand webinars were viewed 5,999 times. Titles dealing with rent court were the most popular, followed by family law topics, and expungement of criminal records.

### MOST VIEWED ON-DEMAND WEBINARS FOR THE PUBLIC – FISCAL YEAR 2025

Webinar Topic	Views
Webinar - Facing Eviction for Failure to Pay Rent	1,782
Webinar - Filing A Failure to Pay Rent Case	1,735
Webinar - Filing Your Case in the District Court of Maryland	288
Webinar - Filing for Divorce in Maryland, Updated February 2024	272
Solicitando un divorcio en Maryland	239
Webinar - Filing for Expungement Part 1: Introduction to Expungements in Maryland	219
Webinar - Responding to a Complaint for Custody	217
Webinar - Child Custody and Visitation in Maryland	215
Webinar - Filing for Expungement Part 3: Expunging Guilty Dispositions	196



## The Maryland Justice Passport

Help centers also play a critical role in referring Marylanders for additional legal help or full representation when needed. With over 50 civil legal aid providers in the state, finding a free or low-cost lawyer can be challenging. Help center staff create a Maryland Justice Passport for individuals who are being referred for additional help. This digital portfolio allows the individual to control their data, manage their case, and connect with a referral resource with minimal friction. The Maryland Justice Passport application was created by Civil Justice Inc. with a grant from Access to Justice.



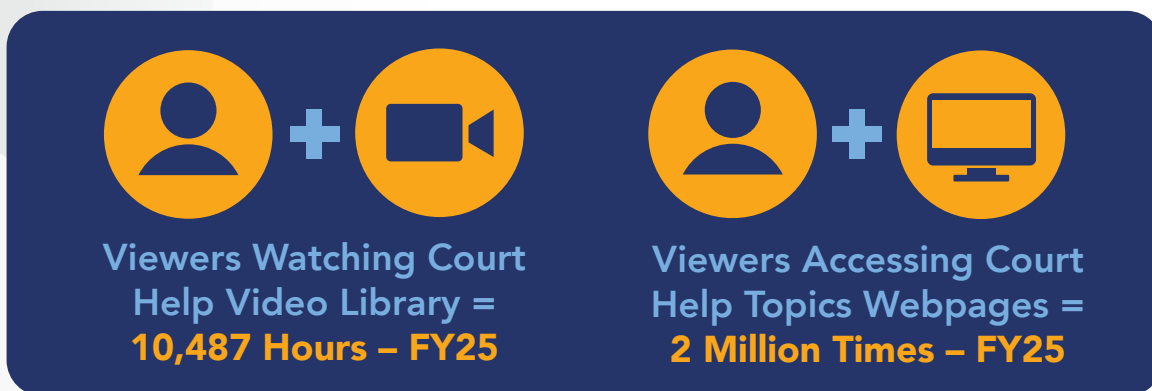
## Learning Resources for the Public: Videos and Web Content

As part of its commitment to improving access to justice, the Maryland Judiciary provides Maryland Court Help resources which include an extensive Court Help Video Library and a series of topical web pages, called Court Help Topics, to support the public in navigating Maryland law and the courts. With more than 170 videos and 45 webpages, these resources offer overviews of substantive areas of law and provide practical tips, such as preparing for court, researching the law, and requesting an accommodation with the court. Recognizing that people have varied styles of learning, and that access to multiple types of resources supports understanding, the Video Library, Court Help Topics, and the People's Law Library of Maryland – a resource managed by the State Law Library – all refer to one another so the user may find all resources on any one topic easily.





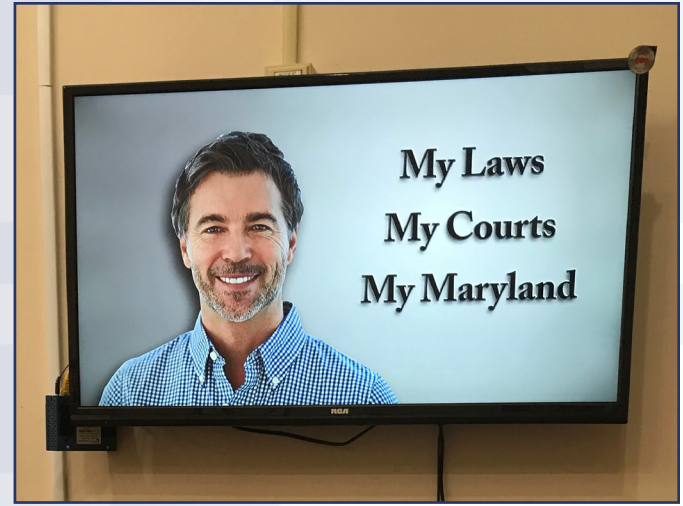
The Maryland Judiciary regularly adds to the information offered through these media, and data demonstrate the public's heavy use of these resources. For example, in 2024, the Judiciary added videos on remote hearings, victims of crime, expungement of cannabis charges, judicial declaration of gender identity, viewing a case electronically, and divorce.



Viewers spent 10,487 hours watching Court Help Video Library content in fiscal year 2025, and the Court Help Topics webpages were viewed over 2 million times.

## Streaming Information at the Courthouse: CourtTV

CourtTV is a streaming network of displays installed in public areas of courthouses statewide. Courts choose pre-selected or customized playlists of videos from the Maryland Court Help Video Library. Playlists are easy to customize, so the content reflects the types of cases on the docket or areas of interest. The public can watch CourtTV while waiting in a courthouse lobby or other high-traffic area and gain additional understanding of their case. Each video contains a QR code pointing to the page on which the video is hosted for later viewing or downloading additional materials, such as fact sheets or the video transcript.



CourtTV also incorporates short promotional videos about court services and informational pieces about positive Judiciary news, giving the public more opportunities to take advantage of court-based services.

