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For Immediate Release

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**Maryland's Courts Want to Hear From Public About
Ways to Improve Access for All**

(WYE MILLS, Md. — Oct. 14, 2009) Maryland's courts are listening: The public is invited to come to an open meeting to talk about their experiences when they come to court, and how Maryland's courts can improve services to citizens. This 'listening event' will be held Tuesday, Oct. 27, 6-8 p.m., at Chesapeake College's Todd Performing Arts Center, 1000 College Circle, Wye Mills.

The October meeting is one of a series of listening events held throughout the state by the Maryland Access to Justice Commission. The Commission, whose membership consists of representatives from Maryland courts, executive branch agencies, legislators, attorneys, social services and faith groups, and legal service providers and which is chaired by retired Court of Appeals Judge Irma S. Raker, will be recommending and implementing changes to improve the ability of all Marylanders to use the courts effectively and to obtain legal help when they need it. It will focus primarily on expanding access to the state's civil justice system, which includes landlord-tenant cases, divorce, child custody issues, small claims and debt collection, domestic violence and other non-criminal case types.

Each year, the state's courts handle more than two million cases. The Commission is working to enhance the quality of justice for people who encounter barriers when they are dealing with the courts, including the challenges faced by people who represent themselves in court. Other barriers include language or literacy issues, challenges due to varying physical abilities, not being able to afford to hire legal help or take time off work to attend to legal issues, or a lack of understanding of the civil justice system in Maryland and the resources available.

More than 400 advocacy organizations have been invited to attend regional listening events and to bring clients with them who have a story to tell that can inform the Commission's work.

The listening events, including the one on Oct. 27, are free and open to the public, and all are invited to provide written testimony. Registration is required, and registered participants will be invited to speak, time permitting. For information on providing written testimony, directions to the event, or to register, go to www.mdcourts.gov/mdatjc.

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The Maryland Access to Justice Commission was created to improve and expand all people's access to the state's civil justice system. The goal of the Commission is to enhance the quality of justice in civil legal matters for persons who encounter barriers

when dealing with the courts or trying to solve legal problems.

Editor's note: *A video message from retired Court of Appeals Judge Irma S. Raker, chair of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, is available online:*

www.mdcourts.gov/mdatjc

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