

MARYLAND



JUDICIARY

Judicial Council

2019 Annual Report

MISSION

The Maryland Judiciary provides fair, efficient, and effective justice for all.

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.

GOALS

1. Provide access to justice.
2. Be responsive and adaptable to changing community needs.
3. Communicate effectively with stakeholders.
4. Improve systems and processes.
5. Be accountable.
6. Assure the highest level of service.
7. Build partnerships.
8. Use resources wisely.



THE MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL

As the governance body of the Judiciary and principal policy advisor to the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, the Maryland Judicial Council is committed to advancing the Judiciary’s mission of providing fair, efficient, and effective justice for all.

The Judicial Council is the nexus through which its committees vet Judiciary-wide policy changes, judicial reforms, legislative issues, and other internal and external developments that impact the administration of justice.

Guided by the eight key goals of the Judiciary’s strategic plan, the committees develop recommendations for policies, programs, and initiatives that help ensure efficient operations and the timely and effective administration of justice in Maryland. These recommendations are reviewed by the Judicial Council and, if accepted, are forwarded to the Chief Judge for approval.

The Judicial Council and its committees, subcommittees, and work groups include a wide representation of the diverse Judiciary community: judges, magistrates, trial court clerks and administrators, commissioners, and justice partners from throughout Maryland.

It is through their collective work that the Maryland Judiciary is fulfilling its mission and achieving its strategic goals in serving the people of Maryland.

This report focuses on just a few highlights of the work of the Judicial Council and its committees during 2019.

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A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE MARY ELLEN BARBERA

I am pleased to present the *Maryland Judicial Council 2019 Annual Report*, which highlights some compelling examples of what can be accomplished when dedicated and talented professionals commit their time, expertise, and energy to the administration of justice. The stories in this report are a small sample of the real-life results that are borne of hundreds of hours of behind-the-scenes work.

The core advisory and governance body of the Maryland Judiciary is the Judicial Council, which comprises committees, subcommittees, and work groups. Members come from every level of Maryland courts, as well as court-related agencies, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the headquarters of the District Court of Maryland, justice partners, and stakeholders. Their efforts are supported by court professionals who provide staffing support, institutional knowledge, and subject matter expertise.

Members take on, with dedication and commitment, projects and initiatives. As problem-solvers, they examine challenges and identify evidence-based strategies to craft creative and effective solutions. They explore emerging concepts to develop unique and groundbreaking programs. Through research and analysis, they develop and promote best practices, as well as refine and update systems and processes. They anticipate trends and challenges and provide options to inform the Judiciary’s response to best meet the needs of the people of Maryland—now and in the future.

These efforts to improve nearly every aspect of the work of the Judiciary already have had extensive benefits for those who rely on Maryland courts and services. The articles in this report are just a few examples of the initiatives that reflect the work of so many.

On behalf of the Maryland Judicial Council, I hope you will find this report interesting and useful. For a comprehensive recounting of Judiciary efforts, initiatives, and achievements, I invite you to review the *Maryland Judiciary 2019 Strategic Plan Update*.



Mary Ellen Barbera
Chief Judge, Court of Appeals of Maryland

2019 JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Honorable Mary Ellen Barbera, Chair *
Chief Judge, Court of Appeals

Matthew T. Barrett, Esq.
Chair, Conference of Circuit Court
Administrators
Court Administrator, Circuit Court for
Cecil County

Melissa Batie
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court
Administrators
Court Administrator, Circuit Court for
Wicomico County

Honorable Keith A. Baynes
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges
Circuit Court for Cecil County

Honorable Pamila J. Brown
District Court in Howard County

Honorable Matthew J. Fader *
Chief Judge, Court of Special Appeals

Markisha Gross
Administrative Clerk
District Court in Montgomery County

Pamela Q. Harris *
State Court Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts

Honorable James A. Kenney III (Ret.)
Chair, Senior Judges Committee

Honorable Karen H. Mason
Circuit Court for Prince George's County

Cheryl Miller
Administrative Clerk, District Court
in Cecil County

Honorable Patricia L. Mitchell
District Court in Montgomery County

Honorable John P. Morrissey *
Chief Judge, District Court of Maryland

Charlene M. Notarcola
Acting Chair, Conference of Circuit
Court Clerks
Circuit Court for Cecil County

Honorable W. Michel Pierson
Circuit Court for Baltimore City

Honorable Gerald V. Purnell
District Court in Worcester County

Honorable Laura S. Ripken *
Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges
Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County

Roberta Warnken
Chief Clerk, District Court of Maryland

Honorable Alan M. Wilner (Ret.)
Chair, Standing Committee on Rules of
Practice and Procedure

Honorable Brett W. Wilson
Circuit Court for Dorchester County

Honorable Dorothy J. Wilson
District Court in Baltimore County

Vacant
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court
Clerks

Faye D. Gaskin, Secretary
Deputy State Court Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts

* Member of Executive Committee

2019 COMMITTEES

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Committee

Honorable Mimi Cooper, Chair

Promote the use of appropriate dispute resolution processes throughout the courts. Provide an avenue for courts to vet changes to ADR rules and standards of conduct.

Court Access and Community Relations Committee

Honorable Pamela J. White, Chair

Address barriers to access to the courts and legal services in Maryland. Strengthen public awareness of the Judiciary's programs, projects, services, and initiatives. Promote knowledge and understanding of the Judiciary.

Court Operations Committee

Honorable E. Gregory Wells, Chair

Address matters related to the efficient operations of the courts. Assist in the development of consistent statewide operations, policies, and best practices.

Court Technology Committee

Honorable Fred S. Hecker, Chair

Honorable Margaret M. Schweitzer, Vice-Chair

Ensure the technology operations of the Judiciary are efficient and effective. Provide advice and guidance regarding the implementation of technology and its impact on judicial operations and functions.

District Court Chief Judge's Committee

Honorable John P. Morrissey, Chair

Chief Judge, District Court of Maryland

Advise the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals on the operation of the District Court. Aid the Chief Judge of the District Court in the administration, operation, and maintenance of the District Court statewide.

