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The Full Access Financial Scorecard for State Access-to-Justice Communities

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and Wayne Moore*

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Full Access to Justice is within our reach. It is a “stretch goal” that every state justice community can strive for.

As we outline in this article, some states are now generating more than half the funding they would need to provide Full Access. They are within sight of an historic achievement, and they provide a blueprint for the rest of us. Eliminating the “Full Access Gap” in every state is the challenge of the 2000s.

Full Access is within our reach.

“Full Access” means access for low income people, everywhere, to the level of legal help one needs to function as a responsible member, not a victim, in our society. Full access is achievable. We believe that some communities are well down that road. By the end of the current decade, we believe that several states will have achieved Full Access.

Getting there means that people are in action on three fronts:

- Resource development
- Delivery systems engineering
- Leadership building

We call these the “cornerstones” of a Full Access vision.

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1. Resource development. We can secure the resources needed to bridge the gap between where we are today and what is needed to achieve Full Access. We can already see the results that can be achieved when a state leadership group sets bold funding goals and commits itself to a sustained effort over a period of 5-10 years to achieve them. In New Jersey, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Maryland and several other states, access-to-justice groups have succeeded in developing multiple funding streams for legal aid that collectively exceed the federal (LSC) contribution by a factor of two or three. These include state appropriations, filing fees, annual law firm campaigns, city and county funding, corporate funding, foundation grants and others. These groups have succeeded in turning on new funding streams to achieve total per-capita funding levels that are two to five times the levels that exist in states where leadership efforts are just getting started. Per-capita funding levels range from \$11 to more than \$60 at the high end, with a median funding level of about \$20 per person in poverty.

Volunteer resources can also be dramatically increased. Pro bono participation by private lawyers typically runs at 10 to 20 percent of the eligible lawyers in a community, yet in places where strong recruitment efforts have been combined with innovative programs offering lawyers a wide range of opportunities, sustainable levels of 40 to 80 percent are being achieved. The gap between 10 percent and 80 percent represents an enormous latent resource waiting to be tapped in communities across the country.

Also, *non-attorney* volunteers are a significant untapped resource. Some programs use volunteers to fill a wide variety of support roles in outreach, intake, providing brief services, administration and clerical support. Successful volunteer programs leverage their dollar investment many times in supplemental staffing they contribute to legal aid programs.

The successes of individual states and local programs demonstrate the feasibility of generating levels of funding and volunteer resources that are two to five times what we have now. They show that the resources are out there. They invite analysis of why

the things people are doing in these places are working. They create possibilities for the rest of us.

2. Delivery systems engineering. Assuming we could double the funding and volunteer resources that are available, how would we deploy those to achieve Full Access?

One answer is, we would do exactly what the most innovative and successful legal aid programs across the country are already doing to get more bang out of their bucks. We would:

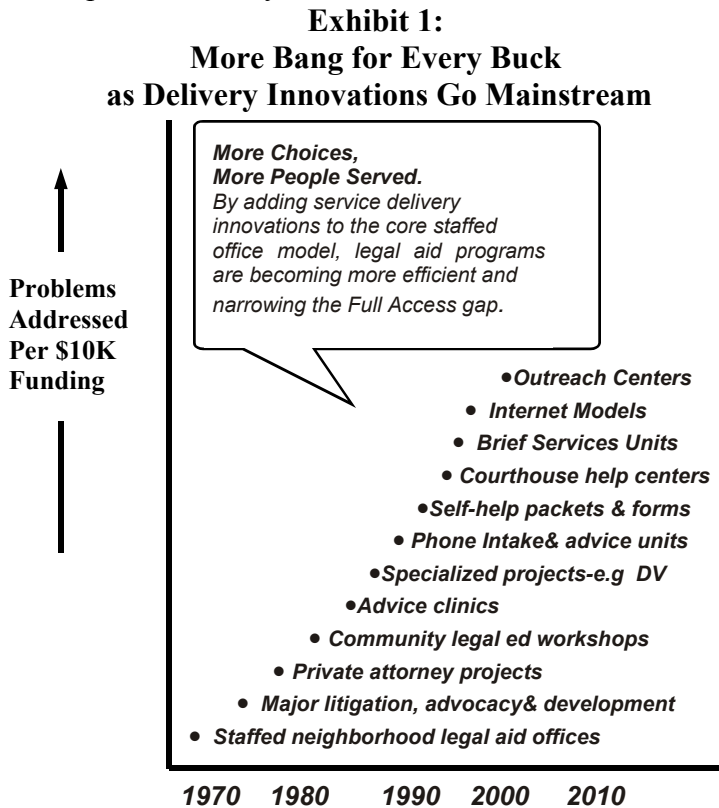
- **Grow the core.** We would invest some of the new resources to improve and expand the core staff delivery model that since the mid 1960s has provided extended legal representation to low income clients through negotiation, individual court and administrative representation, appellate work, major litigation, community economic development and advocacy in legislative and administrative rule-making forums. We would make these programs more cost-effective by launching new collaborative special projects addressing community-wide issues such as domestic violence. We would invest in higher attorney salaries to attract the best and brightest advocates to work in the new systems on behalf of the poor.
- **Deploy innovations.** We would invest additional new resources to grow the innovative new service delivery models that have emerged out of the funding shortages of the 1980s and 1990s. These include phone intake and advice systems, “brief services units,” courthouse self-help centers and technology-based systems for distributing legal education and self-help materials over the Internet. We would link these and the core staff delivery system together with a front-end intake system that matches each client problem with the least expensive delivery mechanism that produces sufficient results.¹

We could base our choices about deploying delivery innovations on on-going evaluations of the success of these models.

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Exhibit 1 illustrates how new delivery methods conceived during the 1980s and 90s have built on the solid foundation of the core staff attorney model to dramatically increase the numbers of people who can get an appropriate level of assistance to address legal problems affecting their families, homes, jobs, health and personal safety.



We believe that the delivery system models are available that will *triple* the number of people whose legal problems can be solved with a given amount of funding. The knowledge is scattered among communities across the nation in the form of “best practice” models ready to be applied. Program managers and boards are gradually overcoming their skepticism about new methods and reaching a state of readiness to deploy these systems.

3. Leadership community building. The appearance of “state justice communities” may be the most significant innovation of the decade between 1995 and 2005. It has happened in several states, in different forms, at almost the same time. Maryland, Massachusetts, California, New Jersey, Minnesota and Washington have been early leaders.

The payoff is clear: These are the states near the top of the per-capita funding ranking. This did not happen because these are rich states. It happened because leaders came together to figure out how to turn on the funding streams it would take to address a bigger percentage of the legal needs their studies indicated were there but not being met. They committed to a bold vision. They gathered the data and built the case for getting funding from their state legislatures, state associations and law firms, city councils and county commissions. They marshaled the smart campaigns it took to build political support for the funding decisions that are turning vision into reality.

They have created a blueprint that others can follow. Their job is not finished, but as we’ll see shortly, they are well down the road. Their leadership stories show it can be done. The rest of us can learn from the path they took. Building a leadership community in every state committed to Full Access is the challenge of the first decade of the 21st century.

Closing “The Gap”: A financial scorecard for tracking a state’s progress toward Full Access

It is a widespread belief that only about 20 percent of the legal needs of the poor are being met. This is consistent with what intake workers see each day. People with problems other than dire emergencies routinely have to be turned away or placed on wait lists. The 1993 ABA Legal Needs Survey and state-level legal needs studies in the early 1990s confirmed what intake workers know. For every person accepted, several are turned away and many more don’t bother to apply.

