

Maryland Justice Passport

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Overview

The Maryland Justice Passport is a web-based tool that will leverage technology to improve processes for litigants, particularly those who have experienced trauma. It will help litigants get organized, store important documents, and streamline referrals from statewide self-help centers to legal resources. This tool will help litigants keep track of important paperwork, keep a record about which programs and services they have used, and will allow legal services providers to access litigant information easily.

Problem Statement

In Maryland, individuals often present at a self-help center as a first step towards addressing legal problems. They may appear with court paperwork such as a summons or court form, lease agreement, receipt, contract, photos, or other documents pertaining to their case. Or, they may explain their problem verbally. Telling and retelling stories forces individuals to relive painful experiences, often resulting in retraumatization. This is especially true for survivors of domestic violence, crime victims, and individuals with high conflict family law matters.

After obtaining initial advice and information, many litigants are referred to other organizations for follow-up help, or full representation. Referrals may be made to legal services providers, social services providers, and the private bar. Litigants may also need to take steps on their own to advance their case (i.e. file an answer, gather evidence for trial, make a request to have a housing inspector visit their apartment, reach out to a domestic violence service provider for representation and support, etc.).

When litigants leave a self-help center, they may experience the following barriers to advancing their case:

WHICH ORGANIZATION?

They may not know WHICH ORGANIZATION they visited for help. This can be problematic when they appear at the next organization and are not sure who referred them or why.

WHAT STEPS?

They may forget WHAT STEPS to take next. Litigants are often under stress, eager to leave, and may be unable to recall verbal instructions even a few minutes later.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN REFERRED?

They may forget WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN REFERRED for additional help or next steps. For years, the medical profession has used written instructions like prescription pads and emergency room discharge instructions to help patients remember follow-up directives.

RETRAUMATIZED

They may be RETRAUMATIZED by having to re-tell stories over and over, particularly in family law or domestic violence matters.

TROUBLE KEEPING TRACK OF IMPORTANT PAPERWORK

They may be disorganized or HAVE TROUBLE KEEPING TRACK OF IMPORTANT PAPERWORK like lease agreements, court papers, or evidence. Litigants may experience instability in housing or lack transportation, which impacts organization and the ability to keep track of important paperwork.

Solution

The Maryland Justice Passport will help address these issues by including the following functionality:

REPOSITORY FOR CASE INFORMATION

Case information such as documents, lease agreements, and court paperwork, will be scanned at self-help centers or other referral locations to facilitate litigant organization. Information will belong to litigants and will be encrypted and password protected. Litigants may give full or limited access to providers so they can run conflicts checks, give brief advice, or provide representation.

ELECTRONIC TO-DO LIST

When a litigant leaves a self-help center or other provider, the provider will add an electronic to-do list which indicates next steps. If litigants are referred to other providers, the app will auto populate with pertinent information (address, phone number, hours, directions, etc.)

Track of referrals