Domestic Law Committee

Honorable Cynthia Callahan, Chair

Honorable Cathy H. Serrette, Vice-Chair

Provide guidance and direction regarding policies, rules, and legislation surrounding family

domestic law, including domestic violence. Recommend policies, rules, and legislation that improve the effective administration of domestic law.

Education Committee

Honorable Susan H. Hazlett, Chair

Guide, promote, and encourage the education, training, and professional development of all judges and Judiciary employees.

Juvenile Law Committee

Honorable Michael J. Stamm, Chair

Provide guidance and recommendations regarding policies, rules, and legislation surrounding juvenile law, including juvenile justice and child welfare. Recommend policies, rules, and legislation that improve the effective administration of juvenile law.

Legislative Committee

Honorable W. Timothy Finan, Chair

Honorable Stacy A. Mayer, Vice-Chair

Protect and promote the Judiciary's interests regarding new laws and initiatives.

Major Projects Committee

Honorable John P. Morrissey, Co-Chair

Pamela Q. Harris, Co-Chair

Address policy-related matters regarding the implementation and ongoing operation of new and existing technology projects, as well as the establishment of priorities for the implementation of those projects.

Senior Judges Committee

Honorable James A. Kenney III (Ret.), Chair

Honorable Deborah S. Eyler (Ret.), Vice-Chair

Advise the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and the Judicial Council on matters relevant to retired/recalled judges.

Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee

Honorable Nicholas E. Rattal, Chair

Honorable Mark S. Chandlee, Vice-Chair

Promote and oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of specialty courts and dockets in the courts.

Maryland’s mental health courts open new doors and prepare participants for brighter futures

Providing fair, efficient, and effective justice for all involves a great deal of collaboration and research. In 2019, the Maryland Judicial Council’s Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee, through its Mental Health Performance Measures Advisory Work Group established a set of performance measures and trainings to improve the rate of success of participants in mental health courts across the state.

On an unseasonably hot Thursday afternoon in September, a few dozen people filled one of the second-floor courtrooms of the District Court in Baltimore City.

A packed courtroom is not necessarily an unusual sight. The District Court of Maryland has jurisdiction over all property owner and tenant cases, replevin actions, motor vehicle violations, misdemeanors, certain felonies, and peace and protective orders. It has exclusive jurisdiction in civil claims for \$5,000 or less, and concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts in civil claims above \$5,000 but less than \$30,000, and it has concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit courts in criminal cases where the penalty may be confinement for three or more years or a fine of \$2,500 or more. In Baltimore City alone, the District Court processed 267,792 criminal, civil, and motor vehicle filings in calendar year 2019.

Typically, crowded courtrooms might indicate a full docket, but on this day, the docket was dedicated to a special event: a ceremony to mark the successful completion of the Mental Health Court treatment program for 15 graduates.

The 15th graduate to receive a graduation certificate during the September event was Kathy*. Having started the program with a string of misdemeanors in her past,



Judge Rachel E. Skolnik presides over the Mental Health Court docket for the District Court in Baltimore City which helps defendants get back on their feet within their communities.

Kathy made diligent efforts, which included treatment and assistance from program resources, to turn her negative circumstances into a new start on a better life. Kathy’s experience in the program offered her access to community resources and support which enabled her to take out a loan and open a small business of her own.

In her remarks, Baltimore City District Court Judge Rachel E. Skolnik praised Kathy for not only getting her business off to a great start but also being able to pay off her loan.

* To ensure her privacy, the participant’s name has been changed and details about her business are not included.



In fiscal year 2019, 368 new defendants entered mental health court programs in Maryland, 923 defendants were still participating and working toward graduation, and 86 participants successfully completed the program. Overall, mental health court judges in Maryland met with participants 4,288 times during court hearings.

It is success stories like Kathy's, and those of this past year's 85 other graduates in mental health courts in Maryland, that make mental health courts a significant opportunity for participants and their communities, and an integral part of the criminal justice system.

To be eligible to take part in the District Court in Baltimore City's program, participants must be:

- A resident of Baltimore City;
- 18 years or older, diagnosed with a qualifying serious mental illness and/or a trauma related disorder;
- Eligible for public health services; and
- Charged with a misdemeanor or felony (excluding domestic violence charges) within the jurisdiction of the District Court of Maryland.

Participants are identified through mental health screenings and assessments and participate voluntarily in the program. Teams of mental health professionals and court staff develop personalized treatment plans and supervise the participants for the duration of the program.

"The individuals who participate in mental health courts are facing a number of challenges that impact how well they will do in the program, including obtaining housing, receiving treatment for mental illness, and ensuring they remain on track throughout the program," said Prince George's County District Court Judge Patrice E. Lewis, who is the presiding judge of the Mental Health Court for the District Court in Prince George's County and a member of the Mental Health Performance Measures Advisory Work Group. "Over the past year, the Performance Management Work Group

MARYLAND MENTAL HEALTH COURTS STATISTICAL SUMMARY

County	Location	Year Est.	Entered	Graduated	Neutral *	Terminated	Total Served FY 2019
Baltimore City	Circuit	May 2017	68	0	12	2	137
Baltimore City	District	Oct. 2002	119	26	102	6	395
Harford	District	Jan. 2003	14	2	1	1	26
Montgomery	Circuit	Jan. 2017	7	1	1	2	15
Montgomery	District	Jan. 2017	47	17	2	5	77
Prince George's	District	July 2007	113	40	36	20	273
Total			368	86	154	36	923

* Neutral is defined as administratively discharged during the reporting period (e.g., death, probation expired, moved from jurisdiction).

has developed initiatives that will contribute to the future success of mental health court participants across the state.”

Throughout 2019, the Judicial Council’s Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee, through the Mental Health Performance Measures Advisory Work Group and in conjunction with the Office of Problem-Solving Courts and the National Center for State Courts, developed a set of mental health court performance measures that will allow for continuous improvement and set standards for evaluation across the state.