To many experienced legal aid workers, the goal of Full Access seems overwhelming. The gap between the resources we have now and what we’d need to help everyone with legal problems seems to grow while we struggle to replace funding sources that get cut back. If we are serving at best one-fifth of the people in need, where would we get the money to help the other four-fifths?

The mountain is not as high as it seems. Our growing ability to engineer more cost-effective delivery

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systems is one of two developments making Full Access a possibility. The other is the capacity of legal aid communities to generate new funding streams.

Already we can see the results of focused projects combining strategy with funding. Many programs, for example, have organized themselves into specialized units to meet specific emergency needs—securing protective orders for abused women, keeping families from being summarily evicted from their homes, getting disability benefits for people injured or too sick to work. In some communities legal aid programs are now meeting the need of every domestic violence victim seeking a protective order. With more funding, we could spread these successes to other kinds of legal needs until all are met.

Some states have raised, and are now deploying, between four and five times the per capita funding of other states. In states where that resource development work is just beginning, a funding goal of four to five times what is currently being received should not seem out of the question.

How big is the Full Access funding gap?

We believe that with an optimal mix of delivery models and some additional funding, leading states like Maryland are within reach of Full Access. We have developed below a measure of the Full Access funding needed, and the funding gap, for each state. To do that, we have applied estimates of how many legal problems each state's low income population has each year and the costs of delivering the assistance that is needed. The details are provided in a supplemental paper posted on the web site of *The Resource for Great Programs*, www.greatprograms.org.² Below we carry out these two steps using Maryland as a sample, then apply the analysis to all 50 states.

1. Number of legal problems. Many studies were done in the early 1990s to quantify the numbers and types of legal problems encountered by low income people. For example, the American Bar Association completed a national legal needs study in 1993 finding that each year the total number of legal problems of the poor averaged 1.01 per household. Other stud-

ies showed similar results. The data from these studies enable us to make order-of-magnitude estimates of the total number of legal problems generated in a state based on its low income population, and to break down those figures by types of legal problems experienced. *Exhibit 2* estimates that for Maryland's most vulnerable population the number is 148,500 legal problems per year based on the 1993 ABA study.³

Exhibit 2: Estimate of total need for legal assistance in Maryland

2. Cost of meeting the "Full Access" level of demand for legal assistance.

Legal Problem Area	Problems Per 100 Households <i>** ABA Legal Needs Survey, 1993</i>	Total Problems <i>Based on state Poverty population</i>
Financial/ Consumer	17	25,100
Housing/Real Property	17	25,100
Community and Regional Problems	13	19,200
Family/Domestic	12	18,300
Employment-related problems	8	12,100
Personal/Economic Injury	7	10,200
Health/Health Care-Related	7	9,600
Wills/Estates/Advance Directives	5	7,400
Public benefits problems	4	5,900
Small Businesses/farms	2	3,000
Children's Schooling	3	4,400
Other civil Rights/Liberties	1	2,100
Misc.	4	6,100
Total	101	148,500

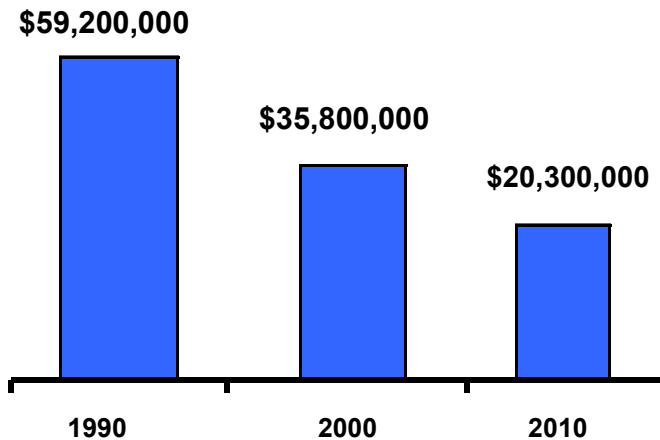
We can estimate the funding needed to address the number of problems we have identified. Exhibit 3 shows the results of our analysis.³ We have applied service cost benchmarks from AARP experience and the national data base of *The Resource for Great Programs* to estimate the cost of addressing 100,000 legal problems using a mix of services.

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Exhibit 3:
Full Access Funding Needed to serve
100,000 households annually

Assuming best use of service delivery technologies available in 1990, 2000 and 2010



The range of services we considered in this analysis are shown in Exhibit 1. Our fundamental assumption is that in a Full Access system, everyone with a legal problem is intercepted by an intake system that directs him or her to the least expensive type of assistance appropriate to his or her situation. Each type of service delivery system has a specific cost per “case” or “matter” associated with it, which we can estimate based on program and demonstration project data. By making assumptions about the percentage of problems that would be addressed with each level of service, we can estimate the total cost of handling 100,000 legal problems a year.

1990 cost. In 1990 there were essentially three delivery models that were widely used: staffed neighborhood law offices, organized pro bono projects, and compensated private attorney projects. Using national benchmarks for the service cost of each of these three models and assuming the percentage breakdown of 100,000 legal problems across the models, we estimate the total cost would be approximately \$59 million in 2000 dollars.

2000 cost. In 2000, there were more delivery models available, including legal hotlines, pro se assistance projects, and high-volume specialty projects. The figure shown in Exhibit 3 is a theoretical figure derived by assuming that all the available models were deployed in a way that matched each of the 100,000 problems with the least expensive service method of addressing it. We get an estimate of approximately \$36 million per 100,000 problems handled.

2010 cost. Innovation in legal services delivery is accelerating, significantly driving down cost per problem addressed.⁴ By assuming an optimal deployment of 100,000 legal problems across these methods, we estimate that the total cost in 2010 would be slightly more than \$20 million (in 2000 dollars). This 2010 figure includes a 36 percent increase in average advocate salaries aimed at reducing attrition and attracting the kinds of highly qualified people that a Full Access system demands and legal aid clients deserve.

Exhibit 3 illustrates that the costs will fall dramatically as we fully deploy intake systems that match each client’s problem with the least expensive method that is appropriate for addressing it, and expand the capacity of systems such as legal advice hotlines, brief service units, community outreach units and specialized projects that offer the most cost-effective ways of addressing particular types of problems. Exhibit 3 illustrates the theoretical impact of deploying all available best-practice methods in an optimal mix. We anticipate that all of the delivery system improvements shown in Exhibit 1 will be in wide use in legal services by 2010.

The Scorecard: Maryland is currently within 65 percent of the Full Access level for the state’s poverty population. It is within 29 percent of the funding that would be needed to reach its actual goal of serving the poor and near-poor populations

According to Exhibit 3, it will take around \$20 million to fully address 100,000 legal problems per year using state-of-the-art, 2010 delivery methods. Exhibit 2 indicates that for Maryland’s poverty popula-

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tion there are roughly 148,000 legal problems a year. Maryland's Full Access funding figure is therefore 148,000 divided by 100,000 times \$20 million, or \$30 million. At its current level of \$19.6 million, *Maryland is at 65 percent of Full Access funding*. By raising another \$10-11 million a year, and deploying the most efficient mix of service delivery systems, Maryland could provide Full Access to legal assistance for its poorest citizens. Full Access funding amounts to approximately \$68 per eligible person.

