MASSACHUSETTS JURY DUTY - YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

With Erika Rickard, Access to Justice Coordinator Massachusetts Trial Court By the Massachusetts Judicial Branch

Audio video recording produced by the Office of the Jury Commissioner in association with the Boston Neighborhood Network Transcript produced by Approved Court Transcriber Donna Holmes Dominguez

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1	CAPTION: Jury Duty, Michael Ryan, Host
2	MICHAEL RYAN, BNN LIVE HOST: Hello. My name is Mike Ryan.
3	The name of the show is Jury Duty: You Make a Difference on
4	BNN, the show that should answer all your questions about the
5	one day, one trial jury system.
6	HOST RYAN: Our special guest today is Erika Rickard who is
7	the Access to Justice Coordinator for the Massachusetts Trial
8	Court.
9	Welcome, Erika.
10	MS. RICKARD: Thank you so much, Mike.
11	HOST RYAN: Thank you for being on the show.
12	Erika is a graduate of Mills College in California and
13	earned her Juris Doctorate Degree at Harvard Law School.
14	And after that, she worked as an Assistant Attorney General
15	in Massachusetts with a focus on criminal, civil, and
16	appellate litigation.
17	And since 2014 has been the Access to Justice Coordinator
18	for the Trial Court.
19	So that begs the question, what is the, what is Access to
20	Justice?
21	MS. RICKARD: So Access to Justice is kind of a term that
22	you'll see a lot these days in justice systems around the
23	country.
24	We think, a lot of different people think about criminal
25	law and criminal cases as kind of the main work of the Courts.

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And of course in criminal cases, you have a right to an attorney, and if you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.

But in civil cases, in all the non-criminal, a lot of the non-criminal cases, people do not have a right to an attorney. So we see more and more people coming into Courts without a lawyer and trying to learn how to navigate the process.

8 So Access to Justice is something that is addressing the 9 needs of people in civil cases who are coming into Court and 10 we're trying to look at the Courts from the experience of the 11 Court user and make the Court a more effective, easier place 12 for people to access the, what they need when they come into 13 the courthouse.

HOST RYAN: And some of these people have language issues, correct, when they come to Court?

16 MS. RICKARD: Absolutely. And people have a right to equal 17 access to the Court system whether they speak English or not, whether they read English or not, no matter how much money 18 19 they make, people all have the same access to the Court. 20 So it's our obligation to make sure that our forms make 21 sense in English and in other languages and to provide 22 interpreters when people need them in the Court, in their 23 Court hearings.

24 So one of the areas of Access to Justice is expanding 25 language access for everyone who comes to Court.

1 HOST RYAN: What are the long, long distance goals for 2 Access to Justice? 3 MS. RICKARD: Well, I would, actually, right now the, the Conference of Chief Justices, which is a national 4 5 organization, has put out the goal of one hundred percent 6 Access to Justice. 7 And what that means for Massachusetts is looking at our Court process and thinking about things like are people able 8 9 to understand what to do when they come into Court, where to 10 go and what to do once you come into a courtroom? Looking at your form, the forms you need to fill out. 11 12 Looking at how you navigate the process really from soup to nuts, from start to finish, thinking about at every step along 13 14 the way how can we make the Court an easier, more convenient, 15 more accessible place for people who come into Court. 16 HOST RYAN: And the project just started a few years ago? 17 MS. RICKARD: That's right. The Massachusetts Access to Justice initiative started in 2009, so it was something where, 18 19 in a lot of states, you'll see Access to Justice Commissions 20 which is where some folks from Court and some folks from legal 21 organizations come together and think about how to solve Court 22 problems.