## Supporting Community Programs

### Supporting Maryland's Civil Legal Aid Providers Through Grantmaking

Every year, Access to Justice dedicates resources to support court and community-based programs that work to improve access to justice. In fiscal year 2025 Access to Justice grantees provided:

- day-of-court representation in consumer debt matters;
- interpreters to assist persons with limited English in meeting with their civil legal aid lawyer to prepare their case;
- community engagement with the courts;
- help settling title or preparing life planning documents for low-income seniors; and
- in some cases, full representation by a private lawyer for contested family law matters.







These programs enhance the spectrum of resources needed to ensure equal justice for all – especially when the complexity of the case or the income status of the litigant warrant full representation.

## Judicare Program

The Judicare Program is operated by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) under a grant from Access to Justice. MLSC subgrants funds to seven civil legal aid providers to provide low-income Marylanders full representation in contested family law matters across the state. Representation is provided free to income-eligible participants by members of the private bar serving for a reduced hourly rate.



Representation to  
**977** Low-Income  
Marylanders



Engaged **157** Attorneys  
Providing Services for a  
Low Hourly Rate



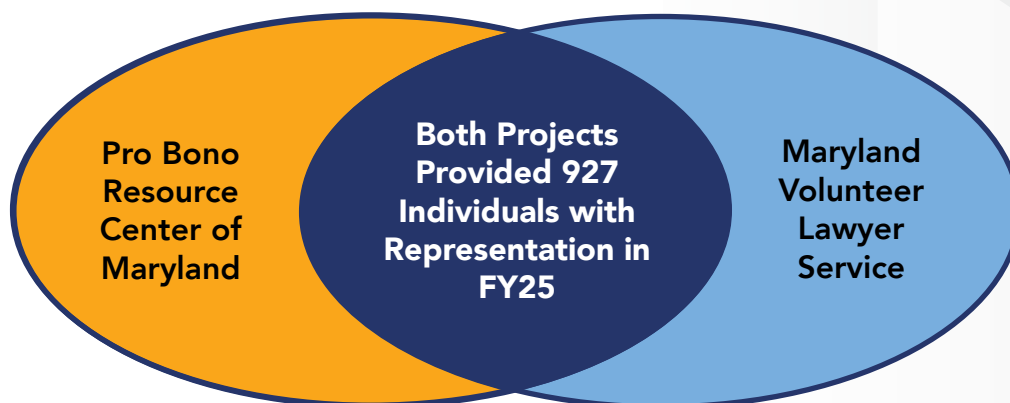
**4.6** Million in  
Economic  
Impact

During fiscal year 2025 the program:

- Provided representation to 977 low-income Marylanders (cases closed).
- Engaged 157 private attorneys from every jurisdiction who provided services for a low hourly rate.
- Benefited low-income Marylanders financially, establishing over \$4.6 million in economic impact by securing direct assets or financial benefits for program clients.

## Consumer Protection Programs

Through grants to the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland and Maryland Volunteer Lawyer Service, the Maryland Judiciary funds two Consumer Protection projects that focus on providing day-of-court representation to consumers facing affidavit judgments. Consumers who receive assistance from a lawyer through these programs often avoid a judgment. They may be able to have the case dismissed or enter into a payment plan with the creditor. These outcomes avoid the negative consequences of a wage garnishment or the accruing of post-judgment interest, while helping to restore credit.



In FY25, these two projects provided limited scope representation to 927 individuals.

## Improving the Rent Court Experience: Rule Changes to Support the ACE Program

In 2021, Maryland adopted legislation creating the Access to Counsel in Evictions program which provides legal representation for low-income tenants at risk of eviction in all jurisdictions in the state. The law also created the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Task Force to monitor implementation of the program, coordinate stakeholder activities, and ensure stakeholder voices are considered. Access to Justice Director Pamela Ortiz sits on the ACE Task Force along with Assistant State Court Administrator Kelley O'Connor, Government Relations and Public Affairs.

In 2024, the ACE Task Force recommended several changes to the Maryland Rules to ensure tenants were being informed about the program including mandating use of the Judiciary form used for the 10-day notice landlords must provide tenants. The Judiciary version of the form includes key information to ensure tenants know about the ACE Program. The Supreme Court of Maryland adopted a change requiring the use of the Judiciary form in the [224th Rules Order](#). The revised rule took effect October 1, 2025.

**NOTICE OF INTENT TO FILE A COMPLAINT FOR SUMMARY EJECTMENT (Failure to Pay Rent)**  
(Real Property Article § 8-401(c))

**FROM:** Landlord/Agent  
Address  
City, State, Zip Telephone  
E-mail Address

**TO:** Tenant (1) Tenant (2)  
Tenant (3) Tenant (4)  
Address  
City, State, Zip Telephone  
E-mail Address(es)

**THIS IS NOT A NOTICE OF EVICTION**  
An action for repossession of the property may be initiated if the total amount listed below is not paid within 10 days after the landlord provides this notice. You have a legal right to dispute the charges.  
The past-due rent and late fee amounts claimed by the landlord to be due are:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ rent for the ☐ months ☐ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \*late fees for the ☐ months ☐ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \*Due pursuant to the terms of your lease.  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \*TOTAL  
\*Does not include other charges related to utilities, services, other fees, fines, and court costs.  
At your request, the landlord must promptly provide you an itemized accounting of debits and credits (rental ledger) showing how the landlord came up with the amount they claim you owe.

