



**Media Relations**

[publicinfo@lacourt.org](mailto:publicinfo@lacourt.org) - [media@law.stanford.edu](mailto:media@law.stanford.edu)

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## **NATION'S LARGEST TRIAL COURT PARTNERS WITH STANFORD LAW SCHOOL'S DEBORAH L. RHODE CENTER ON THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND LEGAL DESIGN LAB TO IDENTIFY INNOVATIVE WAYS TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

*Stanford Law Researchers to Uncover and Address Barriers to Access and Recommend New People-Centered Policies and Tools to Assist Litigants in Navigating the Judicial System*

The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is launching a groundbreaking new partnership with Stanford Law School's Deborah L. Rhode Center on the Legal Profession and Legal Design Lab to research, design and implement innovative, evidence-based approaches to reduce barriers to participation in the judicial process and to improve access to justice for all court users, Presiding Judge Samantha P. Jessner announced today.

"As the largest trial court in the nation, we recognize that the work our judicial officers and court staff do every day in courtrooms, clerk's offices and self-help centers has broad societal implications that impact every facet of life for residents of Los Angeles County," Presiding Judge Jessner said. "Through this unprecedented partnership, we plan to leverage the talents and expertise of the research team at Stanford Law to uncover barriers that may impede access to justice and implement new data-informed policies and procedures that deepen our commitment to the Court's core mission: providing equal access to justice through the fair, timely and efficient resolution of all cases."

The unique partnership announced today between the Court and Stanford's leading legal scholars will examine and map the barriers to full participation across the judicial system. The primary focus will be on case types with high percentages of self-represented litigants, including unlawful detainer (eviction), child support and debt collection actions. The goal of the partnership is to raise participation rates and empower court users to more easily navigate complex and often life-altering legal proceedings.

"We take our role as the arbiters of justice in Los Angeles County seriously. We recognize we have an obligation to ensure all court users, regardless of socioeconomic status, are empowered with people-centered policies that improve access to our justice system," Executive Officer/Clerk of Court David W. Slayton said. "Through this partnership, we have a unique opportunity to channel the expertise of Stanford Law School's top researchers to pioneer new and innovative approaches that can serve as the benchmark for courts across California and the United States."

“All around the country, courts are recognizing that existing processes prevent litigants – whether represented or not – from accessing the justice system effectively,” Co-Director of Stanford’s Rhode Center/Professor David Freeman Engstrom said. “The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is leading the way by systematically taking the steps necessary to break down those barriers.”

Director of Stanford’s Legal Design Lab Margaret Hagan added, “We’re excited to work with the Superior Court of Los Angeles County and its inspiring leaders to document existing impediments and drive real change, help lawyers be more effective and give litigants of all kinds the tools they need to navigate the system.”

The partnership is launched within the context of a rising tide of high-stakes but small-scale legal cases that have come to dominate court dockets across the country: civil cases such as debt collections and unlawful detainers (evictions), and family law cases including child support actions. Many of these case types see a high number of self-represented litigants, and systemic gaps in access to legal services that limit the ability of self-represented litigants to defend their rights, magnifying disparities based on income, education, race, gender and ethnicity.

Mounting evidence demonstrates that courts themselves can play a key role in addressing disparities in access to justice. Many court systems have been hampered by unnecessary complexity in court forms and the necessity to use multiple, disconnected processes to file court documents. With this collaboration, the Court will gain access to reliable, evidence-based best practices on topics such as effective notice, digital self-help and service options, people-centered customer service and more. Ultimately, the partnership seeks to help modernize the Court by designing, implementing and evaluating new approaches that can expand court access and make the system work better for all Angelenos.

The first phase of the partnership will focus on identifying barriers to court user engagement and fair and accurate adjudication of legal rights using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This phase will involve the Stanford Law research team working collaboratively with court administrators throughout the Court to study existing processes and procedures and identify methods to improve participation, engagement and access for all residents of Los Angeles County.

Once the research phase is complete, the second phase will involve engaging appropriate expertise for the design, piloting and rigorous evaluation of new approaches. By leveraging the latest research on how to combine user-centered design, digital self-help, human assistance and expert court administration, the partnership will empower court users to navigate legal proceedings with greater ease. Data and findings from this collaboration will also be used to develop new forms of digital self-help options to deepen meaningful participation in cases and improve overall administration.

More information on Stanford Law School’s Deborah L. Rhode Center on the Legal Profession and the Stanford Legal Design Lab can be found [here](#) and [here](#). For updates on the partnership and for information on the Court’s current programs and services, follow the Court on X, formerly known as Twitter ([@LASuperiorCourt](#)) and visit the Court’s website, [www.lacourt.org](http://www.lacourt.org).