Here in Massachusetts, we have it actually as part of the Court, as inside the Court as an initiative of the Court. So since 2009, we've been working on looking at what the

needs are in the Court, looking at what underserved 1 populations there are, and how we can make things make more 2 3 sense and make things a little bit easier for people to come in. 4 5 HOST RYAN: I notice that there was an interim report just a 6 year after you started that you sent out electric, electric, 7 electronic survey to Court employees, and more than 2,000 responded with some suggestions about Access to Justice. 8 9 MS. RICKARD: That's right. That's right. 10 One of the very first things that the initiative did was 11 survey all Court staff from all around the courthouses across 12 Massachusetts. 13 And I think it was really striking just how much people 14 really care in the courthouses about serving the public and 15 being, being stronger public servants. 16 So some of the top things that people talked about were 17 technology, improving our technology to make the Courts more accessible, providing more language access, and improving 18 19 Court process for people who don't have lawyers. 20 HOST RYAN: And a couple years later in 2013, the Trial 21 Court came up with a strategic plan and part of that touched on Access to Justice, correct? 22 23 MS. RICKARD: Absolutely. Access to Justice is really incorporated as a theme throughout a lot of Court policy now 24 25 including the strategic plan.

1	You'll see a, a few different initiatives that we have are
2	improving the signage in the Court. So it's one of the most
3	frustrating things for people if they come to Court and can't
4	find their way to the room that they need to go to to get what
5	they need.
6	So improving signage to make it easier to understand how to
7	get to the places where you need to go.
8	And other, some other ideas that we've had are Court
9	Service Centers is a new initiative of the Court that came out
10	of the strategic plan and that we're working on expanding
11	right now throughout, throughout the Courts to help people
12	navigate the system a little bit easier.
13	HOST RYAN: I, I saw in the report that it said ensure fair
14	access to the Court system. And the other one was respect the
15	dignity of the judicial process and all participants and
16	provide a safe environment.
17	So it sounded like that sort of summed up your mission when
18	I, when I read that.
19	And we had, we had a show on the Court Service Centers.
20	Can you briefly tell us what a Court Service Center is
21	supposed to provide?
22	MS. RICKARD: Sure. So Court Service Centers have been
23	around in a few other, in other states for a little bit
24	longer. They're new in Massachusetts.
25	And they're really intended to provide legal information to
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1	really anyone who comes in who's, who's seeking help.
2	Now, they're staffed by Court staff, so they cannot give
3	legal advice. But they can give you some explanations of
4	Court process, what forms you need to fill out if you're
5	trying to do a certain type of case, and really kind of help
6	explain the nuts and bolts of what happens when you go to
7	Court.
8	HOST RYAN: And where are the Court services currently?
9	MS. RICKARD: So we have Court Service Centers right now in
10	Boston and in Warren, in Lawrence, excuse me, and Worcester,
11	and we're opening two more in Springfield and Brockton this
12	year.
13	HOST RYAN: And do they have regular hours just like the
14	courthouse?
15	MS. RICKARD: They, they're open as, whenever the Court is
16	open, the Court Service Center is open.
17	HOST RYAN: So somebody can come in, come in with a language
18	issue, and they're able to help that person?
19	MS. RICKARD: Yeah. Even, even language issues. So the
20	Court uses something called Language Line which is telephone
21	interpreting.
22	So if people come in and need some, need some kind of
23	assistance, and they, we don't have someone who speaks that
24	language there that day, we can still help people by, by
25	calling the telephone interpreting.

1	HOST RYAN: I thought that was interesting too. There's
2	computers available at, at the Court Service Center.
3	MS. RICKARD: Yeah, that's right.
4	HOST RYAN: So people, and they have not only Court staff,
5	but they have volunteer lawyers that come and help out?
6	MS. RICKARD: That's right. And we're always eager to have
7	more folks come and volunteer, law students, lawyers, members
8	of the community who want to learn how the Court works and
9	help other people navigate the Court.
10	HOST RYAN: Now, as far as electronic signage, has that
11	improved in some of the Courts now? Do they have electric,
12	not electric, electronic signage?
13	MS. RICKARD: Yes. So we, some, one of the places where we
14	just started having electronic signage is in Boston at the
15	Brooke Courthouse which is a really big courthouse that's just
16	now adding new signage that are, that's electronic, that you
17	can actually look at a TV screen and see where your case is,
18	which courtroom it's going to be in.
19	HOST RYAN: And then next you had a deal with a Language
20	Access Plan. What briefly is a Language Access Plan?
21	MS. RICKARD: The Language Access Plan is kind of a vision
22	for how to improve language access in the Court system, and
23	that means interpreters, but it also means making signs multi-
24	lingual, it means translating Court forms, and really a whole,
25	whole host of different areas where we can identify people who