**LANDLORD/AGENT CONTACT INFORMATION**  
(if different from above)  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE AND METHOD OF PROVIDING NOTICE**  
This notice is being provided to the tenant by the landlord on \_\_\_\_\_ by:  
☐ First-class mail – mail service certificate of mailing ☐ Affixed to the door of the leased property  
☐ Delivered electronically by: ☐ E-mail message ☐ Text message ☐ Electronic tenant portal

**Note:** Notice may be sent electronically only at the request of the tenant. If sent through a tenant portal, the portal must provide the landlord with proof of the transmission by which the landlord can verify the transmission.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Landlord/Attorney/Agent \_\_\_\_\_ Attorney Number \_\_\_\_\_

**RESOURCES FOR TENANTS AND LANDLORDS**  
• Under the [Access to Counsel in Evictions Law](#), all income qualified tenants will have access to an attorney. Call 211 for a referral or visit [legalhelpmd.org](http://legalhelpmd.org) for more information.  
• Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Office [mdcourts.gov/district/adr/home](http://mdcourts.gov/district/adr/home)  
◦ **Mediation** is a conversation between the landlord and the tenant that is facilitated by a mediator. Topics discussed in mediation may include: the amount of rent that is due and how and when it might be paid; a move out date and conditions of moving out; modifying, extending or terminating the lease; and/or, other topics important to the landlord and to the tenant. Mediation is available **before and after a failure to pay rent case is filed** in the District Court of Maryland. To request mediation, visit [mdcourts.gov/district/adr/landlordtenant](http://mdcourts.gov/district/adr/landlordtenant).  
• Rental assistance may be available to both Landlords and Tenants. Visit [mdcourts.gov/legalhelp/housing](http://mdcourts.gov/legalhelp/housing).  
• Speak with a lawyer for free at a Maryland Court Help Center. Get legal advice, help with forms, and referrals to rental assistance programs. Visit [mdcourts.gov/helpcenter](http://mdcourts.gov/helpcenter) or call 410-260-1392.

DC-CV-115 (Rev. 10/2024) [Reset](#)



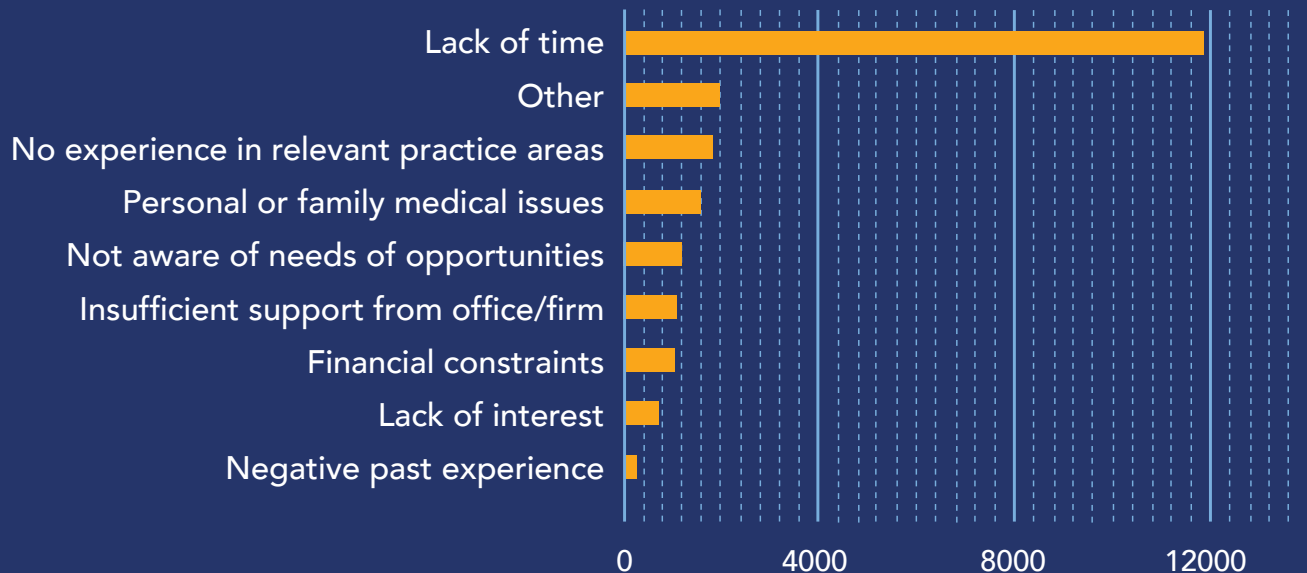
## Supporting Civil Aid through Attorney Engagement: Pro Bono and IOLTA Reporting for Maryland Lawyers

One way the Judiciary supports the health of the civil legal aid delivery system is by requiring Maryland attorneys to report annually on their pro bono activity and by collecting information on attorney trust accounts. Each year, Maryland's 42,000-plus lawyers are required to pay an assessment to the Client Protection Fund, and report on their pro bono activity and their Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA). Access to Justice serves as the business sponsor for the Attorney Information System (AIS) used to manage attorney compliance requirements. AIS was developed and is maintained by Judicial Information Systems (JIS).

The pro bono reporting rule, first adopted in 2002, is designed to incentivize pro bono commitment and sets an aspirational goal for full-time practicing attorneys of 50 hours per year of pro bono work. In fiscal year 2023, the last reporting cycle for which data are available, 38.4% of attorneys reported some pro bono activity. Together Maryland lawyers reported providing 1,021,343 hours of pro bono service. During the same period, attorneys reported making over \$4 million in financial contributions to organizations that provide legal services to people of limited means.

The report also captures information from attorneys to help civil legal aid organizations design pro bono activities that will be attractive and feasible for the state's attorneys.

### REASONS PREVENTING PRO BONO AMONG FULL-TIME LAWYERS – FISCAL YEAR 2023






# Innovating Through Technology

## Guided Interviews to Help with Court Forms

Guide & File is a series of interactive guided interviews designed to help litigants fill out court forms. This free online application works by asking litigants questions and using their answers to fill out forms. The information they type into interviews will appear on the forms exactly as they enter it. Guide & File includes helpful resources, detailed explanations, and guidance on the next steps in the process. When finished, forms can be saved, printed, and submitted at the courthouse or e-filed.



