



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

House Bill 498
Real Property - Access to Counsel in Evictions Program - Mandated Reports
House Judiciary Committee
Hearing Date: February 14, 2024
Position: Informational Testimony

Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) provides the following informational testimony regarding House Bill 498, enactment of which would codify reporting requirements related to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program administered by MLSC.

MLSC's mission is to ensure low-income Marylanders have access to stable, efficient and effective civil legal assistance through the distribution of funds to nonprofit legal services organizations. It currently funds 46 organizations to work toward that mission across the entire state. The Maryland General Assembly created MLSC in 1982 to administer the state's Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program, and since that time MLSC grantees have assisted approximately 4 million Marylanders with a wide variety of civil legal needs.

During the 2021 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly recognized the importance of civil legal services in landlord-tenant cases by passing the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Program and naming MLSC as the administrator. The General Assembly established a goal of full implementation by October 2025 and extended funding for the ACE Program through FY27¹.

ACE provides legal representation in a variety of eviction cases as well as related tenant outreach and education, ensuring low-income tenants facing loss of housing know their rights and have an advocate to guide and represent them through the court process. Attorneys working within the program have helped clients achieve a range of outcomes in their cases, including avoiding eviction, delaying eviction so the tenant has additional time to move, avoiding a loss of a housing subsidy, enforcing a tenant's rights under a lease and more. In many jurisdictions, services are now available both through pre-trial intake with individual providers and through day-of-court intake.

MLSC reports on ACE outcomes, including all the data requested in HB 498, via multiple formats. Each quarter MLSC provides a report to the Joint Chairmen of the House Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, pursuant to requirements set forth in the State Operating Budget. *See Attachment A*. Additionally, MLSC reports to the Governor on an annual basis case statistics and outcomes, the number of people directly affected, and a summary of outreach and education efforts provided by ACE grantees. *See Attachment B*. Finally, the legislatively created Access to Counsel in Evictions Taskforce is responsible for studying potential funding sources for ACE, making recommendations to improve the implementation of the access to counsel program, including necessary policy and statutory changes, and evaluating the provision of services provided as a result of the program. The Taskforce, consisting of 15 members appointed by the Office of the Attorney General, including representatives from both landlord and tenant associations, also releases a comprehensive annual report. The [January 2024 Report](#)² includes substantive data and outcomes as well as evaluations of the policies and procedures related to the administration of ACE.

¹ See Senate Bill 756 (2023)/Chapter 641, Access to Counsel in Evictions – Funding

² Report of the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force, January 2024,

https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/A2C_Docs/2024_ACE_TF_Report.pdf

MLSC is extremely proud of the work of the ACE Program and the impact the grantees have made on so many Marylanders' lives. The data accumulated by the ACE Program serves a valuable purpose of informing future policies decisions related to access to counsel.

As the information sought in HB498 is already being provided through various avenues, MLSC takes no position on the proposed legislation and provides this testimony for informational purposes. It is understood that a sponsor-amendment will be introduced to limit the reporting requirement to match the sunset of funding. MLSC would support such an amendment. If we can provide any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Michelle Siri, Executive Director, at 410-576-9494 x1009, or msiri@mlsc.org.