1	need language access help, and we can tell them about their
2	rights, and make sure that they actually access their, their
3	rights.
4	HOST RYAN: Now, you would in, in conjunction with the Trial
5	Court Office of Court Interpreter Services?
6	MS. RICKARD: That's right.
7	HOST RYAN: And how many full time interpreters do they
8	have?
9	MS. RICKARD: The Office of Court Interpreter Services has
10	25 I think staff interpreters today.
11	It's usually 24 or 25 staff interpreters.
12	HOST RYAN: And they also have per diems, correct, that go
13	throughout the Commonwealth?
14	MS. RICKARD: That's right. So there's contract
15	interpreters.
16	HOST RYAN: Yeah.
17	MS. RICKARD: I think to, presently, we have 150 to 175
18	different interpreters who are on a list who speak a whole
19	range of languages.
20	I think in the past year, we've had 80 different languages
21	spoken in the Trial Court.
22	HOST RYAN: Wow. Wow. What are the most popular ones?
23	MS. RICKARD: The most popular, well, Spanish is by far the,
24	the most common language that, that we'll see in the Court
25	system. That's about 74 percent of the language access needs

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1	that we have are Spanish.
2	After that, Portuguese is another really prevalent language
3	here in Massachusetts.
4	Other languages are Chinese, so both Mandarin and
5	Cantonese.
6	Arabic, Russian, Vietnamese, Khmer or Khmai which is the
7	Cambodian language, Cape Verdean Creole and Haitian Creole are
8	all really common in Massachusetts.
9	HOST RYAN: Now, I noticed that there's something called a
10	Babel Notice that's put up in the courthouse.
11	What's a Babel Notice?
12	MS. RICKARD: Babel, Babel or Babel Notice is a poster that
13	explains something in multiple languages.
14	And in this case, it explains your right to an interpreter.
15	So we have posters up in common, in courthouses all around
16	Massachusetts that say you have a right to an interpreter at
17	no cost to you and if you point to your language, then the
18	Court staff can know which language you speak and they can
19	call an interpreter for you.
20	So we have that poster up in 30 different languages.
21	HOST RYAN: I also notice that a lot of the Court forms are
22	in about six or seven languages now. So that, ideally if
23	someone goes on the, on the Trial Court website, they are able
24	to find things like small claims forms in their, in the most
25	frequent, frequently used languages?

1	MS. RICKARD: That's right. We have small claims forms,
2	abuse prevention order so domestic violence or restraining
3	order forms are all up in multiple languages.
4	And we're adding new, new forms every day. So if folks
5	want to go to the Mass.Gov/Courts website, it's very easy to
6	find. There's a little talk bubble with multiple languages in
7	it.
8	So you can click on that, and all of the different forms
9	are available there.
10	HOST RYAN: And one of the purposes of Access to Justice is
11	do it yourself Court forms that are online, correct?
12	MS. RICKARD: That's right. That's right. That's something
13	that we're expanding. I think improving our Access to Justice
14	technology, thinking about things like people use Turbo Tax a
15	lot for their taxes. We, we're moving toward Turbo Tax type
16	surveys for people to fill out Court forms.
17	HOST RYAN: Sort of like E, e-filings for, of legal, legal
18	documents?
19	MS. RICKARD: We're, I think that is in the works, yes,
20	looking at e-filing as well.
21	HOST RYAN: And you're also big on self-help online as well,
22	correct?
23	MS. RICKARD: That's right. We're trying to get information
24	to people as early as we can so folks don't come to Court
25	confused about what's, what's happening in their case.