**Maryland Court Help**

**Guide & File**

**Guide & File** is a new tool developed by the Maryland Courts to help you complete court forms online.

The application guides you through a series of questions called an "interview." This free program copies your interview answers directly into your court form exactly as you enter it.

The Guide & File program includes helpful resources related to your legal issue, detailed explanations, and definitions. When you're done, the program automatically generates all the forms you will need, along with detailed instructions on what to do next.

**Why use Guide & File?**

- **Convenient.** Use it from any computer with internet access.
- **Smart.** The application knows the forms you need based on your answers.
- **Start and finish when you want.** Create an account to save your work and return later.
- **File your forms.** Completed forms can be filed **in person**, by mail, or **electronically\***; **\*NOTE:** Once you register to **e-file (electronically file)** your court documents, you **MUST** continue to e-file ALL future filings.

**This program does not provide legal advice.** For **free** legal help in **civil** matters, contact the **Court Help Center**. Lawyers at the Court Help Center may help you understand court documents, complete court forms, and prepare for court.

**Guide & File Interview Index**

Click on the **box (Form No.: Legal Issue)** listed below for the form you would like to use the Guide & File application to complete (filing options are also included). New interview topics will be added as they become available.

**RESOURCES**

- [Getting Started - Quick Reference Guide \(QRG\)](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)
- [Guide & File Flyer for Litigants](#)
- [E-filing \(MDEC - Maryland Electronic Courts\)](#)
- [Video: Getting Started](#)
- [Video: About Guide and File](#)

**WHICH FORMS?**

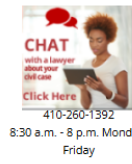
- [Court Form Search](#)
- [Form Finder Tool](#)

**TECHNICAL HELP**

- [Contact Odyssey Support 1-833-307-2324](#)
- [Help Center Knowledge](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

**COURT HELP**

Maryland Court Help Center  
Free legal help with your civil matter



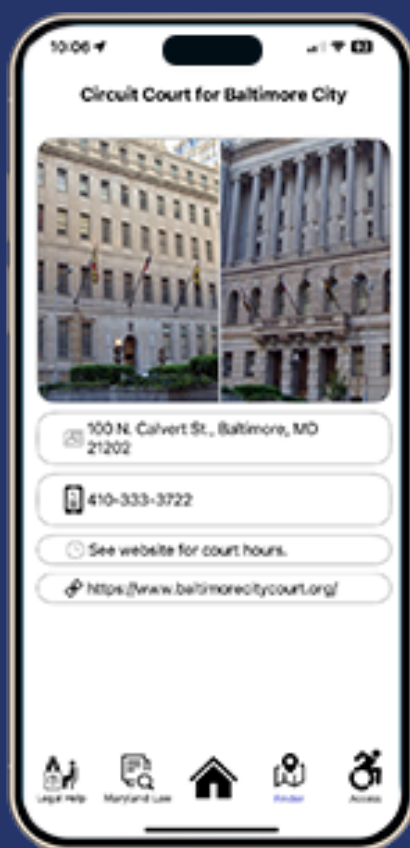
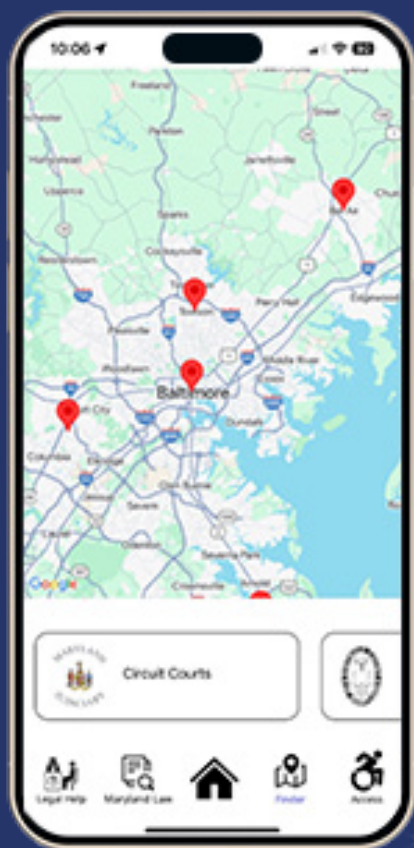
In fiscal year 2025, the Maryland Judiciary published new interviews including a request to modify child support and a peace order request.





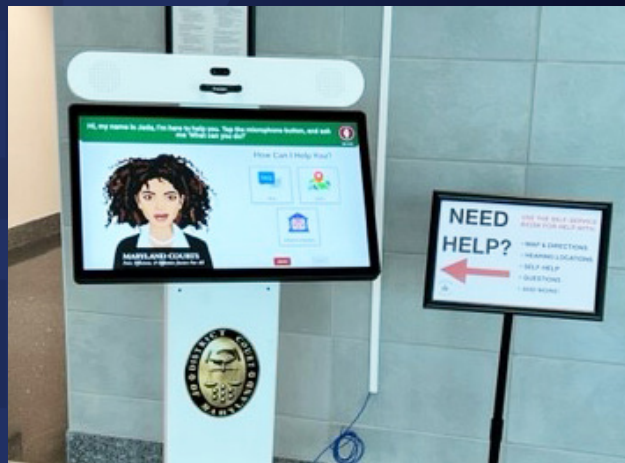
## Connecting Court Users to Resources with the Maryland Court Help Mobile App

Maryland Court Help is a free mobile app that connects litigants with legal information on their smartphones and tablets. The app combines tools and resources developed by the Administrative Office of the Courts and others to help litigants use the courts, find local resources, or explore legal help options. In fiscal year 2025, Access to Justice released version 3.2, introducing a list of courthouses and other locations for legal help resources so litigants only need to know where they want to go. Access to Justice also rearranged the main page to include direct links to call or chat with a Maryland Court Help Center attorney, making free legal advice more accessible.