The Full Access gap is a range. What we have calculated is a *lower* estimate of Full Access funding for Maryland – the amount it would take to help everyone at 100 percent of poverty who has a legal problem. States may seek to serve a much larger segment. Maryland, for example, has committed to serving not only the poor but the near-poor. The Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) defines income eligibility to be up to 50 percent of the state's median income. Under that definition, the eligible population numbers approximately one million, more than twice the 438,000 figure found at 100 percent of the Federal poverty guideline. To provide Full Access for that many people would cost \$68 million (\$68 per eligible person times one million people). Maryland is currently at 29 percent of that level.

Most legal aid programs set eligibility at between 100 and 175 percent of the poverty guideline. Maryland and other states that seek to serve people above the poverty guideline may require substantially more funding than we have indicated here.

We can use our analysis to produce an *upper* estimate of Full Access funding. At a 2010 cost of \$68 per eligible person, the amount needed to serve Maryland's one million eligible people would be \$68 million. As this analysis shows, the amount of funding needed for Full Access lies in a range. Maryland's definition "50 percent of median income" recognizes that an income well above the poverty line is needed to afford legal assistance, and takes into account the fact that some funding streams in Maryland are not means-tested. This definition sets an upper limit on the amount of funding needed by a state justice community to reach Full Access.

Application of the Full Access Scorecard to 50 States

Our analysis simply illustrates one approach for estimating the amount of funding needed to reach Full Access. Every state justice community can produce its own estimate of Full Access funding, based on the assumptions, legal needs data and eligibility criteria that capture reality in its community. According to our estimate, it would take \$68 per eligible person, deployed optimally across a mix of service delivery models, to provide Full Access. If a state is near the low end of the funding spectrum, around \$10 per person, it is generating 15-20 percent of what is needed. States near the high end, over \$50 per person, are well positioned to really begin closing the Full Access gap.

Closing the Gap: Where Will the Money Come From?

The 4 x 4 Commitment of the national leadership organizations and state justice communities

Eliminating the Full Access Gap is a financial commitment that the national leadership organizations (NLADA, ABA, LSC, NAIP) and state justice communities can make together. It calls for a social contract among us to mobilize four "Partners for Full Access" in every state:

- The federal government
- State government
- The private bar
- The local community

Campaigns can be mounted to get from each partner an appropriate "share" of Full Access funding. As a goal, we are proposing that an appropriate share for each partner is *one-fourth*. "Four by four" – four partners, four equal shares. Our campaigns would, in effect, present each partner with an "invoice" for its share of meeting our society's promise of *Justice for All*.

The Scorecard: how much is each partner's share? Breaking the Full Access price tag down into four parts makes the commitments of each partner manageable. It breaks it down into smaller cam-

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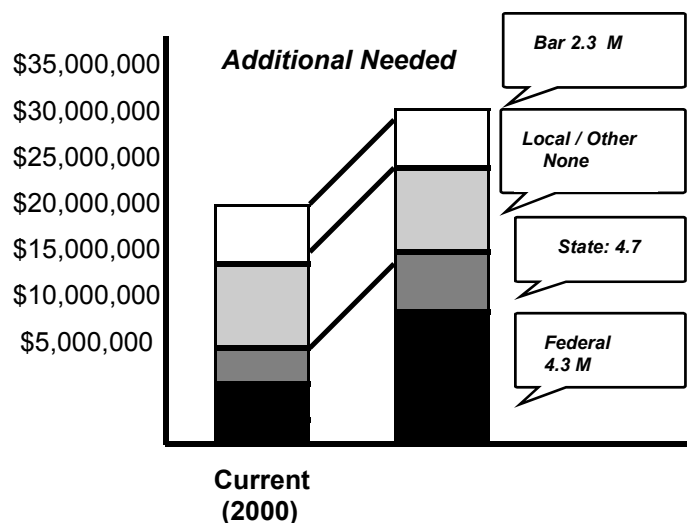
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paigms, each with its own champions. The goal is not unrealistic; in fact, eight states are already more than halfway there. Moreover, it is equitable. No one partner has to carry more than its share of the load. No one partner has to lead the whole effort.

We can calculate the “4 x 4” price tag for each partner. For Maryland, our lower estimate of the cost of Full Access is \$30 million to serve people below the poverty line. Exhibit 4 illustrates how this could be translated into “4 x 4” shares for the federal government, state government, the private bar and the local community, subject to the assumptions we have made characterizing Maryland’s funding streams into these four components. The four partners, and their share of the additional funding needed to reach Full Access are as follows:

- *The federal government share: \$4.3 million more*. Currently, Maryland programs get \$3.2 million in federal funding. The Full Access level would be \$7.5 million. NLADA, LSC and ABA continue to lead efforts to preserve existing funding streams such as LSC and to develop new ones. Possibilities exist and must be developed for further growth in federal funding. The example of VOCA and VAWA funding and how it has expanded legal aid’s ability to help domestic violence victims in recent years – while certainly fraught with challenges– points the way to growth in other areas through partnerships with federal programs in housing, health, transportation, employment and other areas. State leaders are already in action developing some of these partnerships and as a result beginning to get significant program dollars that contribute to the federal government share of Full Access.
- *The state government share: \$4.7 million more*. At \$2.8 million, Maryland is already demonstrating how a state leadership group can turn on state funding in the form of filing fees and other state funding streams. The additional state funding needed to reach a one-fourth share of Full Access is \$4.7 million. This presents a clear goal for further state funding campaigns.
- *The private bar share: \$2.3 million more*. Currently, Maryland programs get \$5.2 million from this source. The ABA, state bar associations and IOLTA programs have an opportunity to play a critical role in making *Justice for All* a reality by leading campaigns aimed at fulfilling the “private bar share” of Full Access. The opportunities here are many: traditional fundraising campaigns aimed at law firms, bequests, *Cy Pres*, IOLTA revenue enhancement campaigns with major banks, corporate donor campaigns and pro bono recruitment campaigns, among others. A variety of mechanisms will be necessary in light of the threat to IOLTA funding, which represents the bulk of private bar funding in Maryland.
- *The community share: well on the way!* At \$8.4 million, Maryland communities may well be already meeting their one-fourth share of Full Access funding. Local bar associations and local legal aid programs provide the leadership in generating funding from city and county governments, local foundations, local corporations, United Ways, and individual donors. They develop partnerships with community shelters, faith organizations, client groups, social agencies and community organizations to mobilize additional financial, in-kind and volunteer resources.

**Exhibit 4:
The 4 x 4 Financial Scorecard for Maryland**



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Full Access calls for a state justice community to have a “CFO function.” Every major enterprise has a Chief Financial Officer, and each state justice community needs one. The CFO’s job is to forecast the funding needs of the enterprise, trigger the marketing efforts that these call for and manage the work that delivers the required financial results – that is, be accountable for the financial success of the enterprise. The “4 x 4 Full Access Financial Scorecard” is the radar screen of the State Justice CFO. It shows where each partner is in meeting its share of society’s promise of Equal Justice. The CFO uses it to manage the community’s campaign toward Full Access.

Conclusion: A New Accountability for State Justice Communities

Several states are well down the road to Full Access funding. They have the leadership in place to close the Full Access Gap. They provide a blueprint for the rest of us. The payoff will be realized as the new funds are invested in the people and delivery systems that will make Full Access a reality.