1	If people want to get more information from, from the
2	comfort of their own home before they come to Court, we're
3	trying to make user friendly information available on the
4	website.
5	HOST RYAN: So on the self-help center, there's a, there's
6	quite a wide range of topics. And this isn't necessarily for
7	somebody who is language impaired. This is anybody who's
8	looking for information about the Court system, correct?
9	MS. RICKARD: That's right.
10	HOST RYAN: So if I, if I needed to find out about how to
11	file a small claims, if I had a parking ticket, I could go on
12	and find out how to handle that.
13	MS. RICKARD: That's right. We have information about
14	housing, families, so guardianship issues, all, a whole host
15	of different issues.
16	It's kind, the self-help page on the website also has an
17	interactive piece. So on the right hand side of the, of that
18	page, you can access the law library website.
19	And the law librarians actually have five different ways
20	that you can reach them. You can do online chat. You can
21	text. You can email. You can call. Or of course you can go
22	into their, to the law libraries which are all around
23	Massachusetts, and they'll help provide even more self-help
24	information about different legal areas.
25	HOST RYAN: And again, it's Access to Justice is providing

legal information but not legal advice? 1 MS. RICKARD: Of course. 2 HOST RYAN: And the other thing that I, I noticed about 3 Access to Justice is limited assistance representation. 4 5 What, what does that mean? MS. RICKARD: So one of the things that folks struggle with 6 7 and the reason why we see so many people without lawyers in the Courts is that people just can't afford a lawyer. 8 9 But, so if people are not eligible for legal aid which is 10 free, a free lawyer, or if they can't afford a lawyer, 11 sometimes folks think that they have to go it alone. 12 But limited assistance representation is this kind of 13 middle ground where you can pay an attorney for just a part of the case, so it's a little bit more affordable. And it's, 14 15 requires a little bit more communication with the lawyer to 16 figure out just what part the lawyer's going to help you with. Are they going to go in on a hearing? Are they going to 17 help you write a document? Are they just going to give you a 18 19 little bit of legal advice? 20 But for each of those things, you can actually have an 21 attorney give you some real legal advice and pay a much 22 smaller fee than you world for having someone represent you 23 for the full case. 24 HOST RYAN: And I notice that some people do go pro se which 25 means?

1	MS. RICKARD: Which means that they don't have a lawyer.
2	
	HOST RYAN: They don't have a lawyer.
3	MS. RICKARD: So pro se or self-represented or unrepresented
4	are a lot of the terms that we use.
5	HOST RYAN: And you try to help them by giving them
6	information if they're for instance filing for a small claims
7	case?
8	MS. RICKARD: That's right. So in addition to the, the
9	forms and the self-help information on the website about small
10	claims, we actually have videos, self-help videos for people
11	to learn how to do the process by themselves.
12	So if you don't have a lawyer, it's really helpful to see
13	what it's going to look like when you go into Court and what's
14	going to happen when you get there.
15	HOST RYAN: So with limited assistance representation, it's
16	where a lawyer comes in and helps like in a, a part of their
17	legal business, as you say. It might be a document. It might
18	be just giving out some information and
19	MS. RICKARD: That's right. And that's something that each
20	lawyer and the person who is hiring that lawyer negotiate
21	together.
22	HOST RYAN: And are there lawyers in the courthouses for
23	this? Or do they have to contact various agencies?
24	MS. RICKARD: So different, some of the Courts actually have
25	lists of which attorneys are certified to be limited