Each of the six mental health courts across the state will use the performance measures as a foundation for their programs. Courts will have access to data points allowing them to implement incremental improvements throughout the course of the program to more readily identify where to focus resources needed by participants.

These performance measures go beyond recidivism and take many other factors into account, including living arrangements, ability to obtain mental health treatment, and the reduction of failure to appear rates that often characterize those struggling with mental illness.

Very little data exists across the country on mental health courts. Performance measures for mental health courts, therefore, are based in collaboration with practitioner experience that includes multiple factors necessary for a successful program.



Looking ahead in 2020, mental health court teams will receive specialized training, based on real-life scenarios and simulated data points, to teach Judiciary staff, judges, and justice partners about how to translate that information into a personalized program for each participant.

“These initiatives will provide us with a baseline of what works and how to use this data to make a better program,” said Prince George’s County Circuit Court Judge Nicholas E. Rattal, Chair of the Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee. “This is one of the first statewide mental health court performance measures initiatives in the country and will ensure continuous improvement in the future.”

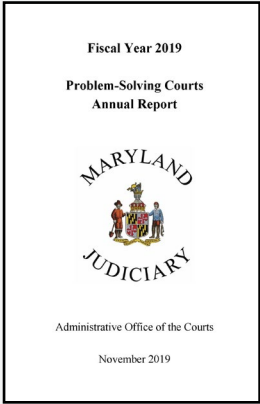


Factors Considered for Mental Health Court Performance Measures:

- Network of support and community interaction
- Living arrangements
- Recovery
- Aftercare
- Time spent in jail
- Failure to appear rates
- Medication compliance
- Partnerships with community resources and treatment providers

MARYLAND MENTAL HEALTH COURTS
TOTAL SERVED FISCAL YEAR 2019

Circuit Court for Baltimore City	137
District Court in Baltimore City	395
District Court in Harford County	26
Circuit Court for Montgomery County	15
District Court in Montgomery County	77
District Court in Prince George’s County	273
TOTAL SERVED	923



Online at: mdcourts.gov/opscreport

Beyond the Classroom: State court judges participate in field courses to expand knowledge, skills

Under the guidance of the Judicial Council's Education Committee and Judicial Education Subcommittee, the Judicial College provides a broad range of continuing education opportunities. These offerings provide new and experienced judges and magistrates with expanded knowledge, skills, and updates on substantive law. To be effective jurists, judges must be life-long learners.

For adult learners like judges, sometimes the best lessons are learned outside the classroom. In a unique series of new offerings from the Judicial College, judges are now stepping away from the bench and into the shoes of the people who appear in their courtrooms.

Highly interactive day-long courses now offered at the Maryland Judiciary's Judicial College combine field trips and behind-the-scenes tours with in-depth discussions led by experienced faculty. Enrollment numbers for each course is limited to heighten the experience for each participant.

These distinctive courses have been popular since they were first offered in 2018, and in 2019, new opportunities were developed and refined to enhance learning. As a result, the program will expand in 2020 to include a focus on juvenile justice that will include tours of the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services facilities.

"The decisions we make every day have a profound impact on people's lives that may last long after a case is over," said Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Marcus Z. Shar, who is Chair of the Judicial Education Subcommittee. "Yet, in order to function, a judge must be able to leave that case behind and move on to the next. Consequently, after a while, things like sentencing can become rote without full appreciation of what a period of incarceration will actually entail. It is therefore important that periodically, as judges, we take time to observe at least part of the real-life impact of sending someone to prison. The tour is designed to provide that opportunity."

At least nine on-site field courses are now offered through the Judicial College, including a visit aimed at residential drug treatment and behavioral health at Gaudenzia, a residential treatment facility in Crownsville, Maryland.





“Judges learn that continuity of care and supervision are essential to the success of participating defendants.”

Anne Arundel County Circuit Court
Judge Ronald A. Silkworth (Ret.)

The tour of the facility gives judges the opportunity to view what it is really like inside the facility and from that vantage point, judges explore their role in approving and monitoring the success or failure of residential treatment. Participants examine the efficacy of residential drug treatment, how long it takes for a residential experience to be considered effective, and what aftercare entails and its role in treatment. Issues that are addressed include how to determine who is amenable for residential treatment and how to measure success of short- or long-term residential treatment. Judges also observe peer-to-peer discussions about the experience of residential treatment.

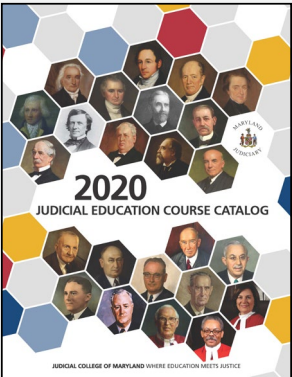
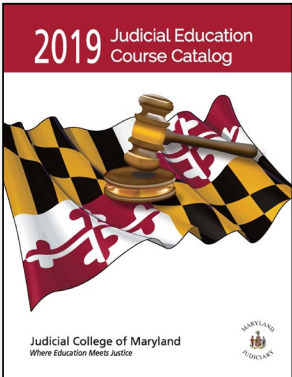
“One recent attendee described the experience as moving and helpful,” said Anne Arundel County Circuit Court Judge Ronald A. Silkworth (Ret.), who has been a coordinator and faculty member for the residential treatment and behavioral health session. “The course provides judges with a unique insider’s point of view and the goal of the experience is to enable judges to better understand behavioral science, the treatment process, Health General 8-507*, and the importance of the role of the judge in supporting defendants who participate in residential treatment, including aftercare plans.”

During a course focused on sentencing and prisons, judges get a deeper understanding of what happens after a sentenced defendant leaves their courtroom. An insider’s tour at a maximum-security facility, like Jessup Correctional Institution in Jessup, Maryland, is just one element to the course, which is followed by meetings with corrections officers and leaders from the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, as well as peer-to-peer discussions about issues judges encounter when sentencing.

* MD Code, Health - General, § 8-507. Commitment of defendant for treatment.