Our analysis simply illustrates one approach for estimating the amount of funding needed to reach Full Access. Each state justice community needs to have its own “Full Access Case,” based on the assumptions, legal needs data and definition of Full Access that community leaders can commit to.

Full access calls for a new accountability. State justice communities everywhere in the country can make the leap from a commitment to “restoring funding that has been cut” to “*fulfilling the promise of Justice for All.*” This is a measurable and achievable goal. It is the challenge of the decade ahead of us.

Notes

1. For an outline of the delivery systems that we expect to be deployed over the next decade, see Wayne Moore’s paper, “*The Future of the Delivery of Legal Services to Low-Income People,*” in *Management Information Exchange Journal*, Summer 2002.

2. For details of our analysis, see, “*Estimating Full Access Funding for Legal Aid for the Poor,*” by Ken Smith and Wayne Moore. This paper is posted on the web site of *The Resource for Great Programs*: www.GreatPrograms.org.

3. By “most vulnerable population,” in this analysis we are using 2000 Census figures for numbers of people in households at or below 100 percent of the Federal poverty guideline. States may seek to serve a much larger segment. Maryland, for example, has committed to serving not only the poor but the near poor. The Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) defines income eligibility to be up to 50 percent of the state’s median income. Under that definition, the eligible population numbers approximately one million, more than twice the 438,000 figure found at 100 percent of the Federal poverty guideline. The eligibility cutoff of most legal aid programs is 100 to 125 percent of the poverty guideline. Maryland and other states that seek to serve people above the poverty guideline may require substantially more funding than we have indicated here.

4. For a description of Community Outreach Centers and Brief Service Units and other service innovations, see Wayne Moore, *ibid.*

5. Our analysis shows that with 2010 best-practice delivery methods, 35 percent more funding could address all the legal problems of Maryland’s poor living at or below 100 percent of the poverty guideline. Indeed, in 2000, Maryland legal aid providers addressed more than 108,000 legal problems, 73 percent of the 148,000 problems we estimate are experienced by the poorest Marylanders each year. Yet this is not to say that Maryland is already at 73 percent of Full Access. As indicated in note 2, Maryland defines eligibility to encompass more people with its legal aid dollars than almost any other state, so its definition of Full Access may require addressing many more legal problems than considered here. Moreover, many of those served currently may not get as much help from a lawyer as they need. Our analysis assumes that in a Full Access system, there is an intake system in place that diagnoses each person’s problem, then directs the client to the least expensive type of legal assistance that is appropriate.

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Legal Aid Society of Hawaii

History and Organization



The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii (Legal Aid) adopted the hotline legal advice and intake model in 1995. The creation of the centralized telephone Intake Unit was driven mainly by the geography of the state where the poverty population of almost 110,000 and the over-60 population of over 200,000 is dispersed over six isolated, mountainous islands. Executive Director Victor Geminiani's belief in the efficacy of legal hotlines, as well as his experience in founding a senior legal hotline as Executive Director of Legal Services of Northern California, was instrumental in getting the Legal Aid hotline established. The Hawaii Senior Legal Hotline was incorporated into the Legal Aid telephone intake system in 1996 when it received a Title IV grant from the Administration on Aging. That hotline was profiled in the second issue of the *Legal Hotline Quarterly*, Spring 1997. Rob Palin is Managing Attorney of the Intake Unit which runs the hotline system. Legal Aid has continued to be on the forefront of testing new methods of providing legal services in a challenging geo/demographic environment, including brief services units, a self-help office, and video-conferencing.

Legal Aid's main office is on a busy street in downtown Honolulu. It is a large, modern and airy two story building with an impressive reception area open to a street level entrance. A bank of computers for client use are lined up at one end of the reception area. Legal Aid has a total of nine offices. The main office plus two others are on Oahu. There are offices on the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, and Lanai as well.



Rob Palin, Intake Unit Managing Attorney

Funding

Legal Aid is mainly funded by LSC and the State of Hawaii. The senior legal hotline also receives a small grant from AoA Title IV. There are about 20 other small funding sources also. TIG grants fund the video-conferencing and web site development projects.

Staff

Both the low-income and senior hotlines are staffed by the same complement of 25 telephone advocates equal to 5 full-time staff positions. The staff consists of contract attorneys, paralegals, Ameri-Corps attorneys, and law students, as well as a telephone receptionist. The hotline is staffed with 6 people on the morning shift and 5 on the afternoon shift. The Hotline takes calls weekdays from 9-11:30 AM and 1-3:30 PM. Each shift has a designated supervisor. The staff takes approximately 190 dockets (intakes) a week. Apart from those, the hotline receives an average of 70+ calls weekly from over-income callers, 20+ are conflicted out and about 80 do not have an issue Legal Aid handles. .

Work-Flow

Clients call local numbers which bump them into the central Honolulu office number. An ACD puts them into a queue but allows callers to hit 0 for the operator. Callers also have the option of accessing recorded scripts that provide general information in four broad legal areas: Divorce, Domestic Abuse, Bankruptcy, and Debt Collection. About 800 calls come into the central phone number per week. About 45% of them get routed to the intake hotline. The rest of the callers either didn't wait in the queue or knew their party's extension. The low-income hotline does not permit callers to leave messages for a call-back. The average waiting period on hold is 5-7 minutes. The senior hotline does permit messages and has answering machine for that purpose. The hotline supervising attorney will review the message and make call backs.

Legal Aid priority areas are Family Law, Housing, Public Benefits and Consumer Issues, and hotline services are limited to those areas. The senior hotline answers calls on most civil matters. Non-Legal Aid issues are referred to other free legal ser-

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services if possible, including the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, the Disability Law Center, Title IIIB providers, Volunteer Legal Services, Immigration Rights and Public Interest Legal Center, Hawaii Civil Rights Commission, Office of Consumer Protection, and legal service centers in the District and Family Courts, among others.

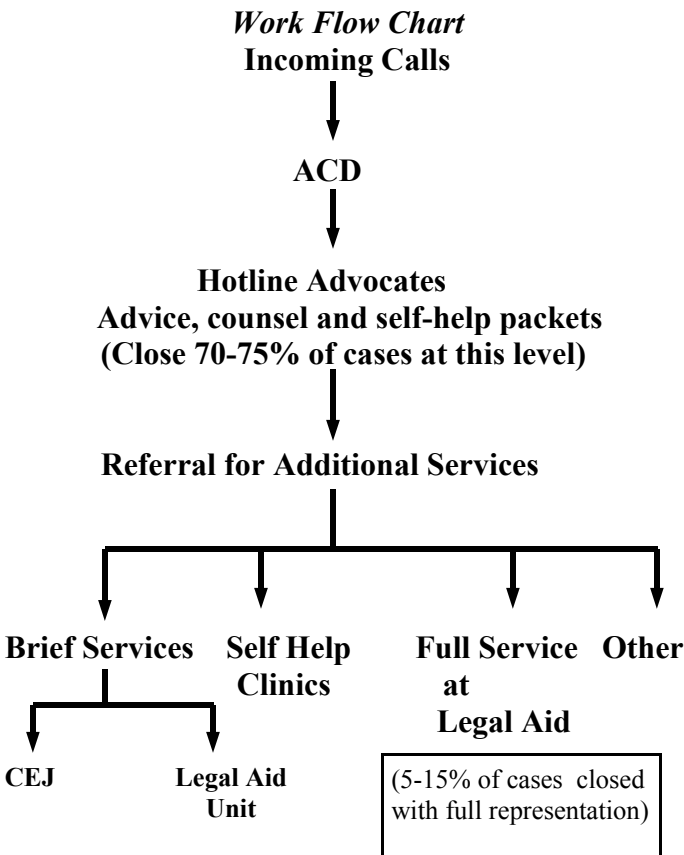
The Intake Advocate interviews callers, uses prepared scripts and checklists developed for various problem types to provide advice and information to hotline callers. Using case acceptance criteria, the intake advocate decides if counsel and advice are not enough. About 75% of calls are handled by hotline advocates who also send out about 10,000 information packets to callers annually. Legal Aid has developed self-help packets for advance directives, guardianship and adoption, small claims court, many landlord/tenant issues, divorces, and collection issues. If the hotline advocate decides further assistance is warranted, he can sign the client up for a Clinic, have the client come into the Center for Equal Justice (self-help office), send the case to a Legal Aid unit for brief services, refer the case to Legal Aid for full representation, or refer the case to another free legal service provider.

