The Maryland Access to Justice Commission exists to support universal access to civil justice in Maryland. The Commission supports efforts to ensure that all Marylanders who encounter a civil legal problem have the information, tools and resources necessary to experience a just result.

A2JC’s Focus: The Civil Justice System

- housing
- employment
- natural disasters
- immigration
- public benefits
- domestic violence
- family law
- veteran’s issues

Universal Access to Civil Justice Exists When

1. People who face a civil legal issue
   - Know that they have a legal issue;
   - Have the resources or supports to have their view fairly and effectively presented, or the issue addressed; and
   - Have the knowledge necessary to take advantage of that opportunity.

2. The civil justice system
   - Is accessible in all ways, including language and disability,
   - Is credible and trustworthy, and not overly intimidating, and
   - Makes decisions based on the appropriate facts and laws, without bias of any kind.

Civil cases make up 85% of court filings in Maryland in a given year *

National and Maryland data both show that the goal of universal access to civil justice is not being met. Nationally, almost one million low-income people each year seek legal help and do not get the help they need. And 80% of Marylanders who need help with a civil legal problem do not get the help they need.

Justice for all, not the few who can afford it.

In 2018, there were

192,963 filings in the criminal justice system

1,114,755 filings in the civil justice system

Yet defendants in civil legal cases have NO LEGAL RIGHT to an appointed attorney if they cannot afford one.

* excluding Motor Vehicle cases

40 attorneys per 10,000 persons of Maryland’s general population

1.49 attorneys per 10,000 low-income persons in Maryland
A2JC: Who We Are
The Maryland Access to Justice Commission (A2JC) is an independent entity that is a proud partner of the Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA). We unite leaders to drive reforms and innovations to make the civil justice system accessible, user-friendly and fair for all Marylanders. A2JC was established in 2015 as a successor to Maryland’s original court-ordered Commission, which was created by the Maryland Judiciary in 2008 and sunset in 2014, when the Judiciary established an internal Access to Justice Department. A2JC is comprised of high-level leaders from a broad cross-section of the legal profession.

A2JC: What We Do
- **We Serve as an Umbrella** that brings together all civil justice partners to maximize collective impact.
- **We Change “the System”** by improving institutions and laws that protect all Marylanders.
- **We Educate the Public & Decision Makers** about the importance of civil legal aid through our thought leadership, communications, and advocacy.
- **We Develop Programs & Implement Innovations** to help Marylanders navigate the civil justice system.

A2JC Victories
- **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS:** established partnership with the Maryland State Bar Association.
- **CIVIL LEGAL AID FUNDING:** advocated for $6M in increased funding for civil legal aid before the Maryland General Assembly, $12M in increased funding from federal VOCA funding and the creation immigration legal defense funds in 3 Maryland jurisdictions.
- **LEGAL INFORMATION:** increased access to quality legal information to Marylanders by training 425+ public librarians in legal reference and creating an Immigration Legal Information Hub.
- **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:** increased law student engagement in access to justice by forming a Student Engagement Committee at UB Law and enhanced pro-bono engagement by law students through Alternative Spring Break.

Lack of access to justice has broad impact on
- **INDIVIDUALS**
- **FAMILIES**
- **COMMUNITIES**
- **BUSINESSES**
- **STATE RESOURCES**
- **COURTS**

- **7/10** low-income Americans with recent personal experience with a civil legal problem say the problem “significantly affected their lives.”
- **71%** of low-income households have experienced a civil legal problem in the past year
  - But rates are even higher for low-income households with:
    - **97%** Survivors of domestic violence
    - **80%** Persons with disabilities

Measures of Success Over the Next Three Years:
- **Access to justice will be an important and visible issue in Maryland.**
- **Decision-makers in Maryland will have better information about access to justice challenges and opportunities.**
- **People with legal needs will have increased understanding about the importance of legal help to address vital issues; and improved access to legal resources.**
- **Key stakeholders will embrace innovative approaches to expand access to justice.**
- **Leadership for access to justice will be broader and more influential.**
- **The Access to Justice Commission will continue to build its capacity to achieve results.**
A2JC's three-year strategic vision to advance access to justice in Maryland:

**Communications**

Raise awareness about the civil justice system, elevate understanding of the barriers within the system and promote solutions to make the system accessible, user-friendly and fair for all Marylanders.