A rare opportunity is provided to go behind the scenes at the Spring Grove Hospital Center in Catonsville, Maryland, to help judges gain a real-life perspective of what happens to a defendant once the judge signs a commitment order to the Maryland Department of Health. In addition to the tour, judges attend an information session with hospital clinicians and staff, focusing on the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders, with discussions about receiving and processing court orders, the admission process, case management, standards, current practices, and aftercare plan development. The tour is complemented by another session that includes discussion on the law of competency, as well as best practices on handling defendants with mental health issues.

“These courses, like all Judicial Education courses, are a direct result of the tireless commitment of the members of the Judicial Education Subcommittee and Judiciary coordinators and faculty, including judges, magistrates, law professors, other subject matter experts, and judicial partners,” said District 9 Administrative Judge Susan H. Hazlett, Chair of the Judicial Council’s Education Committee. “The dedication and volunteerism of this group enables the Judiciary and the Judicial College to serve our judicial stakeholders so they can, in turn, better serve the public.”



In 2019, the Judicial College refined its judicial field courses based on feedback from judges who participated in these courses in 2018. In 2020, the courses will expand again to include a focus on juvenile justice.

A decade of dramatic growth: Self-help services expand across Maryland

The Court Access and Community Relations Committee has been investigating new ways to increase access to justice for all who come to Maryland's courts. One area of dramatic growth has been in self-help services. The launch of a pilot walk-in center inside a Maryland courthouse ten years ago signaled the start of self-help services in civil matters in the District Court of Maryland and ushered in a decade of dramatic expansion of services for people coming to Maryland's courts without legal representation.

On December 9, 2009, the first District Court Self-Help Resource Center opened as a walk-in center in the Glen Burnie District Courthouse. In its first calendar year in operation, staff at the Glen Burnie District Court Self-Help Resource Center provided services 4,598 times to visitors seeking assistance.

Lonni Summers, who is now Senior Program Manager with Access to Justice, Administrative Office of the Courts, was present the first day the Glen Burnie District Court Self-Help Resource Center opened its doors in 2009. Summers had interned at Legal Aid, working in the Family Law Self-Help Center in the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County.

As word spread about the walk-in center, traffic quickly picked up and it was clear what the future would look like for self-help services.

The numbers indicated that more walk-centers were required, as well as other services to meet the needs of people who could not visit in person. Phone and

online chat services launched from the Glen Burnie site in 2011 and these remote services soon outgrew the technology and available space in Glen Burnie and were moved to Annapolis.

Fast forward ten years, the number of District Court walk-in center locations has increased five-fold across the state: There are now centers operating in Upper Marlboro, Salisbury, Baltimore City, and Cambridge. The center expansion has more than quadrupled the number of times services have been provided to Marylanders to 23,641* in calendar year 2019.



Self-help services are staffed through the Maryland Center for Legal Assistance (MCLA), a wholly owned subsidiary of Maryland Legal Aid. Pictured above is Risheena Schwemle (left), Supervising Attorney for the District Court Self-Help Resource Center in Glen Burnie, Lonni Summers (right), Senior Program Manager for Access to Justice with the Administrative Office of the Courts, and Emily Angel (center), Supervising Attorney for the Maryland Courts Self-Help Center.

*As of January 1, 2020

“Equal access to justice is a critical objective for the Judiciary, and there is a real concern for developing effective self-help resources,” said Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Pamela J. White, who is Chair of the Court Access and Community Relations Committee.

The newest walk-in center is located in Frederick and falls into a category of its own. It officially opened in July 2018 and currently assists litigants with both circuit court and District Court matters in one convenient courthouse location. The response to this unique center location has been immense as staff averages more than 570 services per month.

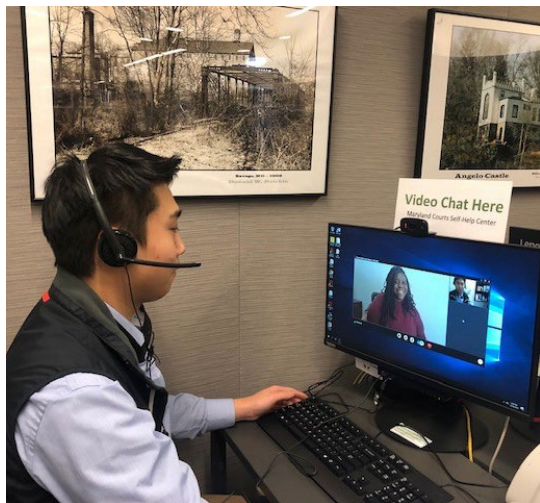
Over the past decade, self-help services have grown exponentially in other areas, as well. In addition to walk-in centers, litigants may also receive help remotely via phone, online chat, and email. It’s an easy and accessible option in today’s world.

Under the name Maryland Courts Self-Help Center, the remote services center in Annapolis uses call center technology to better serve litigants and has grown to meet expanding need. It is now staffed by more than 17 full-time attorneys. In fiscal year 2019, phone services alone assisted more than 60,000 litigants, and in all, remote services assisted more than 75,000 litigants.

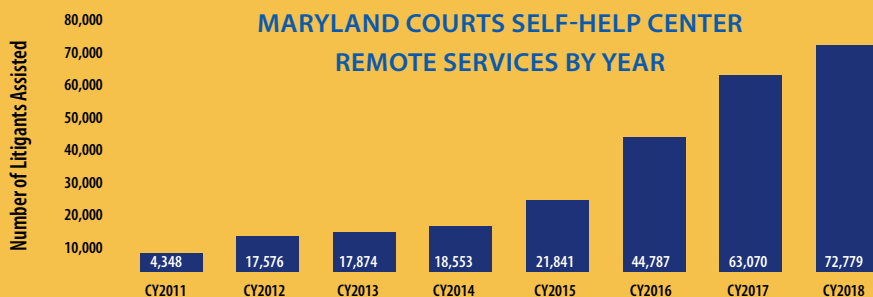
Building off that momentum, a new videoconferencing service pilot launched in the Circuit Court for Howard County in 2019. Videoconferencing enables litigants to scan and share documents with the self-help attorneys, something they cannot do through the phone or online help services.