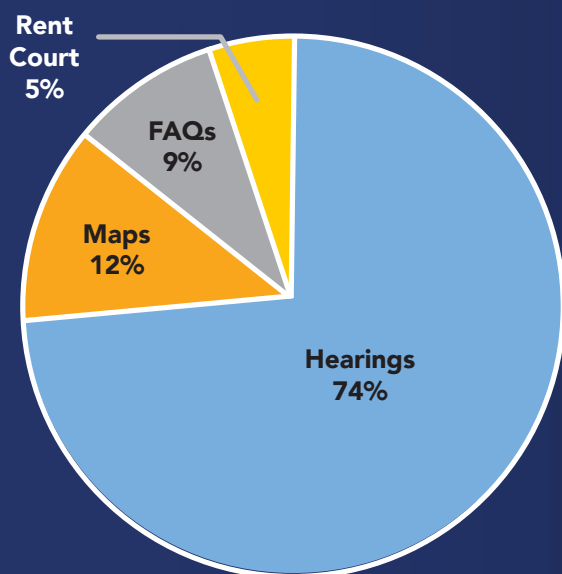
## Public Kiosks for On-site Help with Wayfinding and FAQs

Access to Justice worked with Judicial Information Systems and local courts to plan, install, and test public kiosks in court locations as a pilot project. Pilot locations include the District Court in Catonsville, and the Circuit Courts for Howard and Charles counties. A courthouse kiosk is a self-service touchscreen that uses a voice activated avatar to provide quick and convenient access to wayfinding, docket details, jury information, and answers to frequently asked questions without needing to wait for staff assistance. Litigants have found them easy to use, and many relied on them for fast information when in a rush, reducing congestion at the clerk's counter and helping staff focus on more complex issues. The kiosks also offer the opportunity for other uses to improve the public's visit to the court.

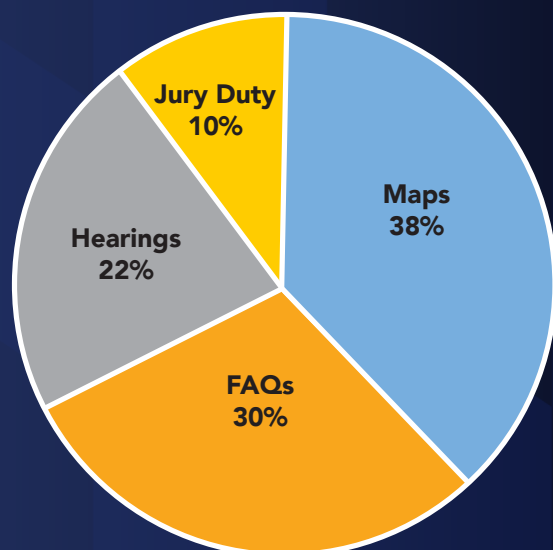


Overall, they enhance accessibility, improve efficiency, and support a more user-friendly courthouse experience.

**District Court, Baltimore County, Catonsville**  
**Kiosk Usage Since February 2024**



**Circuit Court for Howard County**  
**Kiosk Usage Since February 2024**







# Identifying and Removing Communication Barriers

## Language Services in the Maryland Courts

Access to Justice plays a key role in aiding the courts in identifying and reducing communication barriers through its work managing court language services. The Court Interpreter Program team is responsible for recruiting, testing, certifying, and supporting foreign language interpreters who serve on the Maryland Court Interpreter Registry. The Registry also includes nationally certified American Sign Language and Certified Deaf Interpreters.

In fiscal year 2025, the Judiciary provided in-person interpreters for 20,309 court events in the circuit and District Courts. In addition, the courts use telephonic language services to meet the needs of individuals at clerks' counters, help centers, and commissioner stations. In fiscal year 2025, the Maryland courts provided telephonic interpreter services on 41,429 occasions. These services allow the courts to meet the needs of persons with limited English for any court event or service.

For more information on court language services, see our report, *Language Services in the Maryland Courts – FY 2025*.



## **Empowering Employees to Serve: Bilingual Staff Program**

Access to Justice has supported the rollout of the Judiciary's Bilingual Staff Program over the last two years. The program permits courts to test and certify employees who are fluent in Spanish to serve as a Qualified Bilingual employee. Candidates must pass a language proficiency test in Spanish to ensure they can communicate effectively with the public. Those who qualify are acknowledged for their ability to serve the public directly in their foreign language obviating the need for an interpreter. Qualified Bilingual staff receive a salary stipend to acknowledge their enhanced skill level. They wear a badge to identify their status as a qualified bilingual employee to the public. The ability to serve members of the public directly in their own language helps the Judiciary advance its goal of eliminating communication barriers to promote access to justice. After an initial pilot period, the program is now in the process of being rolled out to all jurisdictions.

For self-represented litigants, the program provides immediate benefits. Instead of waiting for an interpreter, they can receive assistance directly in their own language from trained court staff. This direct service helps individuals navigate forms, procedures, and points of contact more efficiently, reducing delays and frustration.

Access to Justice plays a role in the program by offering examinations, scoring exams, onboarding, training, and supporting Qualified Bilingual employees in collaboration with Human Resources.

