Helaine M. Barnett:

I will now turn the program over to Chris Schwartz, who is the Community Empowerment Advisor at LegalServer, and Libby Vazquez, who is the Director of Legal Services at the City Bar Justice Center.

Chris and Libby are moderating our Rapid Fire Tech opening plenary session, which has become a conference staple and favorite. The Rapid Fire Tech plenary consists of a number of "ignite-style" presentations, highlighting new technologies, which Libby and Chris will tell you more about.

I hope you will enjoy their presentation and I hope everybody enjoys the entire conference. Thank you.

Libby Vazquez:

Good afternoon if you're just joining us, and welcome to Rapid Fire Tech. During the session, panelists will present on their innovative technology initiatives. To learn more about the individual presenters, you can check out their bios that are linked into the conference agenda online.

After all the panelists have presented, we will address any questions that you have. We ask you to share your questions in the chat. The chat button is located on your toolbar, and for me on Teams, that's on the upper right hand of my screen. So please do ask questions.

As for CLE credit, a CLE code will be provided during the session. You must attend the entire session and complete and submit an online form within a week of the conference for credit. An email has gone out or will go out with information on CLE to all participants. Thank you.

Go ahead, Chris.

Chris Schwartz:

Okay. Thanks Libby. So first up, our first participant today in your appetizer of innovative tech projects is James Carey. James is an attorney and policy fellow at the Civil Justice Data Commons in Georgetown, coming to us from out of state, so welcome James. And I will begin your slides on your mark. As you know, this Rapid Fire is automatic, I'm pressing the button, but automatically advancing slides, so people are under a little bit of a time constraint here.

And James, when you are ready, let me know and we'll begin.

James Carey:

Yeah, let's go. As Chris said, I am James Carey from the Civil Justice Data Commons at Georgetown, which is a collaboration between our Massive Data Institute and our law school. We both have legal minds and data people working on the project, which is really helpful and leads us to do interesting things.

I'm sure the first thing you're thinking is, 'what is a data commons?' It's a secure repository of sensitive data from multiple sources that's accessible by outside researchers. It's from that data side and it's a concept that's been used in the past in dealing with medical data. When you have a lot of hospitals that you have data from and they don't share and talk between each other, but you want it all in one place, so it's really helpful for answering broad policy questions and getting into a lot of data.

It's really good for answering legal policy questions we think too, like 'how many Hispanic women are sued for eviction in Arizona?' Which seems like it would be a really simple question, but is actually sort of tricky to answer because court data are inaccessible, dirty, and incomplete.

I'm going to walk you through why we find court data to be problematic in these ways, and the reasons why it's hard to answer questions like this right now. And then how we've used tools from the data side and from the law policy side to try and address these issues to both make court data and court systems

more modernized and easier to use for research overall. And then also in our own work to help create these commons where researchers can come and try and answer a lot of policy questions like this.

I'm going to start off by talking about why court data is inaccessible, and there are a couple of questions that we have that come to us from courts and from researchers that really, I think get at the core of why all these ones and zeros that data is made out of are often locked in places that we can't get.

The first one that often comes from courts is, are they allowed to share the data? There's concerns from that, one, they might have restrictions from state or local laws or policies or are they violating privacy guidelines or things like that. They're also concerned about the resources to share it. As I'm sure everybody here knows, courts can be resource strapped, so can they even spare the people to help get this data out there? Both courts and researchers are also concerned about the data being understood, because maybe there are local nuances and they're worried about it being misinterpreted. And of course, can the data actually be worked with? Can we get it out of the place where it's just ones and zeros, and into cases that can be looked at as a researcher as humans moving through this system, which is really what we're focused on.

So, to address that first question- 'is it allowed to be shared?', thankfully most of the time the answer is yes. We do work helping courts clarify the data policies that apply to their data, and indeed many state policies encourage the sharing of this data for research.

Then courts want to know 'can we share it?' They don't have people to spare to create this data exchange, so we try to provide frictionless tech on the data side. We've got database administrators that help make it easy to transfer the data to us and make sure that courts don't have to worry about a lot of the other tech questions that follow from that.

And can the data be understood? This is where the legal research comes in. We provide localized legal context for a lot of the data elements that we receive, make sure it's connected to the data, so researchers know what that data is about, and to make courts more confident in sharing that data with researchers.