“The remote services can reach a much broader audience,” said Emily Angel, Esq., who started with the Maryland Courts Self-Help Center eight years ago and is now Supervising Attorney. “We get calls from all over Maryland, from places where people would have to drive hours to be able to meet with an attorney in a walk-in center. People all over the world are using Maryland’s courts, and we are able to assist them with our phone and chat services.”

Remote services complement the walk-in centers by serving as a starting point for *pro se* litigants before they decide to make the trip to a courthouse location for help. “If a caller has just found out about a judgment entered against them and calls in, we can direct them on what information they should be pulling together to bring in to a walk-in center so they can review everything at once,” Angel said.



Lawyers are now able to assist *pro se* litigants through videoconferencing technology in the Circuit Court for Howard County. This new technology allows both the lawyer and the litigant to communicate more effectively.

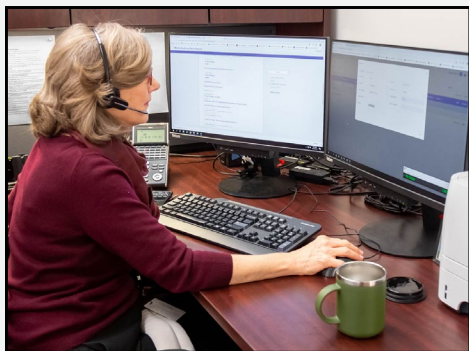


Risheena Schwemle was hired by the Maryland Center for Legal Assistance in 2018 as Supervising Attorney and now oversees the daily operation of the District Court Self-Help Resource Center in Glen Burnie, which is still busy serving unrepresented litigants to this day.

“My job allows me to directly increase access to justice,” Schwemle said. “I get to work daily with a dedicated staff to assist *pro se* clients in learning their rights, responsibilities, and the legal options available to them.”

Summers, who has moved on to work behind the scenes for the Maryland Judiciary’s Administrative Office of the Courts, reflected on the growth.

“I feel so fortunate to have been there at the beginning,” Summers said. “It was rewarding to do the work I did then to provide direct services, and it’s equally rewarding now to manage these programs on behalf of the Judiciary.”



“Equal access to justice is a critical objective for the Judiciary and there is a real concern for developing effective self-help resources,” said Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Pamela J. White, who is Chair of the Court Access and Community Relations Committee.

With just the click of a button, litigants are able to communicate with lawyers who staff the Maryland Courts Self-Help Center. To learn more, go to: mdcourts.gov/selfhelp

SELF-HELP SERVICES IN MARYLAND

District Court Self-Help Resource Centers provide free limited civil legal services, on a walk-in basis, for people who are not represented by an attorney in District Court cases, including:

- Landlord/tenant;
- Small and large claims;
- Consumer matters like car repossessions, debt collection, and credit card cases;
- Return of property (replevin and detinue);
- Domestic violence/peace orders; and
- Expungement.

The walk-in center in Frederick is a combined District Court and circuit court service.

The Maryland Courts Self-Help Center assists self-represented litigants remotely via phone, live chat, videoconferencing, and email on a full range of civil case types handled by both circuit courts and the District Court, including:

- Landlord and tenant matters;
- Family law matters (divorce, custody, child support, and guardianship);
- Small and large claims;
- Expungement and shielding of records;
- Consumer matters (car repossessions, debt collection, and credit card cases);
- Return of property (replevin and detinue);
- Domestic violence/peace orders; and
- Foreclosure.

Self-Help Center lawyers help individuals:

- Complete court forms;
- Learn how to file court documents;
- Prepare for court;
- Prepare for mediation; and
- Understand court documents.

Family Law Self-Help Centers (FLSHCs) provide walk-in assistance to self-represented litigants in circuit courts in family law matters including child custody, child support, child access, divorce, name change, domestic violence, and paternity. Most circuit courts have walk-in family law centers to:

- Explain family law processes;
- Answer questions;
- Help with court forms; and
- Help open, answer, or move forward a person's family case.

Maryland Judiciary employs technology to expand access and connect with people online and on their phones

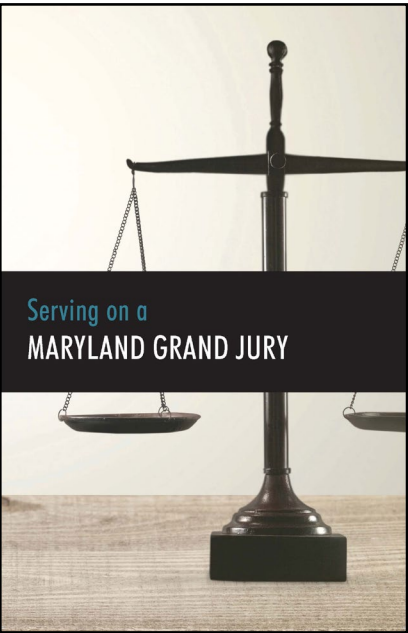
In an ever-changing digital era, the Maryland Judicial Council continues to think progressively, focusing upon continuous improvements to its technological systems, processes, policies, and resources to help the courts serve the people of Maryland better by providing the prompt, efficient, and just resolution of cases.

GRAND JURY BROCHURE

Jury service is one of the most important civic duties a citizen can perform. Service on a grand jury is essential to our justice system, yet receiving the summons to serve can be disquieting for people who may not know what to expect or even what a grand jury does. To alleviate questions and perhaps anxieties about grand jury service, a newly updated and streamlined brochure, *Serving on a Maryland Grand Jury*, was designed in 2019 and serves as a key component of the orientation for all new grand jurors.

The brochure is now available on the Maryland Judiciary’s website. Grand jurors can access the new digital version any time to get the answers they need, and it also can be used as a general educational resource for the public.

The brochure was developed by the Jury Use and Management Subcommittee, under the purview of the Court Operations Committee. It includes contributions from subcommittee members and special input from an assistant state’s attorney from Carroll County.