Clinics

Legal Aid runs clinics for bankruptcy, uncontested divorce, eviction, and custody or child support modification. Using a criteria checklist, the hotline advocate determines if a clinic is suitable for the client. For the eviction clinic, the telephone advocate merely tells the client the time and place to appear. For the other clinics, the hotline advocate routes the callers docket (intake form) to the appropriate unit. The unit staff attorney contacts the client and provides him information about the clinic. The client also receives notification in the mail as to the place and time of the clinic.

Center for Equal Justice

The Center for Equal Justice (CEJ) is a self-help office located at the main Legal Aid office in Honolulu. It is staffed by two paralegals. Scott Morishige, a paralegal at CEJ, was interviewed for this article. CEJ is a large room open to the reception area. It contains typewriters and computers and written material. Services consist of two main components: computer access and brief services. Clients can use the computers to fill out forms, do research and use the Legal Aid website to get legal information. Clients can also review tutorials designed to explain the law on common housing, consumer, public benefits and family law matters.



Center for Equal Justice– Honolulu Office

CEJ staff also provide brief services in the form of writing letters, completing form pleadings, negotiating with landlords, reviewing documents, making phone calls, and providing powers of attorney and advance directives. Clients from the hotline

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can be referred to CEJ or simply walk in off the street. The Hotline staff also interviews walk-in clients for eligibility and legal problem.

If the hotline advocate determines that the client would benefit from CEJ staff assistance, he can provide the CEJ staff with the client's intake and either tell the client just to come in during regular service hours or have the CEJ staff make an appointment for him. Once the CEJ staff determines that the client needs a brief service, they take the client's intake form to the supervising attorney of the appropriate substantive unit for approval and supervision. More complex brief services are handled within the Legal Aid Unit rather than at the CEJ level.

In a typical month, CEJ staff sees 140 clients. About 40 of those are walk-ins who simply want to use the computer center. The remaining 100 receive counsel, advice or brief services. Scott notes that the Center is working to increase computer usage among the client population and plans to set up basic computer classes to further this goal.

Brief Services

Legal Aid has recognized a need to provide a great number of brief services because the legal services providers in Hawaii are limited and overburdened. For example, the Title IIIB program for 80% of Hawaii's elder population only has a staff of two. By expanding the brief services level of delivery at Legal Aid, the providers would be freed up to do more full-service and impact work.

Legal Aid experimented with several brief service delivery methods and currently has two brief service delivery mechanisms. The first level of brief services is handled by the Center for Equal Justice as described above. Brief services are also handled as a discreet part of each of the four substantive full-service units (Family Law, Housing, Public Benefits and Consumer). To handle brief services, Legal Aid utilizes its cadre of AmeriCorps Attorneys who make a maximum commitment of two years. The intake advocate or manager of the CEJ sends cases needing more extended brief services than the CEJ can provide to the appropriate Legal Aid unit where the AmeriCorps attorney makes contact with the client in order to provide the brief service.

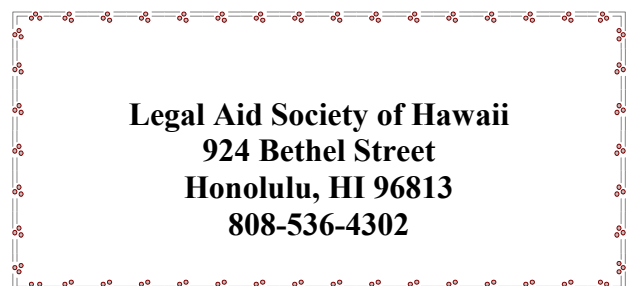
Videoconferencing

The videoconferencing project was developed with a TIG grant from LSC. Since most of the outer-island offices are very small, staffing limitations do not always permit the provision of services a client needs. The videoconferencing project allows staff with the most expertise to talk to clients in outer-island offices, regardless of where the staff person is located. The idea is to make the staff and resources concentrated in the Honolulu office available to clients across the island chain. Videoconferencing workstations are open at 8 of 9 Legal Aid offices.

The PolyCam videoconferencing equipment is connected to the Honolulu office via T1, DSL, and frame-relay lines. According to Scott, videoconferencing works well in several scenarios. It is a good alternative to accessing services when the client walks in to a district office rather than calling the hotline. The district office staff typically does not have time to interview the client and go through the intake process. They can contact the CEJ staff who will turn on the video equipment and interview the client just as if he were a walk-in to the CEJ.

In another scenario, a client may call the hotline from a different island or far from Honolulu on Oahu. The hotline advocate may determine that the client needs a brief service but no brief services are offered at the client's local Legal Aid office. The Center will schedule a time to interview the client by video-conferencing. A fax machine is located at each video-conferencing station so that documents can be faxed during the interview. The video-conferencing equipment has a real time chat feature which makes it particularly useful for talking to hearing impaired clients.

During the past year, Legal Aid has served 30 clients via videoconferencing. This number is likely to increase as Legal Aid works to install video conference equipment in other agencies that clients visit.



Legal Files: The All-in-One Legal Services System By Matt Ryan*

The following article was submitted by Legal Files Software, Inc. LHQ solicited satisfaction surveys from two users whose names were provided by Legal Files. The results of those surveys immediately follow the article.

***LHQ does not recommend any particular product but provides this information in keeping with its mission to inform legal hotlines about available products, services and resources.*

Managing your legal services organization or hotline presents many challenges. In addition to tracking cases from initial inquiry through completion, you have to handle dozens of daily deadlines, a multitude of administrative issues and the demands of your clients and staff. Everywhere and every way possible, you look to eliminate redundant data entry, perform tasks more efficiently and compile timely and accurate reports. Legal Files Software was created to help you make the most of your limited resources.

Legal Files specializes in managing office workflow. From the moment someone inquires about your services until the case is resolved, Legal Files manages every piece of information, every document, every appointment, every note. You decide exactly how you want to use it.

Legal Files was designed with dozens of customizable features to manage every type of matter, integrating comprehensive contact/intake management with full-featured case management and groupware. Legal Files offers unlimited reporting capabilities. Yet Legal Files is easy to use. It brings a true team concept to case management, sharing and integrating the varied responsibilities of staff and pro bono attorneys, legal assistants, volunteers and administrators, enhancing productivity at every level.

