

# Maryland Justice Passport Visioning Meeting Report

**Date:**

April 6, 2020

**Attendees:** Sarah Frush, Joseph Schieffer, Matt Smith, Megan Challender, Lonni Summers, Laure Ruth, Sandy Brewer, Siomara Bonilla, Claudia Aguirre, Rebecca Zuniga, Sarah Witri, Alexa Bertinelli, Christian Noble, Carrie McCully, Mandy, Risheena Schwemele, Jami Cope, Pam Ortiz, Sandy Brown

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**Overview**

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**The purpose of the meeting was to:**

Conduct visioning meeting to present the Maryland Justice Passport project, receive feedback and discuss how the implementation of such a project affects litigants and the providers who are available to assist them.

**Opening Remarks:**

- **The Justice Passport project will develop technology that will help those without attorneys navigate the civil legal services community more effectively.** Litigants often make their way to a SHC or a provider, but it may not be quite the right fit—either they need more help than can be given at a SHC or a clinic, or maybe they need to visit a different organization for more help
- **This project will change the experience for Marylanders seeking legal help.** We should leverage technology to capture efficiencies and reduce instances of trauma for the people that we serve. We can make this easier on litigants seeking counsel.
- **A trauma-informed approach is important because, as members of the legal services community, it is our duty to assist the populations we serve compassionately and effectively.** We are all part of the legal system and we must recognize, understand and respond to litigants affected by trauma. Litigants may associate the legal system with trauma or victimization. Litigants may have a general distrust of the legal system, some have experience with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, others may fear adverse action like deportation. Being mindful of trauma and trying to reduce further trauma is an important part of our roles in the justice system.
- **It takes an enormous amount of courage to come forward and ask for help.** Often providers only get one chance before individuals decide that seeking help is too difficult and they give up.
- **At the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be more important than ever to be trauma-informed;** people may be home insecure, more litigants will need help.
- **Maryland court-based self-help centers assist huge numbers of litigants each year.** They are a good place to start when trying to streamline the referral process.

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## Discussion Points

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### Limitations to be considered/addressed

- **WE MUST CONSIDER LITIGANTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY** – many in Prince George’s County are Spanish speakers.
- **SOME PEOPLE CAN’T MANAGE SELF-REPRESENTATION.** Some people won’t be able to use the Passport, as they cannot stay organized.
- **CLIENTS HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS DEPENDING ON WHERE THEY LIVE IN MARYLAND.** Some geographic areas have many legal services providers, others have fewer. We should also consider that some litigants may have reduced access to mobile phones and/or internet access.

### Privacy & Consent

- **WE MUST CONSIDER SAFETY AND PRIVACY-** Concerns about safety (ask if abuser has access to iCloud, etc.)
- **MANY LITIGANTS GET HELP VIA PHONE.** We should consider how to add information remotely, and how to obtain consent to view documents via phone.
- **WE SHOULD CONSIDER CONFIDENTIALITY.** It may be necessary to obtain written permission from litigants to view and/or share information

### Current Environment

- **LITIGANTS HIT MANY DEAD ENDS** - many people come in saying they called 10,000 places. It is frustrating to give referrals when litigants have already called around to a million places.
- **MANY CLIENTS PREFER TEXTING**
- **ORGANIZED LITIGANTS MAY BE MORE ABLE TO OBTAIN PRO BONO COUNSEL.** Organized litigants may also be more able to obtain counsel from a legal services provider.
- **DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION AND RETENTION IS A BIG ISSUE AT THE SELF-HELP CENTER IN GLEN BURNIE.** Having electronic copies of documents alone will further access to justice.
- **TEXTING IS A GOOD SOLUTION.** CLS and MVLS use text to communicate with litigants.

### How the Passport could contribute to supporting litigants

- **THE PASSPORT COULD HELP LITIGANTS GET ORGANIZED, SO THEY CAN USE THE PURPLE NOTEBOOK MORE EFFECTIVELY**
- **THE PASSPORT MAY REDUCE LITIGANT’S HAVING TO TELL AND RETELL TRAUMATIC STORIES.**
- **THE PASSPORT MAY HELP LITIGANTS KEEP BETTER TRACK OF WHERE THEY HAVE VISITED FOR HELP AND WHERE THEY SHOULD GO NEXT.**
- **THE JUSTICE PASSPORT ISN’T MEANT TO SOLVE ALL PROBLEMS.** The passport is meant to address litigant navigation—getting to next steps.
- **THERE IS VALUE IN FINALITY OF AN ANSWER.** There may be no legal services providers who are willing or able (capacity) to take a matter. With this information, litigants can focus on advancing their case rather than seeking representation. Self-help providers will also not waste time making referrals.
- **DOCUMENT SHARING WOULD BE USEFUL TO PROVIDERS**
- **A CLOUD-BASED SOLUTION WOULD STREAMLINE MANY OF THE ISSUES THAT LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS EXPERIENCE**
- **LITIGANTS MAY HAVE MULTIPLE ISSUES.** We should make sure to consider this when building the Passport (multiple tabs?)
- **ASKING LITIGANTS ABOUT POTENTIAL MULTIPLE ISSUES WOULD BENEFICIAL.** Intake staff can find out and help litigants address them proactively.

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- **IT WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR BOTH LITIGANTS AND ATTORNEYS TO HAVE AN OBJECTIVE OR ONE SENTENCE OVERVIEW/CATEGORIZATION OF THE LITIGANT'S LEGAL ISSUE**
- **PAPER MAY BE IMPORTANT** - Many clients don't have cell phones or access to technology (internet, etc.)

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### Updates

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**Sign up for the Maryland Justice Passport Newsletter!**

[Click here](#) to receive a newsletter with progress updates for Maryland Justice Passport.