And then, as for 'can it be worked with?', a lot of times it is dirty data, so that's sort of the next step-making sure it's clean. A lot of court data comes from PDFs or forms entered in by a court clerk, and this means that names, addresses and other data can be messy. That can be for a couple of different reasons. One, if it's data entered from a court clerk or a plaintiff, you'd be surprised how much they don't actually know accurate information about defendants- how to spell names, what correct addresses are. Then it might also be systemic issues- like maybe addresses are just done differently in one place than another so it's hard for people to understand those. Maybe, in our example the Hispanic woman from Arizona, her last name is in two different words, but the system only allows one space, so you can't accurately represent her name. The data is inherently missing part of who she is.

So, to sort of solve those issues and make sure we know who each person moving through this system is, we do what's called entity resolution. And there's a lot of great other organizations, both academic and nonprofit, doing similar things in this space. We had a conference in the fall where we talked about a lot of different things that people are doing. And some of the things that we concentrated on are data standardization- for example making sure an address is in the same format no matter if you're in one part of a state or another jurisdiction. We implement machine learning, which is really exciting because we can take the data and look at where clusters might be and the machines can help us figure out, 'oh, this is a potential cluster, maybe this is the same person', help us clean the data by knowing what the actual truth of the data might be.

And along with that, we can cross-reference sources. Part of that comes from cross-referencing data across different jurisdictions to make sure that the data is clean, and also trying to fill in holes from

other places. The data does have holes. It's incomplete. Part of that is, like I said, different jurisdictions, because most jurisdictions don't talk to each other, even in a state. For example, one county might have a different case management system than another.

But then it's also things that just aren't collected in court data. Civil court data really doesn't have a lot of demographic information. Courts are trying to get better in this and try and tell that whole story of a person, but there's a lot of struggles. Sometimes that might come from self-identification, or identification by a court clerk, which is problematic because you're trying to get this information to solve bias, but people might not want to identify how they would in normal life because they've worried that it's going to make the system biased against them.

In order to fill in that data and really show a full picture of a person so we can answer policy questions, a big thing that we do is to link to other sources. One of the founders of the Civil Justice Data Commons, Amy O'Hara, came from the Census Bureau where she worked a lot on linkages, and we continue to do that work to link to sources like the census records, where we can use things like the Decennial Census and the American Community Surveys to basically package up a bunch of court data that we get, send it over securely, and then get back information about who the people in those records are, things like if someone is a woman, if someone is Hispanic, and can combine that data to answer a policy question.

We also link to other records. We've been looking at ways to link to things like medical records and hospital records, which can be really useful if you're trying to answer questions about how courts interact with medical debt and serve as agents of debt collection. Linking between different sources is really interesting and helpful to us to answer new policy questions that you can't do with just the court data.

So, what does the commons look like right now? We have over 30 jurisdictions, including several whole states, and we have a wide range of researchers that are working with that data – from answering questions about how dental debt collection works in the District of Columbia and Maryland, to how government eviction cases are run through in Philadelphia – so, lots of different things.

Another aspect of that is taking the things that we've learned from this work, both getting the data from courts and the process of doing research on that data, to contribute to other court modernization work – such as helping courts figure out how to work with their data better, helping initiatives like Georgetown's Judicial Innovation Fellows figure out how to best create opportunities for technologists to work in courts, and then what's the way that data should look to make it easiest for researchers to access?

The next steps from this are: working with more peer organizations and more courts to get more data to fill in a lot of those holes, to get more jurisdictions, and then building more linkages – both between the data that we have from different courts, and more frequent linkages with census to fill in more of that information – and then taking all of this and putting it to work for Access to Justice research. That includes the results of our data work, but then also the lessons that we've learned, as I said, putting it together.

So, we have a really helpful knowledge base that we put together with a lot of helpful resources. If you want to learn more about court data, come check it out. It's publicly accessible on our website. Thank you very much, Chris.

Chris Schwartz:

Thank you, James. Nicely done on time management there. We've got some questions that are coming into chat already hot and heavy for you, and we are going to have a Q&A session for the last 10 minutes of the Rapid Fire panel.

But right now, we're going to get right into our next presenters. Please join me in welcoming Carrie McCully and Nicole Kiker from Civil Justice, Inc., who are going to talk to us about the Maryland Justice Passport. And on your mark, my friends, I will begin the timer.