To help manage your office's cases and workflow from start to finish, Legal Files integrates all these features:

**Matt Ryan is a Senior Applications Consultant at Legal Files Software, Inc., and a frequent author and lecturer on law office automation issues. He can be reached via e-mail at matt@legalfiles.com or by phone at (217) 523-7480.*

- Intake/Eligibility Screening
- Contacts/Parties
- E-mail
- Notes
- Document Assembly
- Document Management
- Phone Messaging
- Event/Calendaring
- Tasks/Deadlines
- Time Tracking
- Case/Problem Info
- Demographic Info
- Pro Bono Attorney Info

Legal Files for Intake

Legal Files includes a complete, integrated intake module that makes it fast and easy to perform eligibility screening, including gathering household, income, expense, asset, benefit, funding source and demographic information. You can easily modify the intake module to capture precisely the data you need. As part of the intake process, staff can perform a conflict check on all individuals involved in the matter, cross-referenced against a master party index.

This "Eligibility Wizard" steps staff and volunteers through the intake process and automatically calculates financial eligibility based on program-specific or LSC guidelines. Once an intake is accepted, all the information entered seamlessly migrates into an open case, where advocates and others can take over.

Legal Files for Advocates

When advocates first launch into Legal Files, they'll be presented with a helpful summary of that day's upcoming activities. Called "Heads Up," this alert system acts as a personal assistant, organizing important deadlines for any case and timely incoming messages – whether related to e-mail, telephone calls or documents.

When working in a case, Legal Files provides one-button access to the information advocates need most, with dozens of built-in reports that can be printed, e-mailed or faxed. And when finished with case activities, Legal Files automatically creates a timeslip of how much time was spent in that matter.

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Legal Files for Support Staff

Using the document assembly built into Legal Files, support staff can save hours and hours of time by eliminating the need to re-type the same documents. A form can be used again and again in different cases, automatically generating a new document merging the template and any data fields you choose. With our document management features, staff have easy access to every document linked to their cases.

Support staff and advocates alike will find Legal Files an excellent training tool and guide. By using a variety of checklists and smart “Task Wizards,” staff use can be prompted to complete the next task in a sequence and won’t have to re-invent the wheel.

Legal Files for Administrators

Administrators will find that Legal Files gives them the “big picture” overview they need for monitoring caseloads, tracking deadlines and making sure nothing falls through the cracks. By seeing at a glance where a case is at, administrators can help less experienced advocates and staff manage their cases and work proactively to address potential problem areas early on. And by using the reporting capability in Legal Files to spot trends in case types and demographics, administrators can better plan pertinent outreach activities and anticipate services to provide.

If you’re trying to manage more than one office, Legal Files provides a means for transferring cases and reporting across sites or the entire enterprise, offering prompt, cumulative data that you can use to accurately and consistently track caseload activity across office locations.

Legal Files...Not Just for Cases

In addition to its intake and case management capabilities, Legal Files also includes a feature called “Office Files” that can be used for tracking non-case-related items. For example, Office Files can be setup for storing information on projects, grants and fundraising efforts. Additionally, Office Files are ideal for recording staff outreach activities, such as seminars, with the specifics on the type of event, number of people served, materials provided, etc.

Using Office Files makes it easy to report on these other activities and fulfill reporting requirements to funding sources or to satisfy your organiza-

tion’s own needs. As with regular case files, Office Files can include a history of all communications related to the matter, as well as a listing of staff or other related individuals. If greater security is needed, as may be case with personnel issues, Office Files can be marked as “private” making them accessible to only those staff assigned to the matter.

If your organization is considering ways to improve efficiency and provide even better legal services to the community, we invite you to consider Legal Files Software. With Legal Files, you will open the door to greater productivity and join the family of thousands of satisfied Legal Files users.

What the Users Say:

LHQ sent a user satisfaction survey to Kathy Daniels at Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut (SLSCT) and Gray Wilson at Legal Aid of North Carolina. (LANC) The two users were referred to *LHQ* by Legal Files and both agreed to be identified for this article. SLSCT installed Legal Files in June 2002. SLSCT has 180+ users at 10 offices and remote locations. It hosts the application on its own SQL server. Users access the program using frame relay and CITRIX. Users can also access the software through the Internet using CITRIX.

LANC has about 250 users in 25 offices and remote locations. It also runs the application using CITRIX. The first office to start using Legal Files did so in March 2001. The last office came aboard in August 2002.

Kathy Daniels at SLSCT notes that files can be transferred between the program’s offices in real time. They have a central intake office and this eliminates the need to re-enter files. She finds the software to have good security features. SLSCT uses Crystal Reports for the data beyond the reports included in Legal Files. Reports they create in Crystal Reports can be imported into Legal Files. The software does interface with Outlook but Kathy notes this interface could be developed further.

Gray Wilson at LANC notes that their implementation was gradual and they are only now starting to use some of the excellent tools included in Legal Files such as document templates, web links, task wizards, etc.

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Legal Files Software User Satisfaction Survey
1 = poor 5 = excellent

Software Characteristic	Rating/Comments Connecticut	Rating/Comments North Carolina
<i>System Administration</i>		
Was it easy to install and set up?	4	4 — LF was not the problem; there were initial issues re: network connectivity
Was the conversion of old data smooth?	4	4 —
Can in-house staff easily make modifications?	4	4 —through custom windows and file menu etc. Some components can be modified only by LF programmers
Performance of software over the Internet?	4	5
Can back-up be performed efficiently?	5	5 —network administrator function
Overall rating for system administration:	4	5 —now that everything is set up properly, can install upgrades in less than one hour
<i>Cost, Training, and Support</i>		
Was the cost of the software a good value?	4	5 — It's expensive but you get a lot for your money
Was the training you received from the vendor sufficient?	4 — used them for initial training and are continuing training as users progress	5 — but it's a complex program and we're always learning new stuff
How was technical support supplied?	5 — phone, email, Citrix	5 —primarily email; excellent response time, friendly and helpful staff
<i>Client Intake Section</i>		
Is the database search function efficient?	5	5
Can client input be done quickly?	2	4 —by some users; others have more difficulty— depending on their computer skill level
Can demographic information be changed quickly?	5	5
Performance of conflicts checking function?	3	4 —I'd like to see some changes in this component
Overall rating for intake section:	4	4
Is the tickler system satisfactory?	4	5 —excellent component! Still insufficiently used at LANC
Is the calendar/scheduler satisfactory?	4	5 —excellent-again we could use it more effectively and hopefully will soon
<i>Casenotes and Services</i>		
Can casenotes be input efficiently?	5	5
Can old casenotes be easily retrieved?	5	5
Can casetype codes be added or changed easily?	5	5 —by admin. only
Does system facilitate mailing materials to clients?	5	5
Overall rating for casenote section:	5	5

Software Characteristic	Rating/Comments SLSCT	Rating/Comments North Carolina
<i>Referral Section</i>	Not using	LANC tracks PAI referrals but otherwise maintains only very limited data on referrals
Ability to match clients to referral agency	Not using	Not currently done by LANC except at receptionist level
Ability to match clients to referral attorney	Not using	4 —PAI attorney name cards list types of cases they'll accept
Is it easy to make changes to referral sources?	Not using	5 —(name cards)
Ability to track referral disposition and/or Appointments	Not using	5 —(appointments)
Ability to track billings to referral attorneys	Not using	Not using
Overall rating for referral section:	Not using	Not using
<i>Document Preparation</i>		
Ability to generate client letters	5	5
Ability to create other documents/pleadings	5	5
Overall document preparation rating	5	5 Excellent document assembly component
<i>Reporting Printing Function</i>		
Does the software run the reports you need?	3	5 a. Legal Files built in reports b. MS Access front end c. Crystal Reports Add-on
Ability to tailor reports as needed	4	5
Ability to print cases individually or in defined batches	4	5
Can software efficiently report attorney time and productivity	4	5
OVERALL RATING FOR LEGAL FILES	4+	5

Websites of Interest

www.clasp.org/pubs/pubs_new:

Contains an article entitled "The Safety "Net": Online Access to Benefits for Working Families" by Elise Richer. This paper examines how state-sponsored websites allow people to access a variety of public benefits via the Internet. The paper discusses the most common ways states are currently posting information and making program applications available, points out some common pitfalls, and highlights some of the most sophisticated techniques certain states are using.

www.benefitscheckup.org

This site now has a BenefitsCheckUpRx service which allows people to fill out a confidential eligibility form and get a personalized report of over 240 public and private programs they may be qualified for that can help save money on prescription drugs. This new feature is welcome because eligibility differs for each of the pharmaceutical company and public programs.