“From the start of this project, we knew our vision of creating an e-book would benefit the public immensely,” said Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Lawrence P. Fletcher-Hill, Chair of the Jury Use and Management Subcommittee. “The committee and subcommittee wanted to make the best use of judicial and financial resources and this online brochure is a direct result of that.”

The 12-page brochure (pictured left), which was approved and made available in Summer 2019, reinforces the main points of service for grand jurors, including how the grand jury functions, how it differs from trial juries, and the critical importance of grand jury secrecy.

TEXT MESSAGING

Cell phones have become an essential part of our daily routine; in fact, it is difficult for most people to imagine functioning without one. To be responsive and adaptable to changing community needs, the Maryland Judiciary extended its court notification text messaging pilot program in 2019.

Guided by the Text Messaging Work Group, under the Judicial Council’s Court Technology Committee, the Hearing Notification Public Judicial Access System, also known as PJA, has sent tens of thousands of text messages to defendants who have enrolled in the system since its inception in late 2018.

In its pilot phase, only defendants with cases in the District Court of Maryland, who are screened for public defender representation, were eligible to register their cell phone numbers and enroll to receive text reminders about court hearings. The program was made available to criminal defendants in counties with electronic filing through the Maryland Electronic Courts system, also known as MDEC. Text message reminders were sent to participating defendants prior to their hearing or trial date.

The six-month pilot launched in December 2018 and had an original pilot end date of June 2019; however, a decision was made to extend the pilot through December 2019.

“The data and feedback that we will gather from the one-year pilot program will guide the Judiciary in evaluating what, if any, further expansion could take place to extend the scope and reach of court notification text messages to other courts in the state,” said Maryland Judiciary State Court Administrator Pamela Q. Harris. “A comprehensive evaluation of the data will take our service to the next level.”

“This pilot text messaging alert system allows us to utilize technology to communicate with individual defendants and provide them with yet another avenue to access justice,” said District Court of Maryland Chief Judge John P. Morrissey. “Prior to implementation of the pilot program, we researched other state courts and recognized that this type of text messaging system may serve as a significant factor in reducing failure to appear rates.”

MARYLAND JUDICIARY TEXT MESSAGING PILOT PROGRAM*

Text Messaging Stats	Total
Total Registrations	41,387
Total Opt-Ins	27,282
Total Opt-Outs (sent stop response)	9,534
Total Hearing Notifications Sent	50,333
Total Case Notifications Sent	24,083
Total 1-day Reminders Sent	30,606
Total 7-day Reminders Sent	31,698
Total HELP Requests Received	1,589
Undelivered Messages	1,293

* AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2019



JOURNALIST’S GUIDE

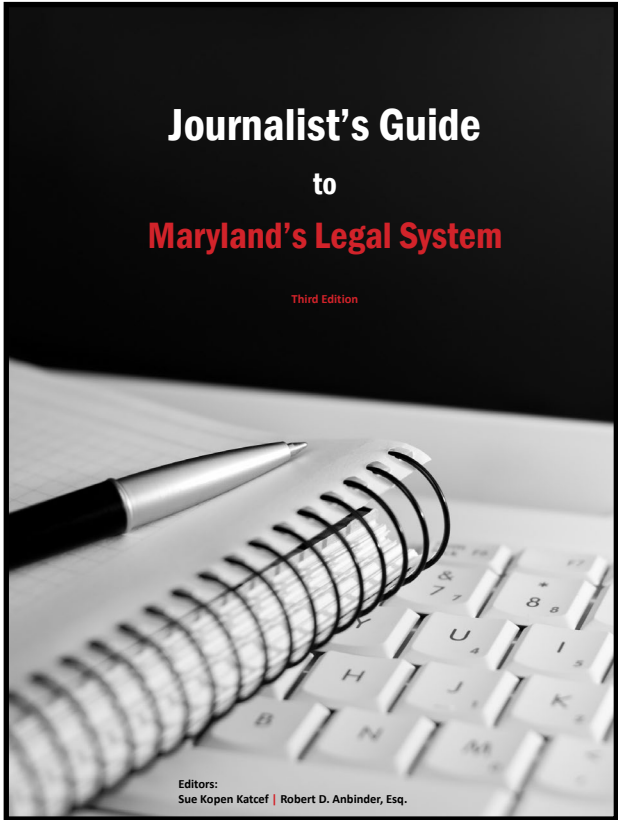
More than 100 pages now assist members of the media and the public in navigating and learning about the Maryland court system. In May 2019, the Maryland Judiciary released its third edition of the newly updated, comprehensive guide, *Journalist’s Guide to Maryland’s Legal System*.

For the first time in its existence, the *Journalist’s Guide* is now offered exclusively online. The document was thoroughly updated, rewritten, and reorganized under the direction of the Maryland Judicial Council’s Court Access and Community Relations Committee and its Community Relations Subcommittee.

“The Judiciary strives to improve public awareness and understanding of the Maryland judicial branch, as well as the court system, and its role in resolving conflicts, providing justice, and upholding the rule of law,” said Maryland Court of Appeals Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera. “A free press is vitally important to inform the public about court proceedings and events. This guide gives journalists the tools they need to report about our legal system with the necessary accuracy and thoroughness to inform and educate the people we serve.”

Three years in the making, research on the new version commenced when Prince George’s County Circuit Court Judge Larnzell Martin, Jr., now retired, was Chair of the Court Access and Community Relations Committee and District 10

“We were fortunate to have the help of several distinguished former journalists and representatives from the Maryland State Bar Association,” said District 10 Administrative Judge Pamila J. Brown, who still chairs the Subcommittee. “This has been an intensive effort by many dedicated committee members and experts.”



Online at: mdcourts.gov/journalistsguide

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Administrative Judge Pamila J. Brown was Chair of its Community Relations Subcommittee.

The subcommittee enlisted the help and expertise of many attorneys and journalists in the community, including Robert D. Anbinder, Esq., and Sue Kopen Katcef. Both Anbinder, a chief solicitor in the Litigation Division of the Baltimore City Department of Law, and Katcef, a veteran journalist and current professor at the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism, made major contributions to the guide by dedicating many hours to research, write, and edit the content you see in the third edition.

