Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service

PRESENTATION BY JENNIFER HABER

MVLS

MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE

What We Do

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS) removes barriers to justice through free civil legal help, community engagement, and advocacy for equitable laws.

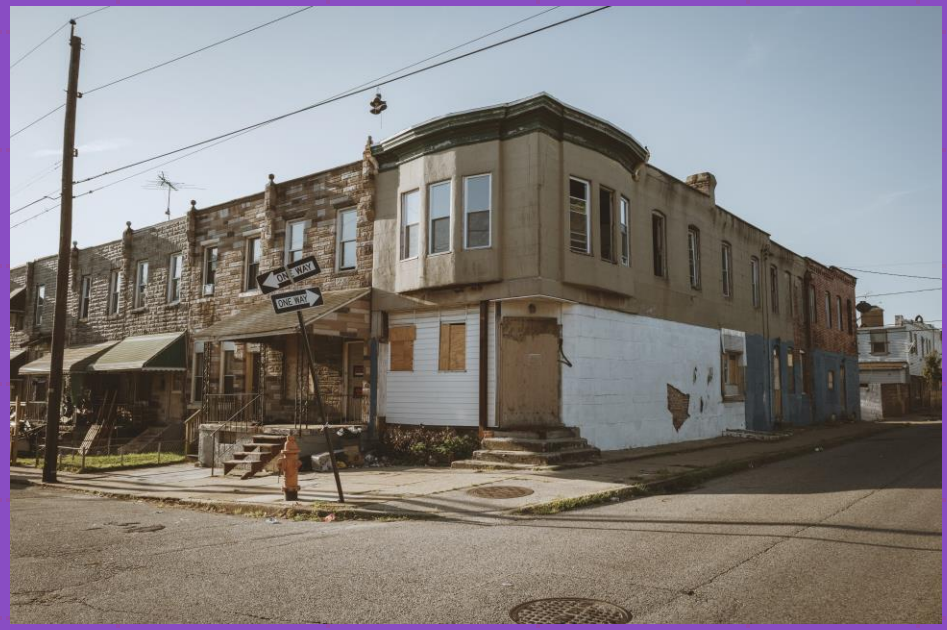
The Justice Gap

- In the United States, our legal aid system currently meets just 20% of the need for civil legal assistance.
- The remaining 80% of people, who can't afford a lawyer, are at a severe disadvantage in court.
- MVLS leverages the power of pro bono to help close the justice gap in Maryland.

- **Our vision** is for a fair legal system that is free of injustice and equitably serves underrepresented Marylanders.

Reducing Barriers Created by Structural Racism

- Many of the barriers MVLS clients face are the result of longstanding systems of structural racism in our community.
- In the family law context, racial disparities persist throughout the family law system with courts making assumptions about people of color's legal knowledge, parenting abilities and commitment to their children. While some judges and members of the court treat Black individuals and other people of color fairly, others in the court system exhibit implicit or explicit bias – making these biases a basis for their decisions.
- Through our work, MVLS strives to create a more equitable justice system.



We Specialize in Civil Cases

Our most common cases include family, housing, consumer finance, and criminal record expungement.

- Family
- Housing
- Consumer Finance
- Tax Controversy
- Estate Planning & Administration
- Criminal Record Relief
- Special Education
- MVLS

We match clients with volunteer lawyers, tax professionals, and staff attorneys who represent clients facing a wide range of consumer finance, family, and housing issues.

The MVLS Judicare Project for Volunteer Family Law attorneys

Please join us!

The Judicare Project

The Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service administers a family law reduced-fee program called the Judicare Project in response to the substantial number of unrepresented low-income litigants in the family courts, especially in highly contested family law disputes.

The Judicare Project is funded through the Maryland Legal Services Corporation who provides grants to nonprofit organizations that provide civil legal services for low-income Marylanders.

Program Benefits

1. Become involved in improving the lives of others through your legal representation.

2. Interact with people from diverse backgrounds which allows one to gain and develop other perspectives.

3. **"If you're in a position to give back within your field, you should take it," Kate, a Judicare Volunteer, said. "These are people's lives—and you really are making a difference in their protection, stability, and overall quality of life."**

4. Use and develop your legal skills to enhance and grow your practice.

5. Engage with and learn from a wonderful community of committed attorneys through an interactive listserv and mentoring activities.

