

# MARYLAND ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

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## MARYLAND ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

*22 June 2009  
9:30 am  
Annapolis, Maryland*

## SUMMARY OF COMMISSION MEETING

One of the goals of the recent Executive Team meeting was to discuss the current activities in the committees to avoid duplicating efforts.

The Commission discussed the timeline for producing a report. The Commission decided that the subcommittees should submit their reports to the committee chairs by August, and then the committee chairs should submit their respective committee's report by the end of August. Commission staff will compile the committee reports and draft an interim report for review at the September Commission meeting.

The District Court Self-Help Center pilot project will be located in Glen Burnie. Space renovations are being made to accommodate the center and they expect those to be complete in late August or mid-September. With the new fiscal year, the District Court also hopes to launch pilots to provide self-help attorney services in Prince Georges County, Montgomery County, and Baltimore City that will deal with expedited civil claims. The District Court hopes to plan an outreach campaign launching the self-help center with the help of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs. The Commission voted to endorse the self-help center project.

The Office of Communications and Public Affairs (OCPA) sent out a press release for the Commission's listening events. A public service announcement was also recorded and placed on the website. The video accompanied the press release and was sent to media outlets. OCPA has been working on developing some media training for the Commission's leadership. The training will help individuals to understand different techniques and responses available when approached by media.

OCPA will also be helping with the self-help center and the listening events.

It has been determined that the Open Meeting Law only applies to Judicial Conference committees, hence it does not apply directly to the Commission. The Commission can implement its own policy.

As a result of this determination, the Commission decided that the **dates** and the **locations** of the Commission meetings can be posted on its website. Meeting dates for just the Commission, not committees will be posted. The Commission decided not to post directions to the meeting locations. The Commission decided not to create a password protected section because of the Commission's goal of visibility and accountability. The Commission held a discussion about whether or not to post meeting minutes. The Commission voted to post a **summary of the Commission meeting minutes** with full minutes available upon request. Commission staff plan to include a "Track our Progress" section on the website, which would include brief **summaries of projects**. The Commission approved this idea.

The funding crisis for legal services is ongoing. It was suggested that the main thrust of the Commission's interim report focus on responding to the IOLTA crisis. The Commission can play a key role in bringing this issue to the public's attention.

The Commission reviewed a summary of the funding strategies states have adopted to increase funding for civil legal services. A number of states have reinvigorated these efforts in response to the national funding crisis. Strategies discussed included: i) pursuing a state general fund appropriation; ii) increasing filing fee surcharges; iii) making an appeal to attorneys to contribute financially to legal services organizations; iv) increasing attorney registration fees; and v) *cy pres* awards, *pro hac vice* fees and other strategies.

The SRL Committee has established several subcommittees. The Discrete Task/Limited Scope Subcommittee is working on a white paper which will be vetted by the Commission. The Forms Management Subcommittee is looking at the forms development process and where forms can be improved. The Public Input Subcommittee will be building on what we learn from the Listening Events, and will identify other ways to get input from the self-represented. Other subcommittees include Media Development (OCA has already updated the Commission on outreach activities) and Self-Help Centers.

The Access & Delivery of Legal Services Committee has likewise established several subcommittees. The Civil Gideon/Judicare (Civil Right to Counsel) Subcommittee plans to look at how you would administer a civil right to counsel if Maryland were to adopt one. The Fee-shifting Subcommittee is looking at ways to improve the private attorney general system which operates in low claims cases where it is not easy to attract attorneys. The Continuum of Services Subcommittee is exploring ways to visually describe the services available in Maryland, to help promote better public understanding of civil legal services.

The Critical Barriers Committee has been busy planning the Listening Events.

The Safety, Accessibility & Convenience Committee is working on obtaining maps of all the court and commission locations to provide details on accessible entrances and accessible parking. The Committee is also working on providing transit maps or directions.

The Public Education Committee's goal is to enhance public awareness about civil legal services and the Commission. There are areas of overlapping responsibility among the committees. Commission staff will be submitting a budget request for consideration for FY2011.