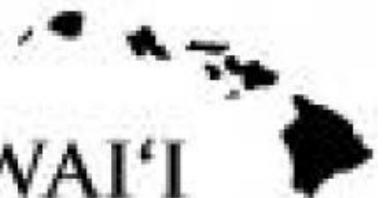


News: Leveraging Emergency Response Network Coordination to Meet SRLs In Need: Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i Launches Text-to-Legal Services Pilot at COVID-19 Food Distribution Sites Across County (Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i 2020)



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As COVID-19 increases the need for civil legal help, the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i took an innovative approach to meet SRLs where many are in these challenging times: food distribution sites. As a member of one of Hawai'i's FEMA Emergency

Support Function Groups the [Legal Aid Society of Hawai`i](#) has participated actively in weekly coordination calls with state, city, and county officials and NGOs since the start of the pandemic. Their role in this network left Legal Aid well-positioned to respond in a coordinated, agile way, to integrate legal service into the state's broader COVID response.

Through these [emergency response relationships](#), the idea to launch a "Text-to-Legal Services" pilot project was born out of conversations among Legal Aid, the Salvation Army, and the City and County of Honolulu. The goal of the pilot was to expand the delivery of legal information and assistance to vulnerable individuals and families visiting Hawai`i's food distribution sites for COVID-19 assistance. The County of Hawai`i also expressed interest in collaborating when it received news of the initiative and helped Legal Aid identify which food distribution sites to work with. The Hawai`i State Bar Association, Hawai`i County Bar Association, and West Hawai`i Bar Association also worked with Legal Aid to staff the text line with Self-Help Center pro bono volunteers who could provide direct legal assistance.

At each collaborating food distribution site, volunteers distributed flyers produced in coordination with the City and County of Honolulu and the County of Hawai`i that highlighted free and low-cost legal services, resources on evictions, and information on how to access free and low-cost medical insurance, low-cost healthcare without insurance, public benefits (i.e. food stamps, unemployment, and child care), and financial assistance for rent and utilities. During the food distribution hours, the Legal Aid Society of Hawai`i's [AmeriCorps](#) members and staff fielded incoming legal help text messages. Legal Aid responded to texts as they arrived, managed follow up screening calls, and then transferred callers to pro bono attorneys available for direct legal information and assistance.

The "Text-to-Legal Services" pilot was a success, reaching nearly 10,000 households with flyers and increasing calls to the Access to Justice Room and Self-Help Centers. Hawai`i Legal Aid said, "We were happy to reach so many people through this pilot and highly recommend others think creatively about where in their community self-represented litigants in need of help may be reached outside of traditional self-help channels."

One of the participating pro bono attorneys also reflected on the pilot: "The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded me that all of us are connected and that each of us must

do what we can to support our communities and fellow human beings, especially in this unprecedented period of social and economic adversity. To that end, serving as a volunteer attorney with Legal Aid's mass food "Text-to-Legal Services" pilot project was both humbling and gratifying; it allowed me to give back to our community and help individuals and families in Hawaii's most vulnerable populations navigate through the evolving legal landscape related to COVID-19 in Hawaii."

Last updated on September 17, 2021.

Year published: 2020

Document Author:

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