6. Access and participate in family law trainings provided by MVLS.

7. Develop a sense of accomplishment by providing a worthwhile and valuable service to your community and to our clients.

8. Network at two large events every year: A Taste for Pro Bono and Celebrate Pro Bono.

9. An MVLS Volunteer shared the following: "The experience strengthened my commitment to advocating for women and children in crisis. This is a reflection of the empathy and resilience that define the MVLS volunteer community.

10. Opportunity to: be featured widely as Volunteer of the Month, to receive one of our annual awards and/or to be featured on our social media pages.

Types of Family Law cases:

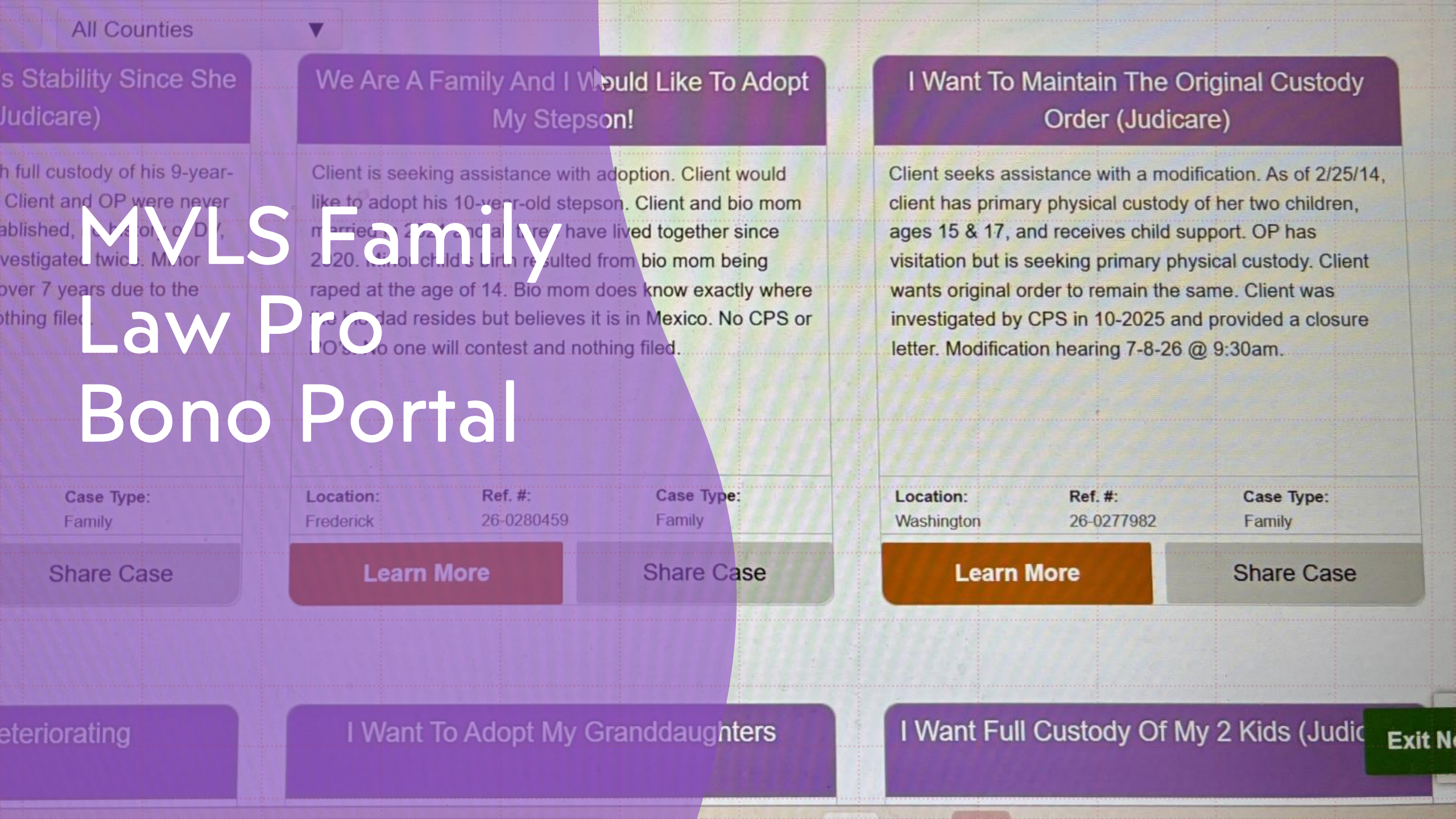
- For family law cases, the following cases are within our **guidelines** to accept (each case is considered individually)
- Custody: initial custody and custody modifications (must have good case for material change in circumstances) and third-party custody/de facto parent (that meet the standards for filing)
- Divorce
- SJIS Special Juvenile Immigrant Status
- Name change and Gender Affirmation
- Birth Certificate (in some instances)
- QDROs (in some instances)
- Uncontested adoptions
- Client **must be** income qualified, there are **no guarantees of representation,** but people are always encouraged to call.
- Some of the cases listed above are eligible for Judicare funding and some are handled on a pro bono basis.