Carrie McCully:

All right, I think we're ready.

Chris Schwartz:

Great.

Carrie McCully:

So, what we were trying to do with the Maryland Justice Passport is to find an effective solution to, 'how does someone navigate the legal services community effectively?' 'How do you find legal help?' Litigants are very stressed and often traumatized. Many of them do not have experience in dealing with the legal service, so they don't know where to start.

In Maryland, we are very lucky in that we have a court help center, and a majority of clients or litigants start there. The court help centers offer brief legal advice in certain civil situations. Over 170,000 litigants went through court help centers in 2022 alone, so there's a large volume of people that are looking for next steps of what to do.

Navigating where to go can be extremely complicated, and then of course if you add in a stressed-out litigant, it makes it even more complicated. How well do you remember directions when you're stressed out trying to deal with a situation, like custody or child support or divorce or debt?

In Maryland, we're lucky that there are over 40 pro bono legal service organizations that offer assistance in a wide variety of issues. However, which one is the right service to go to? Many of them have different income qualifications, they serve different segments of the population, they have different geographical restrictions or legal issue restrictions. And legal problems don't exist in a silo. People need wraparound services such as housing counseling when dealing with foreclosure, credit counseling when dealing with economic problems, or even rental assistance, which is something we saw a lot of in relation to COVID. As a result of that, we created the Maryland Justice Passport.

The Maryland Justice Passport is a free, web-based technology that was created by my organization, Civil Justice, and A2J Tech, with funding from the Maryland Judiciary. The passport can be created in two ways. It can be created by an individual visiting our project website, mdjusticepassport.org, or it can be created by a partner organization such as the court help centers. They can create it for the litigant. The beauty of this technology is it is owned and then controlled by the litigant themselves. They can make the determination as to who has access to it and who they can share it with.

So, what does the passport contain? There are features such as a case summary. If the passport's been created by a partner organization such as the court help centers, there's a curated case summary. They are getting a very detailed case synopsis that focuses in on the heart of those issues and makes sure they're teeing that up correctly for the next organization to take a look at. There's also a task list. I also can sometimes call this an electronic sticky note of what to do next and I can check them off when it's done. It helps keep litigants organized. There is a calendar that will allow litigants to track important dates and deadlines related to their cases.

As I mentioned before, the passport can be shared. They can share individual pieces of the passport or the entire passport with other legal service organizations or some of those wraparound providers. It gives them an opportunity to see what's going on with their case and if the organization can provide the

assistance needed. Conflict check information is also crucial in relation to the sharing. You don't want to share a passport with an organization only to realize that there's a conflict, so we offer that first.

Nicole Kiker:

One way that we can understand how the passport works is to trace the trajectory of a passport user. Like Carrie mentioned, passports can be generated by the litigants themselves, by any of our partner organizations as well, but the majority will start out at the self-help centers in the courthouse. At the help center, one of the intake coordinators will fill out an online form to create a passport for the litigant, which is populated with all of the possible information that's at their disposal.

In addition to everything Carrie mentioned, there's also documents, and that document storage is really huge because I'm sure you've all met litigants who have their documents in a paper bag or in a folder, so this provides a secure place to store those documents.

However, the passport is created, they follow those green arrows to the passport platform itself, and it will contain all of the documents, tasks, referrals, everything that they need.

From there, we provide these referrals to all of our partner organizations. These are warm referrals, meaning that partners aren't just receiving a cold call from a litigant, they're receiving all of that information that's in the passport, and they can know all of that when they do reach out to that litigant. That saves the partner time on their intakes, and it also saves the litigant needing to repeat what are often traumatic experiences, so that way they can just dig right in and start working on the case.

Referrals also follow these purple arrows to pass between different types of organizations, so the litigant can actually build on the progress that they made with one organization. If they were having a debt collection case, they can then move on to credit counseling and the passport will reflect all of the progress they made in their case, which can then be built upon through credit counseling. Like Carrie said, people don't experience these issues in silos, and you don't want to have to reinvent the wheel every time you're going between these different service providers that Maryland is so lucky to have. Each time, they can record all of their progress and move on to the next one.