The work was completed during the tenure of Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Pamela J. White, who became Committee Chair in 2018. “This guide is extensive and inclusive,” Judge White said. “We tried to answer every question and identify every resource that reporters might need to know about Maryland courts and how to cover judicial proceedings. The guide includes practical details and is quite user-friendly, while giving journalists a resource to rely on time and time again. We also believe that the online format will provide easy and instant access.”

Major topics covered in the *Journalist’s Guide:*

- **Guide to the various components of Maryland’s state judicial system and justice partners;**
- **Explanations of the criminal and civil court processes;**
- **Obtaining court records through Case Search, at the courthouse, or through the Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) case management system;**
- **Review of journalists’ rights; and**
- **Guidelines for coverage to avoid legal problems.**

Protecting the most vulnerable Marylanders: New parenting plan puts the best interests of children first; updated rules safeguard rights of people under guardianship

By working diligently to update and improve processes and assure the highest level of service, the Maryland Judiciary advances the administration of justice. The Domestic Law Committee frequently focuses on the policies and rules that affect the vulnerable, including both the youngest and oldest Marylanders who need to be heard in court proceedings.

PARENTING PLAN

In November 2019, the Court of Appeals of Maryland considered a proposal that would weave a parenting plan process into Maryland’s child custody decision-making fabric.

Based on the work of the Court Process Work Group of the Judicial Council’s Domestic Law Committee, the proposal was included in the 201st Report of the Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure, known as the Rules Committee. The proposal was unanimously adopted by the Court of Appeals and the new Rule went into effect Jan. 1, 2020.

The core feature of the newly approved Rule: parenting plans.

A parenting plan is a written agreement that guides how people will care for and make decisions about their child or children. It includes how decisions about a child’s health, education, and welfare will be made, decision-making authority or legal custody, and when the child spends time with each party—parenting time or physical custody. It is developed by the parents, working together, separately, or with a mediator, and is filed with the court, which ultimately decides if the plan is in the best interest of the child.

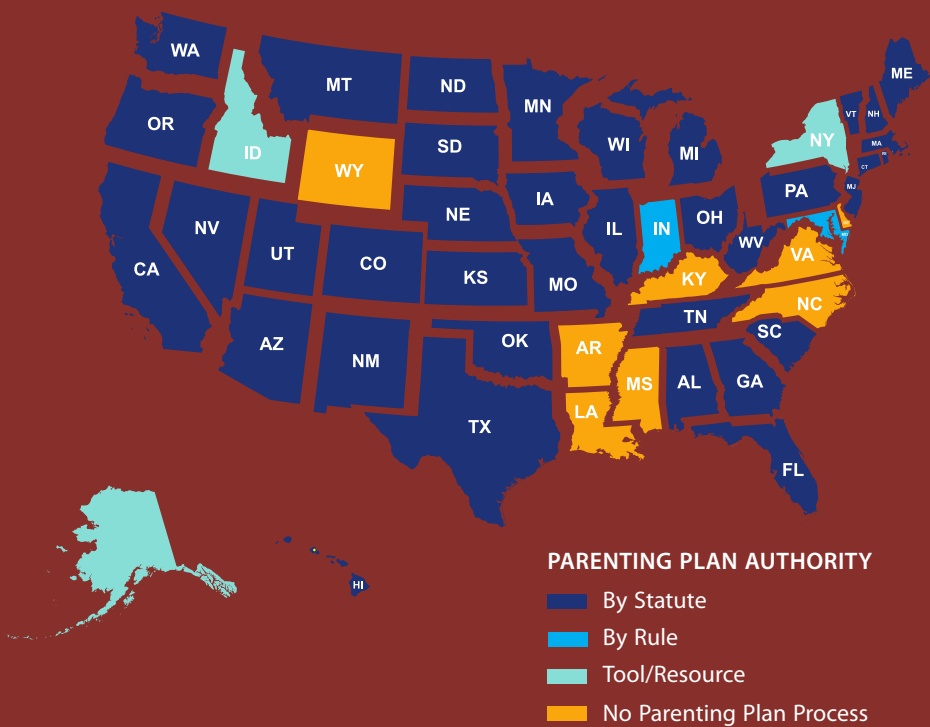
The parenting plan process reframes custody analysis around each partner’s responsibilities and their child’s unique needs and interests. It reflects mental health and child development experts’ recommendations to help insulate children from the adverse effects of conflict between parents. By creating a written plan, parents and children will know what to expect and should have fewer conflicts.



“There are many benefits to a parenting plan,” said Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Cynthia Callahan, Chair of the Domestic Law Committee. “They encourage parents to consider and anticipate their children’s unique needs, foster co-parenting relationships, provide predictability and structure, and promote and ensure children’s continued relationships with each party. In general, it focuses on the children rather than on the adults and on cooperation and mutually-beneficial decisions rather than on conflict.”

If the parents are not able to agree on a comprehensive parenting plan, the process directs the parties to complete a joint statement form to tell the court which issues they have resolved and which they need the court to decide. For example, the parties may agree on how to share decision-making authority and the child’s regular schedule but disagree on which holidays the child will spend with each parent and whether the child will have a cell phone. The joint statement form will allow the court to readily identify the narrow issues that are in need of adjudication. For issues in dispute, each parent can also propose a solution they believe is in the best interest of the child.

STATES WITH A PARENTING PLAN PROCESS



“The joint statement of the parties allows the court to focus on the contested issues and streamline custody proceedings,” said Frederick County Circuit Court Judge Richard “Ricky” Sandy, Chair of the Court Process Work Group of the Domestic Law Committee. “With it, the court can readily identify issues in dispute and make a decision in consideration of the parents’ respective positions. The proposals may also be used to facilitate further discussions, so they may reach an agreement where common ground exists. The overriding goal of the process is to keep everyone focused on what is in the best interest of the children.”

