

**COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force  
Civil Legal Aid Funding Committee  
Minutes from Open Meeting  
July 29, 2020  
Via Google Meets**

Co-Chairs Catherine Bledsoe and Susan Erlichman called the third full committee meeting of the Civil Legal Aid Funding Committee to order at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 29, 2020.

Those in attendance included Co-Chairs Catherine Bledsoe and Susan Erlichman, Tricia Russell from Senator Van Hollen's office, Senator Guy Guzzone, Delegate Sandy Rosenberg, David Eppler, Deb Seltzer, Jake Whitaker, Bod Embry, Karen Lash, Matt Hill, Pam Ortiz, Reena Shah, Wilhelm Joseph, Teresa Carnell, Rylie Shewbridge from Bellamy Genn Group, Lorenzo Bellamy from Bellamy Genn Group, and Cizhu Feng.

**Minutes of July 15 Meeting**

- The Committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting of July 15, 2020, and approved them unanimously.

**Letter to County Leaders**

- Co-Chair Bledsoe discussed the revised letter to the county leaders. She explained the decision from the Policy and Race Equity Committee regarding the issues of letterhead. Because of the political sensitivity, the Policy and Race Equity Committee decided that the letter should be presented in the form of a memorandum by the Civil Legal Aid Funding Committee Co-Chairs to the Attorney General and sent to county leaders with a cover letter from with the Attorney General. The Committee tailored the memorandum for each individual county.

**Update of the Counties' Responses**

- Co-Chair Bledsoe reported that, as a result of the letter sent to county leaders, she received a call from Sameer Sidh, the Chief of Staff to Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. Mr. Sidh reported that the State allocated \$58 million from its CARES Act funding to Howard County, half of which was distributed to the Howard County Health Department and half of which was given to the Howard County Government. The Howard County Government is in the early stages of determining how to distribute its CARES Act funds and is open to allocating a portion to civil legal aid. At Mr. Sidh's request, Co-Chair Bledsoe provided a list of civil legal aid service providers active in Howard County to Mr. Sidh and will follow up with him next week.

- Co-Chair Erlichman reported that she has a meeting schedule for next week with representatives from the Anne Arundel County Executive's office to discuss the allocation of that county's CARES Act funding.

### **Status of the Civil Legal Aid Funding Proposal**

- Co-Chair Erlichman gave an update on MLSC's proposal for CARES Act funding from the State. Based on feedback from the Committee, MLSC increased the request in its proposal from \$3 million to \$5 million. Co-Chair Erlichman explained that, at the last Policy and Race Equity Committee meeting, there were three options discussed as to how the proposal would be submitted: (1) Attorney General Frosh could present the proposal to DBM Secretary David Brinkley; (2) the proposal could be submitted to DBM Deputy Secretary Marc Nicole on behalf of the Civil Legal Aid Funding Committee; or (3) Senator Guy Guzzone could submit the proposal on behalf of MLSC.
- Reena Shah explained that there were concerns about the Task Force issuing multiple "asks" or proposals to the Governor's office for CARES Act funding. There were also concerns about having the first request from the Task Force be for only \$5 million. The other Task Force Committees need additional time to prepare their proposals for CARES Act funding. Therefore, the decision was made to have MLSC submit its request for civil legal aid funding now, through Senator Guzzone and the other state legislators on the Committee, and the other Task Force Committees will prepare a broader, more comprehensive and larger request that the Task Force will review and hopefully submit to the Governor's office by mid-August.
- Senator Guzzone reported that he, Delegate Rosenberg, Delegate Clippinger, and Senator Smith had transmitted MLSC's proposal for civil legal aid funding to DBM Secretary Brinkley and Deputy Secretary Marc Nicole earlier in the afternoon.

### **Philanthropic and Other Initiatives**

- Co-Chair Erlichman shared a news report that the Federal Reserve, which had previously indicated that the present low interest rates would continue through 2021, is now projecting that the rates will remain near zero until at least 2024. As a consequence, the Committee should consider the long-term goal of finding sustainable funding sources to replace MLSC's loss in revenue from interest on IOLTA accounts.
- The Committee members agreed that the Committee should send a letter to the philanthropic community and various private foundations to advocate for civil legal aid funding. MLSC staff members will prepare a draft letter with a list of organizations that the Committee should contact. The Committee members should think about the appropriate person or persons to send the letter.
- In terms of other funding sources, Senator Guzzone noted that state legislators are exploring how monies from the Abandoned Property Fund and the General Fund might be used to support civil legal aid. Those issues will be explored in the upcoming legislative session.

## **Tasks and Strategy**

- Reena Shah suggested that it would be helpful to provide talking points on civil legal aid funding to the rest of the Task Force members. She suggested that the Committee prepare a template of talking point for use in reaching out to decision-makers in various counties, similar to what Tom Lynch has done in Frederick County.
- There was also a discussion about preparing an op-ed piece on the need to fund civil legal aid services in light of the pandemic. Delegate Rosenberg noted the audience was the Governor, and the Committee should consider who should author the op-ed piece so as to maximize its impact on the Governor.
- Wilhelm Joseph echoed the point that the Committee should consider what political leverage could be utilized to influence the Governor. He stated that he would explore potential contacts and sources who might have an “in” with the Governor.
- Jake Whitaker offered to raise the issue of civil legal aid funding with the Governor’s General Counsel.
- Rylie Shewbridge also indicated that the Bellamy Genn Group could provide support to contact decision-makers.
- Senator Guzzone offered to follow up with Sameer Sidh about Howard County’s planned use of CARES Act funding.

## **Future plan**

- At the next meeting, Co-Chairs Bledsoe and Erlichman will report on the upcoming meeting with Anne Arundel County officials and any further discussions with the Howard County officials.
- MLSC staff will draft talking points and a letter to the philanthropic foundations for the Committee’s consideration.
- The Co-Chairs will draft an op-ed piece on the urgency of funding civil legal aid for consideration by the Committee and the Policy and Race Equity Committee.

## **Timeline and Future Meetings.**

- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 12, 2020, at 3:00 p.m.
- The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.