## **Translation Services: Making Written Materials Understandable for All**

Access to Justice provides translation services to the Maryland courts through a vendor. To fulfill the aspirations of its Language Access Plan, the Judiciary maintains all public-facing court forms in fillable PDF versions in English and five priority languages – Chinese, French, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

Access to Justice will also translate public-facing documents for individual courts to aid them in supporting court users with limited English. In fiscal year 2025, Access to Justice oversaw the translation of 488 documents. The bulk of these were new or revised forms in priority languages. Additional projects included brochures, video transcripts, web content, and several projects in other languages including Arabic and Farsi. To meet the specific needs of court users on the Lower Eastern Shore, a core set of forms and court documents were translated into Haitian Creole at the request of the Circuit Court for Wicomico County.





# Providing Educational Programs to Enhance Access to Justice

## Helping Court Staff Support the Public Effectively by Offering Webinars

Providing Judiciary employees with access-related educational programs is essential to advancing access to justice. Staff—particularly those in public-facing positions—play a vital role in connecting the public with Maryland Court Help resources, language access services, and other critical resources that support access to and navigation of the court system.

To support this effort, Access to Justice offered a webinar on Self-Represented Litigant Resources seven times during fiscal year 2025. The sessions were scheduled at different times throughout the year to accommodate staff whose public-facing responsibilities may limit their ability to attend trainings. The webinar provided an overview of all Maryland Court Help resources, highlighted language access resources, shared updates on available services, and offered best practices for referring self-represented litigants to Maryland Court Help Centers. Participants also learned about the Judiciary's current Access to Justice initiatives.

Following each session, participants received an internal-use SRL Resource Reference Guide—a quick reference tool for directing members of the public to the appropriate Maryland Court Help resources.

A total of 302 Judiciary staff members participated in the webinars. Post-webinar surveys reflected overwhelmingly positive feedback, underscoring staff appreciation for the Judiciary's commitment to providing access-related training that strengthens their ability to serve the public. Many participants were unfamiliar with the full range of Maryland Court Help resources and valued the in-depth explanations, while others, already familiar, appreciated receiving updates and refreshers.

By investing in access-related education, the Judiciary not only strengthens staff capacity to assist the public effectively, but also ensures that all members of the public—including self-represented litigants—can more easily navigate the court system and access the resources they need.



“

There are so many resources for pro se litigants. It is so helpful to steer them in the right direction to get the correct information for their particular circumstances.

”

“

I learned Several things such as more in-depth information regarding the toolkits and increased information regarding the help center.

”

“

The Judiciary continues to develop and refine great resources for SRLs.  
Thank you!

”

“

I learned about all of the different resources we can provide to pro se litigants! Some of them I didn't even know about.

”

## Professional Development Programs to Support Access for Persons with Limited English, and for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

In January 2025 Court Interpreter Program staff, Ksenia Boitsova and Xiomara Iglesias, presented a Judicial College Professional Development webinar on *How to Assist Limited English Proficient Customers*.

In February 2025, Court Interpreter Program staff and the Judiciary's ASL consultant, Debi Shostak, presented a Judicial College webinar on *How to Assist Hard of Hearing Customers*. The course presented best practices for court staff to follow when working with deaf customers. As a Certified Deaf Interpreter herself, Ms. Shostak added valuable information and insights about the Deaf community.

In June 2025, Access to Justice staff members Ksenia Boitsova and Xiomara Iglesias joined the chair of the Court Access Committee, Hon. Michael Siri, to present a session titled *How to Work Effectively with Court Interpreters*, at the MSBA Annual Summit in Ocean City, Maryland on June 5.





## Videos Series for Judges on Working with Court Interpreters

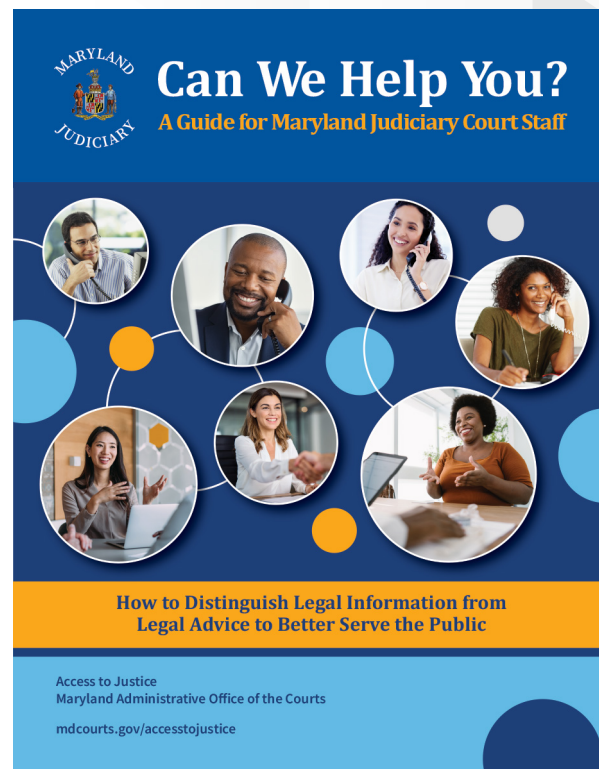
Access to Justice staff combined their expertise on courtroom interpretation and experience in creating video content to produce on demand video trainings on working with courtroom interpreters for Maryland judges and magistrates. Available on the Judiciary's intranet, *Tips on How to Work with Court Interpreters* is a five-part video series that covers a range of topics: preparing for an interpreted proceeding, conducting an interpreted proceeding, team interpreters, video remote interpreters, and relay interpretation. Each video is relatively brief to permit judges and magistrates to watch at their convenience.

By watching these training videos, judges gain practical skills to manage interpreters more effectively in their courtrooms. When judges are mindful of pacing, allow interpreters time to render complete and accurate interpretations, and apply best practices for team and remote interpreting, it reduces interpreter errors and delays. This ensures that self-represented litigants and other limited English proficient participants fully understand and are understood during proceedings. In this way, the videos, although created for judges, directly support fair hearings and strengthen access to justice for court users who rely on interpreters.



