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## Legal Aid Chicago Launches Criminal Record Expungement App Developed by Chapman's Innovations Team

*Chapman's innovations team creates app to help Legal Aid Chicago expand access to criminal record expungement services.*

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CHICAGO, November 2, 2020 — In collaboration with Legal Aid Chicago, the Practice Innovations team at Chapman and Cutler LLP is pleased to announce the launch of a new automation app developed to help Legal Aid Chicago staff attorneys and pro bono volunteers expand access to expungement services for people impacted by the criminal justice system in Cook County, Illinois.

Preparing Cook County expungement petitions can be daunting for volunteer attorneys because the forms can be difficult to fill out without instructions. Traditionally, it also takes time for Legal Aid Chicago's staff to revise forms completed by well-intentioned but inexperienced volunteers. Chapman's Pro Bono Counsel Sara Ghadiri and the Chapman Practice Innovations (CPI) team came up with a solution: an app that automatically populates the forms through a series of simplified questions with clear guidance. Built on the Community.lawyer platform, the app streamlines the process of drafting expungement and sealing forms, making it easier and faster for Legal Aid Chicago staff and volunteers to serve their clients.

As a member of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, Chapman sees expungement as one way to work toward dismantling the effects of systemic racism. And because the CPI team uses app development to improve legal processes with technology, "this project was a natural fit for Chapman," said Ghadiri. "When we partnered with our clients to host an expungement clinic with Legal Aid Chicago, my first thought was, given the expansion of eligibility for criminal records reform, we would have to host a lot more of these clinics to make the kind of impact needed here. However, by automating the process, we can get more volunteer attorneys serving more expungement clients to try to better meet the needs of the significant number of people eligible for relief. Everyone deserves access to legal services to help them get a fresh start."

"We code legal logic and build tools to automate common legal processes to help legal aid organizations scale their capacities. I think this is a great way for Chapman to contribute our legal skills to people who need them," said CPI and Technology Partner, Eric Wood. "I am especially proud of our CPI and pro bono teams for using the transformative power of legal technology to help underserved communities clear their records."

CPI Senior Analyst R. Amani Smathers managed the project and developed the app at Chapman. "Using our document automation expertise to aid access to justice is important and rewarding," she said. "We also believe it's a great new model for pro bono services: by creating tools that clarify and streamline the process of completing complex legal forms, we can optimize the volunteer process for legal aid organizations and attorneys, to ultimately increase availability of legal aid services."

Community.lawyer's user-friendly interface, business model, and mission made it an ideal platform for the project. "Community.lawyer is committed to developing technology that breaks down the barriers of cost and capacity that separate everyday Americans from quality legal help," said Scott Kelly, President of Community.lawyer. "We love seeing firms and organizations use our platform to build apps that combine technological innovation with high professional standards and amplify their impact."

Chapman first reached out to Legal Aid Chicago to propose the idea in March 2020, right when the COVID-19 pandemic started shutting down many in-person legal aid services. “One of the consequences of the pandemic is that it is more difficult for Legal Aid Chicago to provide real-time support to volunteers when filling out forms. The Community.Lawyer app that Chapman and Cutler built for us automates and simplifies the forms, eliminating many of the common questions we answer. This will allow us to assist many more clients with volunteers. We are beyond grateful for the assistance of Chapman and Cutler,” said Melissa Picciola, Legal Aid Chicago’s Director of Volunteer Services.

**About Chapman and Cutler**

*Chapman and Cutler LLP, founded in 1913, is a national law firm that is focused on financial services transactions and clients and is a firm on the leading edge of legal services innovation. Chapman’s Practice Innovations team designs and develops platforms for contract automation and review and analysis, builds custom applications, and connects systems as needed to deliver solutions such as dashboards, transaction management, and online collaboration systems and has also built market-ready software for use in financial transactions. For more information, please visit [www.chapman.com](http://www.chapman.com).*

**About Legal Aid Chicago**

*Legal Aid Chicago seeks justice for people living in poverty through litigation and advocacy. With a team of over 150 full-time lawyers and staff, Legal Aid Chicago fights to secure individual rights to protection from abuse by providing free legal assistance in civil cases to people living in Chicago and suburban Cook County. For more information, please visit [www.legalaidchicago.org](http://www.legalaidchicago.org).*