**GOALS**

1. Drive projects, research, publications, reports, campaigns, and convenings that provide information, context and analysis on A2J issues.
2. Promote and advocate on core A2J issues, including civil legal aid funding and targeted civil right to counsel in basic human needs cases.
3. Create a statewide infrastructure for coordinated communications and a visible media presence (like that of Voices for Civil Justice nationally) to spotlight the critical role of the Access to Justice Commission, civil legal aid and pro bono organizations in ensuring fairness for all in the civil justice system.

**Relationships**

Build strategic partnerships with individuals and organizations to elevate Access to Justice.

**GOALS**

1. Expand high-level, multi-sector and visible leadership within and outside of Commission.
2. Deepen engagement and collaboration with existing partners.
3. Seek out and solidify additional broad-based strategic alliances and partnerships.

**Organization Building**

Strengthen the capacity of the Access to Justice Commission to effectively execute its Strategic Vision.

**GOALS**

1. Expand engagement in Commission by experts and influencers.
2. Bring Commission Executive Director to full-time and add additional capacity.

To learn more and find citations, visit [www.mdaccesstojustice.org](http://www.mdaccesstojustice.org)
I. Process for development of this Plan

The Commission established its Strategic Planning Committee in December, 2018. The Committee was charged with engaging a consultant, and working with that consultant to lead the Commission through development of a Strategic Plan.

The Committee engaged a consultant in February 2019, and in March held its launch meeting to establish the planning process. The consultant, with the support of the Committee and the Executive Director, gathered information to guide the Commission’s strategic discussions, including

• Interviews with all of the current Commissioners;
• Interviews with external stakeholders;
• Review of data relating to access to justice; and
• Review of access to justice commission plans and initiatives from other states.

The full commission convened in a five-hour strategic planning session, facilitated by the consultant, on April 30, 2019. Over the following months, the Committee met regularly to review drafts of the priorities, goals, and implementation steps; and then to review the full report, with the periodic feedback of other Commissioners.

The Commission met on September 17, 2019 and reviewed and approved this final report and Three-Year Strategic Plan.

II. History of the Access to Justice Commission(s) in Maryland

Access to Justice Commissions have been established in virtually every state in the country to bring together justice-focused stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate efforts to reduce barriers to civil justice in their jurisdiction, especially those faced by low-income and other disadvantaged residents. The first Access to Justice Commission was established in 1994 in Washington State, and over the past two decades the American Bar Association’s Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants has supported the establishment and operation of Commissions across the country. These efforts have been supported by the ABA’s House of Delegates, the Conference of Chief Court Administrators, and the Conference of Chief Justices. The ABA has documented the accomplishments of state Commissions; the most recent ABA reports were issued in 2018.

The Maryland Access to Justice Commission was initially established by order of the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals of Maryland in 2008. Over the course of more than six years, the Commission conducted listening sessions and public forums, supported research and legislative proposals relating to right to counsel, published a report on the economic impact of civil legal services in Maryland, presented awards to recognize key contributors to access to justice, and supported the establishment of a range of supports and publications for pro se litigants. The Commission published annual reports from 2009 – 2013. The Commission structure supported by the Maryland Courts was sunset at the end of 2014, when the Courts established their Access to Justice Department.

The current Commission was established in 2015 to continue the work of the original Commission. It hired Reena Shah to be its new Executive Director. In 2018, the Commission became affiliated with the Maryland State Bar Association ("MSBA"). The MSBA provides key financial and institutional support to the Commission, and the Commission retains its mission and independence.
III. Accomplishments of the current Commission

This plan grows out of the accomplishments of the Access to Justice Commission over the past three years. Key elements of this success include:

INCREASING FUNDING FOR CIVIL LEGAL AID:

- 2017 and 2018: Supported the efforts of the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, the state's IOLTA funder, to stabilize revenue from filing fee funds in the amount of $6M and increase funding from Maryland's Abandoned Property Fund by $500K. The Commission added value to the effort by spearheading letters from corporate counsel, law firm partners and the Office of the Attorney General that described the value of civil legal aid to each of their communities.

- 2017: Worked to successfully advocate with the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention for a five-fold increase in Victims of Crime Act funding to civil legal aid organizations from $2 million to almost $12 million.

ADVOCATING TO ACHIEVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE POLICY GOALS:

- 2018 - present: Identified, convened, gathered data, conducted research to take action on the issue of ICE Arrests in State Courts
- 2017 – present: Advocated on 20+ bills relating to access to justice in Maryland to support the following:
  - Increased access to legal representation for Maryland Constitutional claims, during landlord tenant, domestic violence and body attachment proceedings.
  - Increased due process protections and simplicity of court processes to reduce evictions and the demand for legal representation in landlord – tenant matters.
  - Increased civil legal aid funding for 40+ civil legal aid organizations that provide free or low-cost direct or pro bono services to Marylanders.

