

JOHN P. MORRISSEY
Chief Judge

ROBERTA L. WARNKEN
Chief Clerk



DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND
ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) OFFICE
Sweeney District Courthouse
251 Rowe Boulevard, Suite 307
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Phone: 410-260-1676 Fax: 410-260-3536

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS:

SUSAN M. ARMIGER
Finance

POLLY A. HARDING
Administrative Services

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Helping Landlords and Tenants

By Shannon Baker, Regional ADR Programs Director for Baltimore City & Harford County

A new initiative to provide dedicated ADR practitioners to help landlord and tenants have the conversation around rent in District Court is underway in Baltimore City. With the support of Chief Judge Morrissey and Chief Clerk Warnken, the District Court ADR Office will commence a Pilot Rent Court ADR Program this spring during the 8:30 AM Failure to Pay Rent docket at the District Court in Baltimore City, Civil Division. The Pilot Rent Court ADR Program is one initiative developed by a subcommittee (which includes the Access to Justice Department) convened to identify the need for services specifically for Failure to Pay Rent cases.

The proposed Pilot will utilize existing Baltimore City roster ADR Practitioners presently serving the 1:15 PM Day of Trial ADR Program, and provide them with additional training related to Rent cases. These veteran practitioners would then provide ADR services (mediation and settlement conferences) for litigants attending the 8:30 AM Rent docket. Additionally, the ADR Office is exploring a Pretrial Mediation Program partnership with the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law Mediation Clinic (Clinic) specifically for cases being held over to a future rent escrow docket.

Goals of the pilot program include: identifying the need for ADR and assessing the volume of potential case referrals; identifying any additional training needs specific to Rent cases for the ADR Practitioners; developing best practices for case referrals from the bench and the litigants themselves; and, developing logistics for the Pretrial Mediation Program partnership with the University of Maryland Carey School of Law Mediation Clinic.

Keeping Peace in Neighborhoods

By Gretchen Kainz, Regional ADR Programs Director for Montgomery & Prince George's County

Every second Tuesday morning of the month, Montgomery County conducts the "Municipal Infraction" docket in Rockville. The good news for these cases is that a co-mediator team is available to assist Montgomery County neighbors with resolving complaints against each other. Specifically, the co-mediators volunteer to mediate cases that involve neighbors' complaints about dogs: dogs that got off their leashes and are running wildly around the neighborhood; dogs that can't stop barking as soon as they step outside; dogs that view every fence as a personal challenge to leap over; and, dogs that just don't like other dogs (or humans). The list goes on.

After completing a pilot year in 2014 where we overcame a few challenges with logistics, the current program was strong and consistent in 2015! There were 25 cases referred, 24 of which participated in mediation, and 21 of those settled! That's an 88% settlement rate! The mediators helped neighbors talk with each other (and often with the county's animal control) to work through agreements about how they would handle potential future infractions (before calling animal control, that is). Citizens that participated in the process have commented that attending mediation will help them be better dog owners and better neighbors to each other.

Improving ADR's Reach

By Cindy Faucette, Regional ADR Programs Director for Carroll & Frederick Counties; Andrew Fontanella, Regional ADR Programs Director for the Eastern Shore; and, Katherine Quinn, Regional ADR Programs Director for Calvert, Charles & St. Mary's Counties

ADR program expansion across the District Courts in Maryland is steadily on the rise in concert with the support of fourteen of eighteen Community Mediation Centers to provide high quality Day of Trial and Pretrial mediation to District Court consumers. The newest community mediation center is located in Charles County, within the College of Southern Maryland. Opening a community mediation center provides Charles County citizens with the same opportunities for conflict resolution and relationship building enjoyed by Maryland citizens in other counties throughout the State. The first class of mediators with the new Center completed training earlier this month with plans to begin partnering with the District Court later this spring.

Last fall the ADR Office hosted a New Volunteer Mediator Orientation in Easton to welcome 22 mediators to volunteer in a new Day of Trial ADR program in Dorchester County, and to supplement existing programs in Somerset and Wicomico Counties. In so doing, we formed new partnerships with Community Mediation Upper Shore (CMUS) and Mid Shore Community Mediation Center, and strengthened an existing partnership with Tri Community Mediation (lower shore). Pretrial mediation programs are underway in Kent and Talbot counties, and are being considered in Dorchester and Cecil counties. Many thanks to Judge Adkins, Judge Nunn, and Judge Jews for their support to develop and bring ADR to the local District Courts, and to Judge Schneider for her leadership to bring stakeholders together at the first programming meeting for Cecil County ADR programs on February 26, 2016.

Additionally, roster expansion is underway to support existing Day of Trial programs in Calvert, Carroll, Washington and St. Mary's counties. Seven mediators were oriented and welcomed to District Court Day of Trial programs in Prince Frederick and Leonardtown on February 18, 2016. These mediators hail from existing, strong partnerships with the Calvert County and St. Mary's County Community Mediation Centers (respectively). On March 2, 2016, the District Court ADR Office oriented an additional eight new community mediators with the Carroll County and Washington County Community Mediation Centers to provide Day of Trial mediation in existing programs in the District Courts in Westminster and Hagerstown. To learn more about community mediation centers across Maryland, please visit: <http://www.mdmediation.org/>.

Day of Trial ADR Program

By Maureen Denihan, Executive Director, and Leona Elliott, Director of ADR Roster Management

Through the generosity of volunteers, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes are available to District Court litigants in 19 courthouses. 2015 was a benchmark year for ADR services in the District Court of Maryland; ADR practitioners donated more than 6,000 hours in the Day of Trial ADR programs (6,071 hours to be exact). In fact, since 2003, volunteer mediators and settlement conference attorneys combined to provide more than 62,000 hours of conflict resolution processes in the District Court of Maryland. Indeed, with the addition of 70 new ADR practitioners in 2015 (60 mediators and 10 settlement conference attorneys), the Day of Trial roster increased to 348 volunteers that were present to provide ADR in 1,536 cases. More than 17,000 cases have been provided the opportunity to try ADR since 2003, 55% of those reaching resolution in the Day of Trial ADR program. With ADR program expansion to the mid- and upper shore, and solidifying a stronger ADR program presence in the District Court in Charles County, we expect these numbers to continue to increase as more and more litigants are offered the opportunity to resolve their case through ADR.

For more information about the programs discussed in this release or questions in regard to any District Court ADR Programs, please contact the District Court of Maryland ADR Office at 410-260-1676 or adroffice@mdcourts.gov