## Revised Guide on Legal Advice versus Information: *Can We Help You?*

Access to Justice published an updated version of *Can We Help You? A Guide for Maryland Judiciary Court Staff*. The guide covers how to distinguish legal information from legal advice and aims to arm court staff with the knowledge and confidence to ethically and responsibly provide as much legal information as possible to the public. The guide provides examples of how court staff can help the public and the types of referral resources available. The guide is available both online and in print.



## Educational Programs Supporting Increased Access for Persons with Disabilities

### The Accessible Courtroom

In October 2024, Access to Justice coordinated a Judicial College webinar on *The Accessible Courtroom*. Co-presenters included Judge Pamela White (Chair of the Accessibility & Accommodations Subcommittee, Court Access Committee), Pamela Ortiz (Access to Justice), Warren Hedges (Legal Affairs and Fair Practices), and Ronza Othman (President, Maryland Chapter, National Federation of the Blind). The webinar was attended by approximately 60 participants and was well received. The program highlighted the statutory and rule framework for addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, identified key tools available to assist judges in responding effectively, and included a discussion of various scenarios and practical applications of the law and Judiciary policy to ensure full participation for persons with disabilities in the justice system.





## Meeting the Needs of Persons with Disabilities

In fiscal year 2025, Access to Justice partnered with Judicial College and Fair Practices to offer two webinars on *Meeting the Needs of Persons with Disabilities*. The webinar, offered to court professionals, was held on April 10, 2025. It was reprised on November 6, 2025. The webinar highlighted:

- how disability impacts access to the courts and the justice system;
- the etiquette of serving persons with disabilities;
- public accommodation laws and Judiciary policies;
- eliminating barriers for persons with disabilities; and
- tools and resources.

the etiquette of  
serving persons  
with disabilities



## Accessibility and Title II of the ADA for Courts

Pamela Ortiz and Warren Hedges presented a webinar on May 20, 2025, for the National Center for State Courts on *Accessibility and Title II of the ADA for Courts*. Other co-presenters included Danielle Hirsch (NCSC) and Grace Spulak (NCSC). There were over 1,200 registered attendees. The session covered guiding principles in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities, a discussion of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and an in-depth discussion of scenarios to help listeners understand the practical application of the law.

## Reducing Financial Barriers

### Improving the Fee Waiver Process: Revisions to Rule 1-325

Access to Justice recommended changes to Rules 1-325 through the Rules Review Subcommittee of the Equal Justice Committee. The rule permits the courts to waive court costs and filing fees due to indigence. The original process required litigants to first request a prepayment waiver. Once the case was concluded litigants could ask the court for a final waiver of costs. Although the Judiciary has long supported the process by providing forms, information, videos, and tip sheets for the public, the two-part process created a significant barrier to justice for the indigent. Litigants were often unaware they would need to ask the court for a final waiver and were thus surprised to receive an invoice at the conclusion of the case, which they were often unable to pay without hardship.





The Rules Committee took up report of the Rules Review Subcommittee in 2024 and eventually endorsed changes to Rule 1-325 in the 223rd Rules Report. Those changes were adopted by the Supreme Court of Maryland and took effect January 1, 2025. The revised rule provides that litigants may submit a single fee waiver request, asking the court for both the prepayment waiver as well as a final waiver of costs when filing their fee waiver request. This obviates the need for litigants to submit a second request at the conclusion of the case but allows the court the flexibility to make a different decision at the conclusion of the case if circumstances warrant it.

The rule was revisited again by the Rules Committee at the request of Maryland Legal Aid, and, in a subsequent order, the Supreme Court adopted an additional change to permit the one-step process for litigants represented by civil legal aid providers. That change took effect October 1, 2025.

Access to Justice has revised the *Fee Waiver* video series, Tip Sheets, and web content to reflect the revised process.

## **Alleviating the Cost Barrier to Appeals by Addressing Transcript Costs: The Transcript Waiver Pilot Program**

In 2024, Chief Justice Matthew J. Fader appointed the Transcript Task Force to reduce or ameliorate the cost burden of obtaining transcripts in civil cases and the corresponding barrier to access to justice that process can impose. The Task Force, co-chaired by Hon. Douglas Nazarian, Appellate Court of Maryland, and Justice Stephen Gould, Supreme Court of Maryland, adopted a two-pronged approach. The first goal of the Task Force was to identify a short-term solution for indigent appellants who are unable to pay for transcripts. The second goal of the Task Force will be to undertake a broader inquiry into the transcript requirement to identify alternate approaches that may help reduce or eliminate the cost barrier.

To further its first goal, the Task Force recommended and obtained approval to launch the Appellate Court of Maryland (ACM) Transcript Waiver Pilot Program. Appellants appealing cases involving child access issues to the ACM are invited to apply for a waiver of transcript costs once the case reaches the stage at which a transcript must be ordered. Potential income-eligible applicants are those who are self-represented or who are represented by a civil legal aid provider. The ACM makes the final determination whether to grant the transcript fee waiver. Access to Justice has executed a contract with a transcript vendor to provide transcripts authorized for a waiver. Once the ACM issues an order approving an appellant's waiver request, the appellant follows the circuit court's ordinary process for requesting the preparation of the transcript. Circuit courts order the transcript from the approved provider. The final invoice is paid by Access to Justice from pilot program funds. The ACM began inviting eligible appellants to apply for a waiver in Spring 2025.

In the meantime, the Task Force continues its work to explore alternative solutions to the barriers faced by indigent Marylanders in covering the costs of transcripts.