CONVENING CIVIL LEGAL AID PROVIDERS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT:

- 2017 – present: Immigration Legal Services:
  - Convened all immigration legal services providers in Maryland to create a statewide strategy to meet the growing need for immigration legal services.
  - Coordinated immigration legal services stakeholders to create Immigration Information Hub for Marylanders on Maryland People's Law Library.
  - Identified, convened, gathered data, conducted research to take action on the issue of ICE Arrests in State Courts
  - Supported efforts to create legal defense funds for immigrants in Baltimore City, Prince George's County, Montgomery County and Anne Arundel County.

- 2017 – 2018: Convened Rent Court Summits to explore ways to improve coordination, triage, referrals, institute uniform outcome measures and conduct research to evaluate effectiveness of services offered to consumers in “Rent Court.”

- 2017: Convened a consortium of legal service providers to develop and implement a statewide communications strategy to raise awareness about the value of civil legal aid and increase funding for civil legal aid.

- 2016: Hosted a statewide conference to foster the use of limited scope representation.

INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY, LEGAL INFORMATION:

- In partnership with Maryland State Law Library, developed uniform curriculum for state-wide legal reference trainings for public librarians; conducted 22 trainings in every region of Maryland; trained 425+ public librarians in legal reference; launched a consumer-facing public awareness campaign about accessing quality legal information through public libraries; created video demonstrating benefit of training to public librarians; developed resource lists for public library websites; in process of developing advanced, issue-specific trainings for public librarians.

- In partnership with the Maryland People’s Law Library and 25+ immigration legal service providers in Maryland, spearheaded and created an Immigration Information Hub on the Maryland People’s Law Library, which includes 12 new and/or updated plain-language, Maryland-specific articles on a range of immigration topics, translated into Spanish, French, Korean and Chinese; as well as a collection of helpful videos and Know Your Rights resources.

ENGAGING LAW STUDENTS IN THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE MOVEMENT:

- 2018: Partnered with the University of Baltimore School of Law to devise an Alternative Spring Break that offered law students volunteer opportunities to represent clients and assist with case work in civil legal aid organizations, legal clinics and day of court programs in court.

FORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:

- 2018: Entered into institutional partnership with the Maryland State Bar Association to advance access to justice in Maryland.

- 2017: Entered into long-term partnership with State Public Library System to expand access to quality legal information in every community in Maryland.
IV. Three year Strategic Plan

PURSUING CIVIL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Maryland Access to Justice Commission exists to improve and increase access to justice in the civil legal system in Maryland. Its ultimate goal is universal access to justice.

The Commission recognizes that people living in Maryland benefit from many important resources to support Access to Justice, including over thirty non-profit providers dedicated to various aspects of civil legal need; a large number of practicing attorneys who work on a pro bono basis with providers to expand the number of people who can be assisted; financial supports from a wide range of sources, including contributions, philanthropic grants, state and federal grants and contracts, and the Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts program; and the work of law school clinics, the Judiciary and other government agencies to support access to justice.

Despite these resources, the Commission continues to see enormous barriers to Civil Access to Justice. Key reasons that these barriers exist include:

- There are far too few affordable lawyers to assist all the people who need the advice and support of a lawyer – largely because there is far too little money in the system for legal services and pro bono programs;
- Even when low-income people can get the assistance of a free lawyer, the level of assistance available often falls short of the extended services (including full representation) that would best support the individual;
- An enormous number of people facing important problems do not realize that these problems are not just “life problems” but also “legal problems” – in other words, that there are legal interventions available that might help address the problem;
- There are some groups of litigants and some portions of the legal system in which the lack of access to resources is particularly severe, including prisoners, debtors, pro se family litigants, immigrants, and pro se rent court litigants;
- Relatively few Maryland decision-makers and relatively few members of the general public understand the situation, or the harm caused to Maryland residents, businesses and the state budget as a result.

PRIORITIES 2019–2021

What success will look like over the next three years:

- Access to justice will be an important and visible issue in Maryland.
- Leadership for access to justice will be broader and more influential.
- Decision-makers in Maryland will have better information about access to justice challenges and opportunities.
- People with legal needs will have improved access to legal resources.
- The Access to Justice Commission will continue to build its capacity to achieve results.

Strategic Plan: The Commission’s three priorities, goals and objectives

PRIORITY:
Improving Access to Justice through COMMUNICATIONS:
Raise awareness about the civil justice system, elevate understanding of the barriers within the system and promote solutions to make the system accessible, user-friendly and fair for all Marylanders.