The work group created a detailed booklet for parents that includes instructions on how to create a parenting plan, what factors to consider, how to proceed if parents cannot agree on a plan, and a list of important dates and timelines.

The parenting plan process was the result of nearly four years of work and incorporates feedback from judges, family support services court staff, alternative dispute resolution practitioners, family law practitioners, the Maryland chapters of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, and mental health and child development professionals.



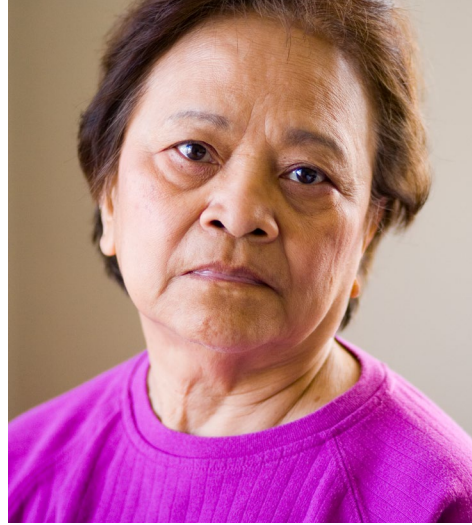
Online at: mdcourts.gov/parentingplanbook

Some of the factors parents are instructed to consider in developing a parenting plan include:

- The day-to-day needs of the child, including education, socializations, culture and religion, food, shelter, clothing, and mental and physical health;
- Stability and foreseeable health and welfare of the child;
- Frequent, regular, and continuing contact with parties who act in the child’s best interest;
- Whether and how parties who do not live together will share the rights and responsibilities of raising the child;
- The child’s relationship with the parties, any siblings, other relatives, and individuals who are or may become important in the child’s life;
- The child’s physical and emotional security and protection from violence; and
- The child’s developmental needs.

GUARDIANSHIP RULES CHANGES

Throughout 2019, the Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Work Group of the Judicial Council's Domestic Law Committee continued efforts to implement its 25 recommendations for reforming guardianship court practices statewide. Chaired by Judge Karen Murphy Jensen (Ret.), the work group focused on strengthening safeguards for persons under guardianship, expanding the use of mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution in guardianship cases, promoting case management best practices, improving court processes, and developing new resources for guardians.



In November 2019, the Court of Appeals of Maryland adopted another set of rule changes based on recommendations from the work group. The changes are geared toward protecting the rights and interests of persons under guardianship and further refining court processes. Specifically, they clarify the role of the attorney representing a person suspected of needing a guardian, overhaul how courts monitor persons and property under guardianship, and protect the privacy of persons under guardianship.

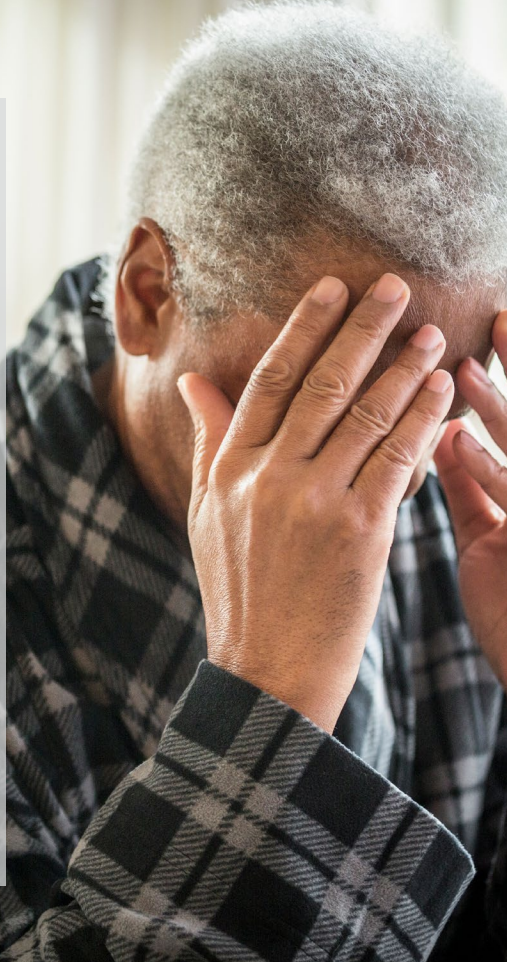
What happens after the guardian is appointed is critical and is addressed in the rule changes. "The court has an ongoing obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of the people under guardianship and his or her assets," Judge Jensen said. "The changes improve how guardians report to the court on the well-being of persons and assets under guardianship. The rules also limit the public's access to information about persons under guardianship. Records in these cases are filed with financial, medical, and psychological information. Keeping this information publicly available subjects persons under guardianship to further loss of privacy and increases their vulnerability to those who would use such information to exploit them."



Online at: mdcourts.gov/guardianshandbook

The Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Work Group also assisted in the development of new forms for guardians and a comprehensive handbook for guardians of minors. Available online, the handbook supplements training programs for guardians and is a guide to help guardians know how to successfully perform their duties, access resources, and maintain records.

“The appointment of a guardian results in the significant and often permanent loss of an individual’s rights and liberties,” said Judge Patrick L. Woodward, Retired Chief Judge of the Court of Special Appeals and a member of the Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Work Group. “The most important protection is the alleged disabled person’s right to an attorney-advocate, whose job is to protect such person’s rights throughout the adversarial proceeding. These changes will help ensure that the attorneys fulfill their ethical obligations.”



QUICK LINKS

PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2019

mdcourts.gov/opscreport

MARYLAND COURTS SELF-HELP CENTER: ONLINE CHAT AND PHONE

mdcourts.gov/selfhelp

SERVING ON A MARYLAND GRAND JURY

mdcourts.gov/grandjuryservice

JOURNALIST'S GUIDE TO MARYLAND'S LEGAL SYSTEM

mdcourts.gov/journalistsguide

MARYLAND PARENTING PLAN INSTRUCTIONS

mdcourts.gov/parentingplanbook

HANDBOOK FOR GUARDIANS OF MINORS

mdcourts.gov/guardianshandbook





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