1	assistance attorneys.
2	So, or County Bar Association, so you can call your County
3	Bar Association, and they have a lawyer referral service, and
4	you can ask for a limited assistance attorney, and they can,
5	they can give you some referrals.
6	HOST RYAN: I didn't know that.
7	Also you deal with ADA, Americans with Disabilities
8	compliance. And what exactly does Access to Justice try to do
9	for ADA?
10	MS. RICKARD: So part of 100 percent Access to Justice means
11	that people should be able to access the courthouse and be
12	able to have their disputes resolved regardless of any
13	disability that they might have.
14	So that includes physical disabilities. It includes mental
15	health issues. It includes mental impairments.
16	So for any of those areas, we're working on policies and
17	procedures to make sure that people have just as much access
18	to the Courts as everyone else.
19	HOST RYAN: In our office, the Office of Jury Commissioner,
20	we're always trying to make sure that if somebody is disabled
21	and they go to a courthouse that is handicap accessible, most
22	of them are now, nowadays, but we try to, you know, under ADA
23	try to accommodate them as much as we can.
24	And you were talking about the ability of, you know, people
25	to speak. We have three Spanish speakers on staff. We have a

1	Haitian Creole.
2	So I hope we're doing whatever we can for Access to Justice
3	and also, we have a, sometimes people are not only randomly
4	called for jury duty, they're randomly assigned. And
5	sometimes that courthouse, they cannot drive or they have no
б	access to public transportation. So we try to accommodate
7	them and get them to the closer location.
8	So
9	MS. RICKARD: That's great. I think from where I'm sitting
10	in the Access to Justice initiative, looking at the work that
11	the Jury Office is doing I think is really helpful for us to
12	see how we can make the Court system work better overall.
13	I think the Jury Office is always working to make things
14	more accessible and more convenient for people to serve on
15	jury duty, and we're trying to do the same thing for people
16	who have an active Court case.
17	HOST RYAN: And as I say, we have, as you know, all the
18	Court houses have an ADA coordinator.
19	MS. RICKARD: That's right.
20	HOST RYAN: And we also try to hear people, try to help
21	people who are hard of hearing. We have what's called
22	listening assistive devices that can be obtained in the
23	various courthouses. You know, they either contact us or
24	they, they apply online.
25	And just recently, you probably know, there's been a deaf

1	juror project which with the Mass Commission for the Deaf and
2	the Hard of Hearing has just launched within the last year or
3	so. So people who are severely or permanently hearing
4	impaired now have access to, you know, going to jury duty
5	which is
6	MS. RICKARD: That's incredible. I think it's so important
7	to have a real jury of your peers which includes everyone,
8	right? So that includes folks whether they have a disability,
9	whether they're hard of hearing.
10	So that's, that's really remarkable.
11	HOST RYAN: Yeah. So is, in a perfect world, do you
12	envision that people who come to Court, they'll be able to
13	navigate their way to Court, receive any and all pertinent
14	legal information, be able to complete Court forms, maybe
15	obtain limited representation, and get help if they have
16	trouble with English? Is that the perfect world?
17	MS. RICKARD: That's, that absolutely is our goal.
18	HOST RYAN: That's the whole access, the whole Access to
19	Justice Program.
20	MS. RICKARD: And I think we're getting closer to that every
21	day.
22	HOST RYAN: Okay.
23	Well, we've run out of time.
24	We'd like to thank you at home for watching Jury Duty: You
25	Make a Difference on BNN.

1	Just remember, if you have any questions regarding your
2	juror service, you can always go online at MAJury.Gov or call
3	the office us toll free at 1-800-THE-JURY, that's 1-800-843-
4	5879.
5	Just remember you do make a difference. Please serve when
6	called. It's important to all of us.
7	Thank you Erika.
8	MS. RICKARD: Thank you so much.
9	HOST RYAN: And thank you at home.
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1	For More Information Visit our Website JuryDuty.MAjury.gov or
2	call 1-800-THE-JURY, 1-800-843-5879
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