GOALS (AND OBJECTIVES):

1. Drive projects, research, publications, reports, campaigns, and convenings that provide information and analysis on A2J issues.
   - Recreate the Access to Justice Commission’s website to serve as a tool to increase Marylanders’ access to quality legal information; demystify civil justice and civil legal aid systems; and serve as a hub for A2J and civil legal aid communications.
   - Publish timely A2J-related reports and host high-level convenings to increase awareness, dialogue and coordinated action on A2J issues.
   - Deploy marketing and communications plans to publicize reports and convenings for maximum impact.

2. Promote and advocate on core A2J issues, including civil legal aid funding and targeted civil right to counsel in basic human needs cases.
   - Research, plan and advocate for viable sources of additional funding to increase litigants’ access to full legal representation.
   - Educate and advocate for targeted civil right to counsel in basic human needs cases.
   - Provide general support to advocacy efforts of allied organizations to increase access to justice.

3. Create a statewide infrastructure for coordinated communications and a visible media presence (like that of Voices for Civil Justice nationally) to spotlight the critical role of the Access to Justice Commission, civil legal aid and pro bono organizations in ensuring fairness for all in the civil justice system.
   - Communicate, plan and coordinate with Voices for Civil Justice, the Maryland State Bar Association, legal services and pro bono providers, and other key stakeholders to coordinate and expand communications, and lay the groundwork for Maryland Voices for Civil Justice.
**APPENDIX A**

**MEMBERS OF THE MARYLAND ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION (as of September 17, 2019)**

**OFFICERS:**
- **Ward B. Coe, III**
  - Commission Chair
  - Partner, Gallagher, Evelius & Jones, LLP
- **David Eppler**
  - Commission Vice Chair
  - Designee for Hon. Brian Frosh, Office of Attorney General
- **Victoria Schultz**
  - Commission Treasurer
  - Associate Dean of Administration, University of Baltimore Law School
- **Reena K. Shah**
  - Commission Secretary
  - Executive Director, Maryland Access to Justice Commission

**MEMBERS:**
- **Meryl Burgin**
  - General Counsel, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield
- **Hon. Kathleen Dumais**
  - Maryland State House of Delegates
  - Executive Director, Maryland Legal Services Corporation
- **Antonia Fasanelli**
  - Executive Director, Homeless Persons Representation Project
- **Hon. Brian G. Frosh**
  - Attorney General of Maryland
- **Herb S. Garten**
  - Partner, Fedder & Garten, P.A.
  - Executive Director, Pro-Bono Resource Center of Maryland
- **Kelly Iverson**
  - Board of Governors, MSBA
- **Wilhelm Joseph**
  - Executive Director, Maryland Legal Aid
- **Michael Millemann**
  - Professor of Law, University of Maryland Francis King Carey Law School
- **John Nethercut**
  - Executive Director, Public Justice Center
- **Pamela Ortiz**
  - Executive Director, Access to Justice Department, MD Judiciary
- **Nathaniel Risch**
  - Chair, Young Lawyers Section, MSBA
- **Bonnie Sullivan**
  - Executive Director, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service
- **Ronald Weich**
  - Dean and Professor of Law, University of Maryland Francis King Carey Law School
- **Donald B. Tobin**
  - Judge, Circuit Court Prince George’s County
- **Hon. Cathy Serrette**
  - Judge, Circuit Court Prince George’s County
- **Hon. Christopher West**
  - Maryland State Senate

**GOALS (AND OBJECTIVES):**

1. **Expand engagement in Commission by experts and influencers.**
   - Create and execute Commission Recruitment Plan that raises the profile and impact of Commission.
   - Establish a high-profile, bi-partisan, non-governing advisory body to raise profile of access to justice issues
   - Establish a broad-based Emerging Leaders Council for access to justice.

2. **Bring Executive Director to full-time and add additional capacity.**
   - Create and implement a Commission funding/ fund-raising plan to effectuate this Strategic Plan.
   - Develop and deploy opportunities for no-cost support for Commission, initially focusing on student projects.

3. **Review and enhance Commission governance, infrastructure and processes.**
   - Review progress against Strategic Plan quarterly, and review/renew Strategic Plan annually.
   - Review and revise Committee structure and devise Committee Charters.
   - Strengthen Commissioner engagement and articulate Commissioner expectations.
   - Strengthen Commission on-boarding / exiting process.
   - Review and enhance Commission meetings and operations.
   - Review and amend Commission bylaws, as necessary.