Resources available to MVLS Judicare Panel Attorneys:

- Up to $4200 per case;
- A network of excellent, supportive family law attorneys; including mentorship;
- MVLS family law staff attorney;
- MVLS Judicare Listserv;
- MVLS Family Lawyer Monthly Open Office Hours;
- Malpractice insurance;
- MVLS Volunteer Resources;
- PBRC Litigation Fund;
- Office space available to meet with MVLS clients;
- MVLS Trainings;
- Discounted Westlaw access for your MVLS cases;
- Regular updates on relevant legislation, programs, and news articles affecting your area of law;
- Language Access Services; and more...

The Attorney Applicant…Easy as 1,2,3!

1. Complete brief MVLS application online;
2. Demonstrate that you have at least three years of family law experience or that you have 2 years of family law experience and a family law mentor in your firm; and
3. Complete Judicare contract and related documents.


All Counties
I Want To Maintain The Original Custody Order (Judicare)
Client seeks assistance with a modification. As of 2/25/14, client has primary physical custody of her two children, ages 15 & 17, and receives child support. OP has visitation but is seeking primary physical custody. Client wants original order to remain the same. Client was investigated by CPS in 10-2025 and provided a closure letter. Modification hearing 7-8-26 @ 9:30am.
Location: Washington
Ref. #: 26-0277982
Case Type: Family
Learn More
Share Case
Client is seeking assistance with adoption. Client would like to adopt his 10-year-old stepson. Client and bio mom have lived together since
raped at the age of 14. Bio mom does know exactly where
Location: Frederick
Ref. #: 26-0280459
Case Type: Family
Learn More
Share Case
I Want To Adopt My Granddaughters
I Want Full Custody Of My 2 Kids
Exit
MVLS Family Law Pro Bono Portal

Opportunity for emerging Family Law Attorneys

If you do not have the requisite experience to be part of our Judicare panel, please consider joining our Family Law Cohort.

Benefits include:

- 3 Excellent, comprehensive training sessions and materials;
- Being partnered with an expert family law Mentor;
- Helping a pro bono family law client (learn while doing); and
- Support from MVLS family law attorney.

Please feel free to reach out with questions and/or to join our team!

Jennifer Haber, Esq.
(She/her)

Family Law Staff Attorney,
Judicare Program

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS)

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Thank you!

NOT A VOLUNTEER? SIGN UP TODAY!

https://mvlslaw.org/volunteer/volunteer-sign-up/

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

https://opd.state.md.us/

BECOME A panel attorney

The Office of the Public Defender retains private attorneys to handle cases when a conflict of interest arises. These attorneys are selected by the local District and Division Public Defenders. The Office of the Public Defender utilizes Panel Attorneys who are experienced trial attorneys who can represent persons in cases independently.

When a conflict arises the District Public Defender (DPD) or Division Chief (DC) selects an attorney from the Panel list and refers the case to that attorney. The Panel Attorney may accept or reject the case. Once a Panel Attorney accepts a case, the case file along with the necessary paperwork will be forwarded to the attorney. The client is contacted and a meeting between the Panel Attorney and the client is arranged.

After a matter is concluded ,the DPD or DC verifies the accuracy of the work done on the case and Office of the Public Defender Senior Administration reviews the documents prior to final approval for payment.

An Attorney wishing to serve as an OPD Panel Attorney must fill out an application (below). If accepted to a panel list, the attorney is required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that describes billing requirements and procedures.

OPD currently pays the following rates:

- $60/hour for most cases
- $75/hour for cases in which a life sentence is a possible penalty. This includes appellate and post conviction cases.

APPLICATION to become a Panel Attorney

Completed applications, along with a copy of your resume, should be submitted to OPD.panel@maryland.gov