



MID-SHORE REGIONAL PRO BONO COMMITTEE 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

Eastern Shore Civil Legal Needs — Findings & Opportunities for Action

May 6, 2026
Hynson Lounge, Washington College
5:30-7:30 pm

1 Legal Needs of Eastern Shore Communities

Participants identified significant unmet civil legal needs across the Eastern Shore, particularly in the areas of immigration, housing, family law, protective orders, debt collection, employment, veterans' issues, and estate probate matters. Family law emerged as a recurring concern, with many individuals facing multiple, interconnected legal issues at the same time.

Barriers to Access

Several barriers prevent residents from effectively accessing legal help:

- **Insufficient attorney capacity**, even when clients can pay for services.
- Limited access to **same-day legal assistance** and counsel located where people already receive services.
- **Transportation challenges** that make it difficult to attend court or meet with attorneys.
- The high cost of court-related expenses such as transcripts and exceptions.
- A lack of understanding about legal processes, including how to interpret court documents, request postponements, and understand available options.
- Challenges related to **trust and community engagement**, with many residents relying on word-of-mouth referrals and information from trusted community members before seeking legal assistance.

"Having access to counsel in places where people are."

Participants also noted that people on the Eastern Shore often value their independence and want sufficient information to make informed decisions themselves. Remote court appearances and other technology-enabled solutions were identified as potential ways to reduce access barriers.

2 Opportunities for Action

The group identified several strategies to expand access to legal services and strengthen the legal support network on the Eastern Shore. Overall, the discussion emphasized the need for stronger partnerships, expanded legal capacity, and trusted community-based approaches to connecting residents with legal help.

- Create more **opportunities for people to talk with an attorney in places where they are**. This could be achieved by having attorneys available at courthouses, libraries, community centers, and places where people are already doing other things.
- Strengthening **community-based networks** by integrating legal services providers and establishing stronger connections between community resource organizations and legal assistance providers. Engage with community organizations that have mapped local resources (e.g., Mid-Shore Behavioral

Health’s Sequential Intercept Mapping Model, which maps how people with mental and substance use challenges come into contact with the criminal justice system).

- Explore how **peer models** could be developed to serve more people and build trust. Peer models integrate individuals who have successfully navigated hardship to assist others.
- Implement **community justice workers** who are of and from the communities they serve to provide legal services.
- **Engage youth** in learning about legal careers.
- **Make practicing on the Eastern Shore attractive** for attorneys. Increase attorney engagement by making pro bono work more attractive and accessible — for example, developing mentoring and peer-support models to help attorneys participate effectively.
- **Create more diverse volunteer opportunities**, including non-litigation roles.

Proposed Virtual Meeting Schedule

Date	Time	Location / Notes
August 20, 2026	12–1 p.m.	Virtual
November 19, 2026	12–1 p.m.	Virtual
February 18, 2027	12–1 p.m.	Virtual
Early May 2027	5:30–7:30 p.m.	IN-PERSON, Hosted by Judge Cronan, Talbot Co.

Participants

Hon. Harris Murphy, Administrative Judge, Circuit Court of Kent County (Meeting Host); *Special Guest Presenter: Hon. Gregory Wells*, Chief Judge, Maryland Court of Appeals; **Hon. Stephen Kehoe**, Maryland Court of Appeals; **Hon. Lynn Knight**, Administrative Judge, Circuit Court of Queen Anne’s County; **Hon. Melvin Jews**, Administrative Judge, District Court of Dorchester County; **Hon. George Ames**, Orphan’s Court Judge, Dorchester County; **Hon. Karen Jensen**, Retired Circuit Court Judge, Caroline County; Jessica Cooke, Esq., Clerk, Judge Jews; Katherine Gillespie, Esq., Maryland Legal Aid; Rachel Wolpert Bitter, Esq., Maryland Legal Aid; Faith Gentile, Esq., Community Mediation Upper Shore; Becky Burner, Shore Legal Access Board of Directors; Tom Deliberto, Esq., Shore Legal Access Board of Directors; Kaya Abukassis, Esq., Stevens Palmer; Tamara Stofa, Esq., Office of Public Defender; Holland Brownley, Esq., Office of Public Defender, Shore Legal Access Board of Directors; Chelsea Nabozny, Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence; Tony Rodriguez, Esq., Shore Legal Access Board of Directors; Justin Acome, Mid-Shore Community Mediation; John Hardt, Esq., Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service; Michael Donahue, Esq., Caroline County State’s Attorney; Matt Crouch, Esq., Law Office of Dan Rosendale; Mandy Caulk, Shore Legal Access; Geoffrey Cooke, Esq., Shore Legal Access; A. Rand, Esq., Shore Legal Access; Meredith Girard, Esq., Shore Legal Access.

Special thanks to special guest, Hon. Gregory Wells, to Tim Abeska, Esq. for sponsoring the event, and to Hon. Harris Murphy and Lindsay Blume for hosting.