Resource: Document Assembly: An Essential Building Block for the Access to Justice Ecosystem (LHI 2016)

[LawHelp Interactive](#) (LHI) is a national online document assembly platform that allows people representing themselves to prepare their own legal documents and pleadings online for free.[1] It is also used by legal aid advocates, pro bono attorneys, and court systems seeking to work more efficiently and develop new approaches to service delivery.

LHI is used in more than more than 40 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Ontario. LHI increases opportunities for those without an attorney to achieve justice on their own by allowing pro se litigants to create their own complete, high quality

legal documents and pleadings for free. LHI also promotes innovative models of pro bono, remote and unbundled legal assistance, and supports collaborations with community organizations and libraries. [Read more about effective partnerships created by LHI](#).

LawHelp Interactive is a program of [Pro Bono Net](#), a nonprofit leader in deploying technology and collaboration to increase access to justice, operated in partnership with Ohio State Legal Services Association. Together they have received generous support for this work from, among others, the [Legal Services Corporation's Technology Initiative Grants](#) program, as well as significant software donations from the HotDocs Corporation. Through trainings, technical assistance and community networking, LHI helps local programs develop interactive forms and effectively integrate them with services to help hundreds of thousands of people each year prevent or address legal problems.

In the last ten years, over 2.6 million legal documents have been generated through LHI. In 2015 alone, more than 450,000 documents were created using LHI in the areas of child support and custody, domestic violence, debt collection, foreclosure and more. Top states by assemblies in 2015 are shown in the table below. In New York, Minnesota, and California, forms created by LHI can be electronically transmitted to the courts using state of the art e-filing methods and other tools, such as fax and file. In Michigan and Illinois, domestic violence forms powered by LHI have been created for print and file work flows. LHI forms can also be integrated into the case management systems of legal aid programs, courts and other nonprofits to allow staff to more efficiently generate legal documents. In 2016, the LHI platform will be updated to fully support mobile users.

LHI currently hosts more than 3,000 interviews, and supports forms developed using HotDocs and [A2J Author®](#) software. A proof of concept was also recently completed using the Neota Logic software. All of the interviews in LHI are created with input from local experts in that area of law, largely by legal aid groups but also by courts that license with LHI. The interviews provide a guided user experience, and ask the user a series of questions to help them create their documents. If the person's circumstances don't fit with the type of form the interview was designed for, the user can often still benefit from doing the guided interview and learning about other resources and services available.

Through Pro Bono Net, groups that use LHI to develop and publish their online forms have access to online resources, training, and one-on-one support for their projects. In addition, Pro Bono Net provides listservs, an online resource center and monthly networking calls to keep LHI developers and partners aware of best practices, new development and technical improvements. LHI staff at Pro Bono Net also share funding opportunities on a routine basis and are available to brainstorm and support new grant applications with LHI partners to develop and enhance their forms collections. Pro Bono Net encourages organizations using LHI to work in partnership with other groups serving the same area of law to improve the quality and outcome of any given project.

Every quarter, LHI staff share utilization reports with all of the programs using LHI. These reports include utilization by LHI user types (for example self-helper, advocate or court employee), information on forms emailed through LHI, the average length of time it takes to do an interview, and similar information that is helpful for local project managers. Some of these reports can be created on demand for LHI partners. Family law is by far the area where most of the utilization occurs, however, the use of consumer law and housing forms, as well as wills and probate, continue to increase each year. In 2016, Pro Bono Net will also be creating new reports for LHI content owners, including Google Analytics reports and custom reports that can track utilization by demographic fields.

Top State	2015 Assemblies	% of Total
New York	136,195	30%
California	68,180	15%
Michigan	63,080	14%
Illinois	38,026	8%

Minnesota   23,547   5%

By using LHI to host and create online documents, legal aid organizations and courts can benefit from a robust and proven pre-existing architecture and focus their attention and resources on the delivery of services and assistance. Pro Bono Net manages the state-of-the-art technical infrastructure for the LHI platform and works with local groups to successfully develop LHI-powered forms and projects that enable a more efficient and user-friendly document creation experience for legal aid staff, pro bono lawyers, and those who represent themselves.

In terms of value provided by LHI, if the assumption is that a similar service by a for-profit vendor costs $149.00 per assembly, the value provided by LHI to users in 2015 alone over $68 Million per year. At least one state has calculated this for their own LHI forms collection. A 2014 report by the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission and the University of Arkansas School of Public Service calculated the financial benefit of Arkansas' LHI-powered online document assembly services at $3,370,328 for divorces, $61,962 for living wills, and $39,865 for powers of attorney, based on the cost of forms provided online by private market vendors.

For more information about court initiatives and e-filing, please reach out to Claudia Johnson, Program Manager at cjohnson@probono.net. For information about legal aid or other legal nonprofit initiatives, please reach out to Mirenda Meghelli, Program Coordinator, at mmeghelli@probono.net.

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[1] A number of different document assembly programs are available for lay people, including commercial options that connect to court e-filing system like Tyler Technologies' Odyssey Guide and File or Turbo Court, commercial form generators like Legal Zoom or Rocket Lawyer that aspire to connect people to lawyers and forms and offer many non-court forms, and custom court programed systems like the Utah Court's OCAP forms system. LHI, the leading non-profit version, makes implementing document assembly initiatives free and easy for legal aid, pro bono, and courts by providing the technical infrastructure necessary to offer online document assembly content. LHI functions primarily as a server that uses HotDocs'

[Professional](#) document assembly tools and includes an optional access to justice front-end generated through [A2J Author](#)®.

[Read here](#) for a state-by-state list of document assembly systems and [head here](#) to visit the LHI Resource Site.

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- Claudia Johnson

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