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STANFORD LAW SCHOOL'S RHODE CENTER AND LEGAL DESIGN LAB PUBLISH A FORWARD-LOOKING BLUEPRINT FOR EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SUPERIOR COURT OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Research Report Details Challenges in Eviction Cases and Recommendations for the Court's Continued Leadership as an Innovative, Evidence-Based Court

Stanford Law School's Deborah L. Rhode Center on the Legal Profession and Legal Design Lab released a [groundbreaking diagnostic report](#) today that outlines a blueprint for creating more innovative, modern, and accessible courts. This report marks a significant milestone in the unique partnership established in January 2024 between the Superior Court of Los Angeles County (the Court - SCLAC) and Stanford Law School. Created in collaboration with court leadership, frontline court staff, and community partners, the findings of the Stanford report demonstrate the Court's commitment to enhancing the self-represented litigant experience and its dedication to leading in justice innovation.

"The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is committed to innovative transformation that enhances efficiency, accessibility, and fairness in the justice system for all residents of Los Angeles County," said Superior Court of Los Angeles County Presiding Judge Sergio C. Tapia II. "The Court acknowledges the crucial role of accurate and reliable data in promoting innovation and making informed decisions. We appreciate our partners at Stanford Law for identifying areas where we can improve, allowing the Court to better fulfill our mission of providing fair and timely access to all that seek it, regardless of whether or not they have legal representation."

A Commitment to Innovation

As the largest trial court in the nation, the Court has helped lead a revolution in how American courts serve the millions of people who navigate the civil justice system. The report showcases how Stanford, in partnership with the Court, is using a wide range of methods—from data analytics to court user surveys—to identify ways the Court can continue to be a leader and innovator among courts.

"Serving a population of over 10 million residents, the Court is uniquely positioned to drive innovation and change by benchmarking ways to make the judiciary more accessible to those seeking justice," said Superior Court of Los Angeles County Executive Officer/Clerk of Court David W. Slayton. "Thanks in part to the Court's unique partnership with Stanford Law, we now have an actionable blueprint that will guide Court leadership's decision making going forward. We would like to thank Stanford Law for lending their invaluable resources to the Court to benefit the residents of Los Angeles County. We also hope that courts across the country can use data from this study to inform how they may better serve their communities."

Combining the Court's tradition of leadership with Stanford's deep scholarly and technical expertise, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County-Stanford partnership presents a unique opportunity to design,

implement, and rigorously test promising interventions that can improve the delivery of justice and serve as a model for other courts around the country.

“This report is more than just a diagnosis; it is a blueprint for change,” said David Freeman Engstrom, Professor and Co-Director of Stanford’s Rhode Center at Stanford Law School. “While courts everywhere face daunting challenges with high-volume civil dockets, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County’s visionary leadership and willingness to innovate, when combined with Stanford’s deep technical expertise, promises to develop new approaches that work. Together, we can create a modernized model court and build a robust evidence base for other courts to follow.”

Eviction Cases as a Start

Over the past year, the Court and Stanford prioritized eviction (unlawful detainer) cases as a first step toward innovation. Eviction lawsuits are vitally important to Angelenos because they protect tenants’ access to stable and safe housing and landlords’ property investments. The Stanford team:

- Analyzed case management data for 150,000 UD filings.
- Conducted hundreds of hours of interviews, focus groups, and meetings with court users, court staff, and community stakeholders.
- Shadowed court users navigating the Court’s processes.
- Evaluated Court-hosted digital self-help tools and the Court’s website.

The resulting report presents the findings from this far-ranging research and identifies a mix of challenges and opportunities. It documents, from 2019 to 2023, an increase in eviction filings by corporate landlords, a widening gap in the number of landlords and tenants with legal representation, and a decline in the number of tenants who file answers. It also identifies some of the barriers that court users face in navigating court processes and Court-hosted digital self-help tools; struggles that many court staff face, particularly in responding to court user requests for referrals to appropriate legal help; and a lack of alignment between community legal services providers and the Court.

A Blueprint for Change

The report offers a broad but grounded vision for how the Court can address these challenges in eviction dockets and provide fair and accurate adjudication for all parties. The report proposes concrete steps that the Court, in partnership with Stanford, might take along four frontiers of justice innovation.

- **Learning Organization:** The Court can build on a culture and organization focused on continuous learning and improvement by strengthening the Court’s ability to capture actionable data from court documents and litigants’ use of help services.
- **Information Hub:** The Court can provide clearer and more usable information to court users. An example of an initial concrete step is to redesign the informational packet that the Court provides to eviction defendants and then supplement it with email and text message alerts to close critical information gaps.
- **Collaboration Hub:** The Court can develop richer and more collaborative relationships with legal services providers and community groups throughout Los Angeles. The report recommends piloting an online, interactive tool to help court users more easily identify appropriate legal help.
- **Digital Hub:** The Court can construct high-quality digital tools that better serve court users and improve court operations. For example, the report recommends piloting a tool to assist court staff in ensuring that a plaintiff who seeks a default judgment against an absent defendant has met all legal requirements.

A Model for Other Courts

This report and the broader Superior Court of Los Angeles County-Stanford partnership are already providing a template for other courts that want to better serve their communities. By conducting diagnostic activities, engaging stakeholders, and partnering with researchers, courts nationwide can identify areas for improvement and implement data-driven, human-centered solutions. With courts around the country facing many common challenges, the fruits of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County-Stanford partnership will benefit court users and communities in Los Angeles and well beyond.

“In order to modernize courts, we must start by listening—to court users, staff, and community stakeholders,” said Margaret Hagan, Director of Stanford’s Legal Design Lab. “By putting in the hard work to build human-centered solutions, the Superior Court of Los Angeles County is setting an example for how all courts can innovate and improve.”

Learn More and Upcoming Webinars:

[Click here to access the full report.](#)

To join a discussion about the report and to ask questions, sign up for a live webinar. The Court and Stanford will host the following sessions:

- **An LA-focused webinar on April 30 at 4 p.m. PST.** Register [here](#). This discussion will focus on the report’s empirical findings about eviction in Los Angeles and on its proposed local solutions. The Stanford and Court teams are especially eager to invite legal aid providers, court staff, and other local stakeholders who helped to facilitate the research underlying this report.
- **A national webinar on May 1 at 1:30 p.m. PST.** Register [here](#). This discussion will center the SCLAC-Stanford partnership in the national context of court modernization and reform. The Stanford and SCLAC teams are especially eager to invite court leaders, academics, policymakers, and other justice stakeholders who are interested to learn more about how SCLAC is emerging as a leader along the four frontiers of justice innovation.

For more information on the Court’s current programs and services, including information on the Court’s partnership with Stanford, follow the Court on X ([@LASuperiorCourt](#)), Instagram ([@LASuperiorCourt](#)), Threads ([@LASuperiorCourt](#)), or visit the Court’s website, www.LACourt.org.