



Commonwealth of Virginia

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Board Matter
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Access to Justice Kiosks and Web-Based AI

Mr. Chairman,

Access to justice is not always equal for Fairfax County residents. In 2017, the National Center for State Courts published a study entitled Virginia Self-Represented Litigant Study: Outcomes of Civil Cases in General District Court, Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court, and Circuit Court. This study revealed that the traditional adversarial model, where both parties are represented by counsel, occurred in only 1 % of General District Court cases, 6% of Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court cases, and 38% of Circuit Court cases. Poverty was the reason most often associated with not being represented by counsel. The barriers faced by self-represented litigants include cultural and language barriers, procedural hurdles, and general difficulty navigating the court process and understanding legal terminology, from what forms to file, to where and when to appear, and what to say in court.

In 2023, Fairfax County funded the first self-help resource center in Virginia. The self-help resource center provides legal information, referrals, forms, and resource materials on topics related to various court matters. As an extension of the self-help resource center we have the option of implementing a kiosk and web-based AI program to increase access to justice.

The kiosks and web-based AI program will be a logical expansion of the self-help resource center with the capability of providing access to more information, this

information will be available at different locations throughout Fairfax County, available in different languages, available with ADA accessibility and available twenty-four hours a day. The Courts receive thousands of requests a year for interpreter services in forty-two different languages. These kiosks will help residents with localized and immediate language access to the court and allow them to work with the court without having to come to the court. This technology is an access to justice solution for people with transportation and childcare issues. A virtual clerk would be available to assist at the kiosks and online as well, providing access to the courts at all hours.

Regarding ADA accessibility, the kiosk has a button on it that changes the screen layout for those in wheelchairs, making it ADA accessible. For the hard of hearing, they can interact with the screen via text and touch and do not need to speak or listen to the avatar. For the web-based AI program, if the person has hearing problems, they too can communicate with the avatar through all text, and they do not have to talk or listen to the avatar. The kiosks in the future could also be utilized for virtual hearings. Kiosks and web-based AI are being used across the country in courthouses and public libraries to further access to justice. Fairfax County is the largest jurisdiction in Virginia with a diverse population and needs. This technology will expand services provided by the self-help resource center and further access to justice by providing information for our residents to participate in the legal system in a meaningful way. This project falls directly in line with One Fairfax to ensure all our citizens have the same and equal access to justice.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that County and Court staff have begun to review the kiosk and AI option. Keeping in line with our One Fairfax Policy and understanding the great need for increased access to justice for all residents, I move that the County Executive direct staff from DIT, the Fairfax County Court and other appropriate County agencies to finalize review of this kiosk and web-based AI program, as well as others to make a determination and report back to the BOS on how we may be able to incorporate this type of technology to assist our residents.