## Fostering a Healthy, Diverse, and Productive Workforce

### Accessible Hiring Practices: New Video on Requesting an Accommodation for the Application Process

As one part of the effort to fulfill the recommendations of the former Disability Inclusion Work Group, Access to Justice and Human

Resources collaborated to produce a brief video for Judiciary job applicants on how to request an accommodation during the application process. The work group's report included recommendations to foster an inclusive hiring process. One recommendation was that the Judiciary provide specific information to job applicants on how to request an accommodation for the hiring process. The video is available on the Judiciary's careers webpage and provides information on what a reasonable accommodation is, the form to use, and where to submit the form.



#### Accommodation:

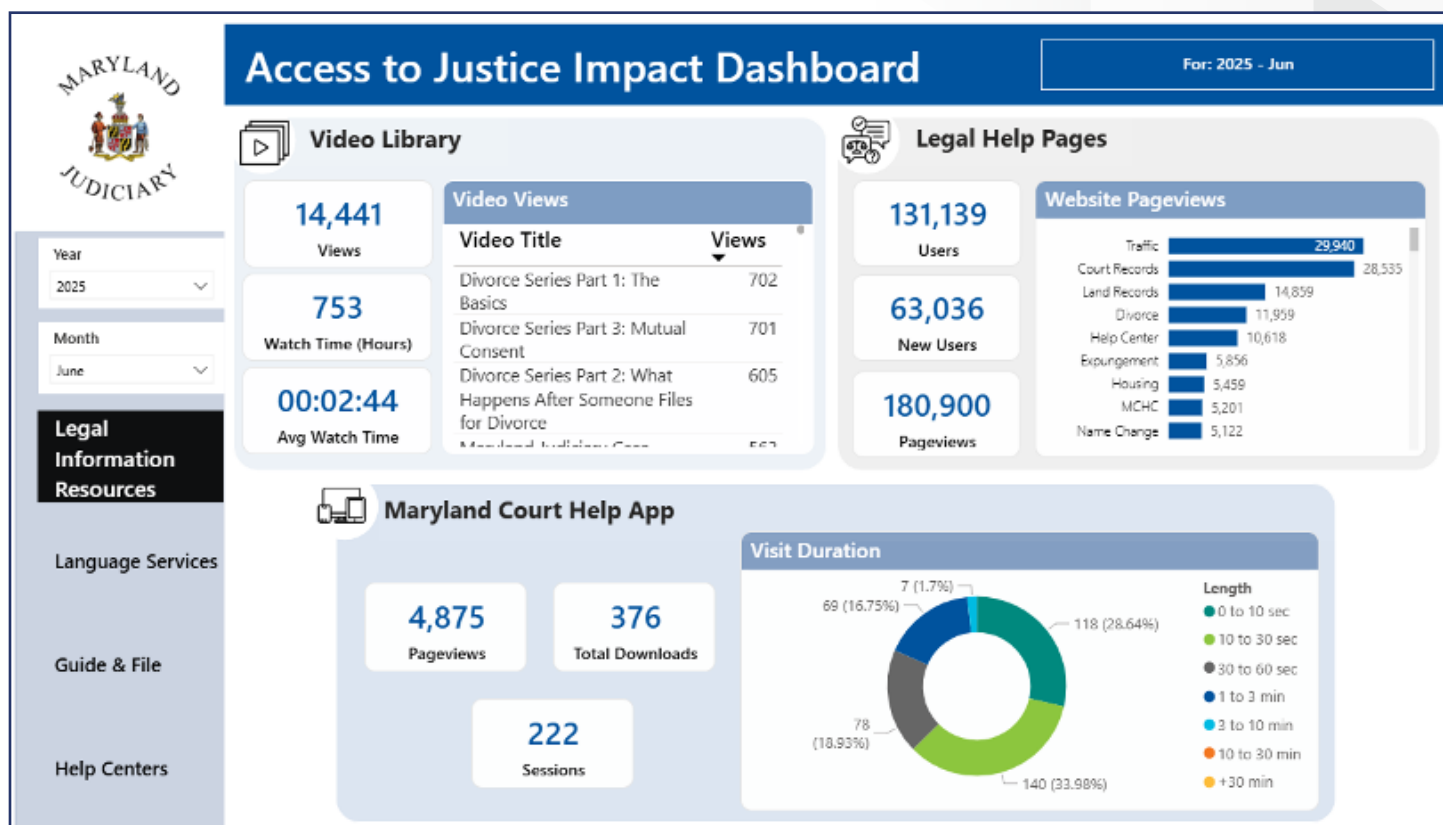
Reasonable modification to the application or recruitment process.

It allows an applicant with a disability to engage in the application or recruitment process.

## Promoting Accountability and Public Trust

### Promoting Transparency Through the Access to Justice Impact Dashboard

The Maryland Judiciary's Access to Justice Impact Dashboard promotes accountability and builds public trust by providing publicly accessible data on key services, including Maryland Court Help Centers, language access in the courts, and legal information resources. By openly sharing this information, the Judiciary enables the public to assess its responsiveness to access-related needs. The dashboard also drives continuous improvement by highlighting service gaps and areas for enhancement, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to meet the needs of Marylanders.



## Looking Forward

The Maryland Judiciary will continue to advance its mission of ensuring fair, efficient, and effective justice by expanding resources for self-represented litigants and strengthening partnerships that make access to justice possible. From innovative technology solutions and supporting community programs to new rules improving accessibility and reducing financial barriers, the Judiciary demonstrates its commitment to meeting Marylanders where they are and providing the tools they need to navigate the court system.

Access to Justice will build on these achievements by evaluating pilot projects such as the transcript waiver pilot program, supporting the rollout of plain language training, and continuing to evaluate and enhance services for people with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and limited financial means. By sustaining these efforts and strengthening collaborations with community partners, the Judiciary will remain steadfast in its promise to ensure equal justice for all Marylanders.