CMS Series: A Review of Options

By Jessica Eaton*

Reprinted from *Lstechie, Journal of Poverty Law Technology*, December 2002.

Like the name implies, a case management system (CMS) is simply a piece of software to help your office organize and manage the cases that come in. At its most basic, it's a computer database of information about clients, but the value of a CMS lies in the extra time-saving tools that are included. Common features of most systems can help your staff calculate client eligibility for services, track hours worked on a case, and manage individual attorney calendars from a centralized location. Many programs can also generate letters and reports and can assist intake staff in gathering information.

This article will provide an introduction to some of the major systems addressing the needs of legal services organizations. It is intended to be an overview for legal services managers who are considering implementing a CMS (or changing from their existing system) and for legal services employees who want to know just what their office's CMS can do.

One of the major distinguishing factors is whether a system is server-based or web-based. Advantages of a web-based system include affordability (no need to invest in an on-site server and the staff hours to keep it running) and the convenience of easier installation, upgrades, and repairs. Disadvantages include the sense, well-founded or not, of a lack of control, and the desire to have hardware on-site in case of any problems.

Another distinguishing factor to consider is the need or desire that your office might have to customize your CMS in the future. Most CMS providers will help tailor the software to the your organization's needs upon installation, and most software also allows tech-savvy employees in your office to further customize the system as needed. Assessing whether you may want to customize yourself, and whether you have the staff knowledge to do so, may be important when shopping for a system.

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Some of the major providers of case management systems for legal services:

Kemp's Case Works

(<http://www.kempscaseworks.com>)

Kemp's has been producing case management software for legal aid offices for 14 years and is one of the oldest and most popular systems. Its system, Clients, includes all of the basic case management services, and it allows users to customize forms, reports, and even the structure of the program. In addition to the basic case management tools, advertised features include:

- A Lawyer Referral portion that tracks PBI lawyers.
- A Fund Raising portion that tracks contributions to programs, the people who make them and the organizations to which they belong.
- A Question and Answer / Frequent Advice portion that provides context-sensitive questions to ask clients and advice on how to proceed with the case.
- An Agency Referral portion to give referrals to other non-legal aid agencies.

Kemp's offers three different types of delivery systems:

- The Standard Version uses a Microsoft Access database on both the workstation and the Server. It is used for a standalone computer or a LAN (local area network) installation.
- The SQL or Clients/Server version of clients is for larger offices or for use across a WAN (wide area network). It can be used with or without Citrix or Terminal Server. This version uses the industrial strength Microsoft SQL Server database on the server.
- The ASP/SQL version runs on the web and is an outsourcing of case management. All that is needed is a computer that runs a browser. Users can concentrate on what case management does, instead of worrying what software or hardware it uses.

The latest version of Clients, Prime, is currently in beta testing. Prime incorporates the Center for

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Law and Social Policy's (CLASP) compliance check list, the National Index Codes developed by the IMAG standards, the AARP state-specific list of frequent questions and answers developed from hot-lines, and the ABA Universal Task and Billing System Codes as an optional field to time records.

Pricing for Clients varies depending on which version your program is buying, whether it's a new version or an upgrade, and the numbers of users and offices that you have.

Legal Files (<http://www.legalfiles.com>)

Legal Files also offers all of the standard case management tools: eligibility calculations, time tracking tools, and customizable document and report assembly. It boasts a design for non-technical people – specialized knowledge isn't necessary to customize the system for your office's needs.

Advertised features include:

- Easy to use and administer - a legal services organization can administer its own Legal Files system without additional, or specialized, staff. No technical ability is required.
- Allows you to access functions and information on BOTH the user and case level at the same time, eliminating the need to traverse several levels of hierarchy, saving both time and effort.
- Can efficiently manage the entire eligibility process, saving time and effort. You don't have to re-key the same information into one system to determine eligibility and into another for case management.
- Can keep track of every minute and maintain an accurate record of a user's time in every file. In addition to tracking time for client files, you can also track time spent on matters and supporting activities.
- Extensive customer service, with the experience and willingness to show you how to best use Legal Files to benefit your day-to-day operations.

Legal Files is a 32 bit, client/server database that works on Windows 95/98, 2000, XP Pro, Linux and NT and runs under NT and Netware networks. Database server requirements are determined by several factors including the number of Legal Files users,

volume of files/matters, and volume of documents. Legal Files' replication system allows you to link multiple office locations across your organization.

Legal Files software lists for \$995, discounted to \$495 for legal services and non-profits. Volume discounts may also apply.

Practice Manager (<http://www.reallegal.com>)

Practice Manager began as a corporate legal program with a special module to address the needs of legal services organizations. It has been providing services to legal services customers for six years, and now boasts 700 legal services seats around the country. Again, it provides the standard information, time, and document management tools and can be tailored to an individual organization's needs and later customized further by tech-savvy staff. The company prides itself on selling a structurally solid program to technologically-sophisticated customers.

Special features of Practice Manager include:

- The only Microsoft Back Office Certified Case Management System on the market, it won't destabilize or be destabilized by the Microsoft software. It is fully integrated with Word and Outlook.
- Has always been Windows compliant, running on Windows 95, 98, ME, NT and Windows 2000. Future editions will support Windows XP, as well.
- First to integrate financial and resource-planning functions into case management. Budgets can be created quickly, and graphical displays show where resources are being used and what resources are needed.
- Next month's new release of Practice Manager will provide accounting functions to track time and expenses.

Practice Manager is based on Microsoft SQL Server technology, allowing it to expand with the size of the organization. It is offered in a variety of formats, from traditional client/server software to a Citrix-based remotely managed Web hosted solution.

Practice Manager offers special pricing for legal

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services. Non-discounted pricing is \$2497.50 for a server and \$247.50 for each seat, plus additional services ranging from \$1000 to \$1800.

Tele-Lawyer (<http://www.telelawyer.com>)

Tele-Lawyer's CMS provides all of the common system features seen in other systems, but is unique in that it was created to work in tandem with Tele-Lawyer's web-based telephone Contact Center. In this system, the Contact Center will route an incoming call to an appropriate case handler, while at the same time pulling up a link to any existing corresponding case records. The case handler can then enter initial data and perform a conflict check, and both the call and the case record can immediately be forwarded to an attorney or other qualified person.

This system also features eligibility management, document assembly, timekeeping, and non-legal referrals. It ensures full compliance with LSC regulations, and users can generate customized reports and information.

Tele-Lawyer is a web-based system, allowing both phone and data access to staff members wherever they are. One possible application is participation from pro bono attorneys, who can access incoming calls and client information by logging in from their offices for a few hours each week.

Tele-Lawyer currently costs \$.12/minute for both the Contact Center and CMS services.

TIME (<http://www.wnylc.net>)

TIME was created at the Western New York Law Center, a legal services office, as a simple-but-effective system for tracking cases and generating documents and reports. Because it was designed in an office environment, its creators boast, the system is intuitive and very little training is needed. Again, TIME provides the same basic features as other systems.

Special features of TIME include:

- A built in letter and document generator and documents stored right in the system, allowing

users to email cases, and the associated letters and documents, from within the system to other users.

- Lower implementation costs due to the intuitive nature of the system.
- Internet ready when you run the system on a Windows NT, 2000, or XP computer and open port 80 on that machine to allow users to access the database from the Internet.
- Uses Visual FoxPro, the step of the Microsoft database engines between Access and SQL.

When the system was first released, users could not change the system configuration or the built-in reports. Administrators can now use the administrative interface to add new fields and most of the reports are configurable; however, large programs that want custom reports must buy one copy of Report Writer or Crystal Reports to generate custom reports.

TIME costs one tenth of one percent (.1%) of a program's budget per year, with a maximum cost is \$1000 per program and a minimum of \$250. The yearly fee gets programs support and all changes and updates. And because WNYLC is a non-profit legal services office, all of the revenue generated by the system goes in to further development of the system or in to helping clients.

Pika (<http://pikasoftware.net>)

Pika CMS is probably the newest addition to the market and provides all of the same common features as the other major systems. It is a web-based system that is accessed from any internet browser (i.e. Internet Explorer or Netscape) and powered by open source software. The main advantages of this system are its straightforwardness and its affordability. Because it is browser-based, it is very accessible to those who might be intimidated by a more complicated program; however, it can be easily customized to fit an organization's needs.

Because this is still a new program, the library of built-in reports is somewhat limited but growing, and as time goes on this should become less of a problem.

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Pika is purchased through an annual subscription: for the first year, the cost is \$2000 plus \$60 per user, with that rate cut in half for each subsequent year. For example, a program with 100 users would pay \$8000 for the first year, \$4000 for the second year and again each subsequent year. No other software needs to be purchased; Pika is based only on open source software that can be freely downloaded off the Internet

VirtuaLaw (<http://www.blueprophecy.com/bryan/>)

A brief mention should be made of VirtuaLaw, a free open source case management system. The source code to VirtuaLaw is freely available, however, users are encouraged to improve the system and then contribute those improvements and extensions back to the community. VirtuaLaw provides information tracking, schedule and deadline management, messaging and task management, document scanning and storage, document creation, contact/player management, phone call logging, and case accounting/billing.

VirtuaLaw is not perfect, however. Bugs exist in the current version of the system, and the program doesn't offer all of the features the other programs do. It also does not have prepared reports, and does not necessarily provide compatibility with most recent LSC requirements.

Considerations for Case Management Systems

So how do you decide among the various programs? The obvious advice is to try them out, play around with the demos, and ask other organizations what they're happy with. There's a wide variety of programs out there; shop around and figure out what's a good fit for your office. In conclusion, here is a list of questions you may want to consider:

1. Are there any unusual tasks that you might want your CMS to accomplish?
2. How user-friendly do you need your CMS to be?
 - a. Will you have volunteers that need to be trained to use your CMS?
 - b. Is your staff comfortable with increasing the technology in your office?
 - c. Will you have untrained non-legal employ-

ees using your CMS for intake? .

3. Is your organization technologically savvy enough to customize your CMS as needed?
4. Do you want to devote future staff time to maintaining your CMS?
5. How much money are you willing/able to invest in a CMS?
6. Does anyone in your office work from a remote location? Do you want these employees, volunteers, and/or pro bono attorneys to access your CMS remotely?
7. Do you want your CMS to be integrated with other technology, such as telephone technology, in your organization?
8. Do you just want your CMS to be a database of cases and clients, or do you want it to address the business and accounting needs of your organization?
9. Do you want to have the server for your CMS on site?
10. How much ongoing customer support will you need from the vendor?

**Equal Justice Conference
2003**

The Power of Partnerships

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April 10-12**

Hilton Portland

www.equaljusticeconference.org

***Hotline-related workshops
and affinity group meeting***



From the Frontline

*By Carol Matthews**

FOCUS ON THE HOTLINE

In an effort to provide the most service to the most people at the lowest possible cost Legal Counsel for the Elderly has been experimenting with additional programs designed to provide specific services. Now, in addition to the quaintly old fashioned practice of scheduling clients to see lawyers in their offices, we have a Brief Services Unit that essentially handles the simpler cases and prepares complex cases for full service representation. Then there are the Self Help Offices scattered about town to help clients help themselves with the aid of paralegals and the internet. As always, the Volunteer Lawyers Project provides additional free services, some private attorneys help with reduced fees, the Legal Service Network helps AARP members with discounts. The Bar provides assorted clinics and the rest of the pro bono community fills many other niches.

What is left for the hotline to do? The above list of services suggests that one task for the hotline is often just to match a needy client with the appropriate provider. But the hotline does much more than that. Even with expanded resources the majority of calls to LCE are resolved by the hotline. Frequently, the hotline attorney can answer a question so easily that a trip downtown is unwarranted. Perhaps all the client needs is the answer to a quick question: *Who has to file a tax return? How many witnesses to a will? Perhaps it is the answer that is short. No, the sweepstakes letter doesn't mean you have already won \$10,000,000.*

Clients may call because they do not know whether they have a legal problem or not. *Is probate necessary if all assets are jointly owned? Sometimes there is a real legal problem but the client doesn't know how or where to begin to solve it. Her husband is going into a nursing home and how will she manage alone?*

Many cases involve reading a letter or document. A letter or short document sometimes can be read to the hotline attorney over the phone. The important point here is that the client is at *home* and not in the lawyer's office. The hotline can say 'no that is not the important document, can you find one that says such and such' and thus set the client looking for the right pieces of paper. Very little time has been wasted.

Other matters are going to involve many documents and the client is going to have to find them before much help can be given. I have had clients who think I can stop a foreclosure with a quick call to the lender whose name they can't remember. While I can't do that, what I can do is start them looking for the necessary papers.

With the advent of the Brief Services Unit, the hotline no longer has to worry about who is going to review the shopping bag full of papers. These are now dealt with by the BSU, after the client has been counseled by the hotline but before the client meets with a foreclosure attorney. (Incidentally, the term Brief Services Unit is never used with the client, who naturally is looking for complete service. Furthermore, there is nothing *brief* about going through that shopping bag of old receipts and papers.) Without the hotline and the BSU the client would likely arrive at the lawyer's office without many relevant documents.

The hotline benefits clients who have problems that can be resolved by telephone and it also benefits those clients who will need further representation by preparing them for the next step. It also helps those clients who will need to be referred elsewhere by not wasting their time with an unnecessary trip to our office. The additional services now available to clients allow the hotline to concentrate on its core business: providing legal counsel and advice on the telephone.



**Carol Matthews is a hotline attorney at AARP Legal Counsel for the Elderly in Washington D.C.*

Contact her with comments and ideas for columns at cmatthews@aarp.org