Organizations that provide services in Maryland have described receiving passports as getting referrals wrapped in a bow with all of the information that they need. That is because we work with each organization to determine their preferences and their requirements. This includes a lot of the things that Carrie mentioned, like what county does the case have to be in? Can they serve non-citizens? Are there income requirements that they need to know about? We record all of those criteria, and we provide pre-screen referrals. That means the organization already knows when they receive the passport that they can serve that litigant. That saves all of the time that they need to spend on an intake -both for the partner and the litigant- and they can just dig right in.

We can also kind of provide that nice purple bow by finding out in advance any files that partners need completed. Whether it's an intake form or a release of information or a consent -anything that partners need to fill out- when we give the passport to the litigant, it can already contain that file and we can use the 'tasks' feature to download, fill out and re-upload this form. That's something that the partner does not need to provide, and they can just get it from the passport.

The purpose of all of these features is to just take the burden off of the litigant to manage all of these different tasks while they're also dealing with some challenging cases, and also take the burden off of our partners, which are really going through a lot with intakes every single day. If there's anything that we can take off their plate, that's what we try to do via the passport. That way progress can just start as quickly as possible and be maintained and be built upon as referrals go between different organizations, they can take their passport with them, which kind of speaks to why we needed that in the first place.

And we can continually update all of these preferences for our partners. If their points of contact change, if they add a new form to their process, then we keep that bow tied up nice and tight.

The numbers I would say speak for themselves. Since the Maryland Justice Passport's creation in 2020, more than 1500 passports have been created for litigants, with these numbers growing annually -and especially in the last quarter, as you can see in this chart- since we've begun making rental assistance referrals for Baltimore City via the passport.

On the right here, you can see that passport referrals are split among a wide variety of legal issues. Pretty much every civil legal service issue can be served on the passport. Starting from the biggest slice and moving in descending order, we have landlord tenant issues, child custody, foreclosure, bankruptcy and credit issues, and divorce. And then continuing in descending order, some smaller ones are protection from abuse, child support, end of life planning, and 'other', which includes disability issues, education, or complex issues that might contain a lot of these different issues at once.

Aside from numbers, awards also speak pretty loudly. In 2022, the Justice Passport was honored with the Mid-Atlantic Association for Court Management's Neufeld Award, which honors innovative programs that improve service delivery and access to courts. Also in 2022, the Community Development Network of Maryland, which is not only a legal service organization, but also housing counselors and rental assistance, honored the Maryland Justice Passport as an industry game-changer, or a program that will make a lasting impact on community development and housing justice in the state. We were really grateful for both of these honors, and we really are excited to continue trying to bring different service providers together in a way that makes litigants' experiences a lot easier.

We have a lot more data visualization on our project website, which is mdjusticepassport.org, along with more information about how the project was developed, our partners, and contact information for the whole team.

Chris Schwartz:

And that's time.

Nicole Kiker:

Thank you so much.

Chris Schwartz:

There we go. Thank you. And as you said, the awards speak for themselves. You're also getting a lot of kudos in chat, and I think those speak for themselves as well.

Nicole Kiker:

Wow. I didn't even see that. Thank you, guys.

Chris Schwartz:

So, check it out, and again, we'll be answering questions towards the end of the session.

All right. Next up we have Professor Samuel Dahan, as well as David Liang, from the Conflict Analytics Lab coming to us from Canada, from Queen's University in Canada. They are going to talk to us today about some of the applications of AI in assisting people with legal matters. Let me know when you're ready to get started and I'll start the timer.

David Liang:

Thank you, Chris. We are ready to go.

Chris Schwartz:

Okay.

David Liang:

Hi, everyone. My name is David Liang, and with me today is Professor Samuel Dahan. As Chris mentioned, we are with the Conflict Analytics Lab. The lab is an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Faculty of Law, Business and Engineering at Queen's University. Today we'll present our project that we've been working on since the inception of the lab, called MyOpenCourt.

Now before we get into the details, we would like to turn your attention towards some background context into why we started this initiative. According to a report by the World Justice Project in 2019, 1.4 billion people suffer from unmet civil administrative justice needs, and only 29% of litigants sought any form of advice to understand or resolve the legal problem.

In Canada, over 55% of the population thinks that nothing can be done, are uncertain of their rights, do not know what to do, think that it costs too much, or simply are afraid. Even in cases that do make it to court, over 50% of the cases contain at least one self-represented litigant. In the US, it's roughly the same, where over 70% of civil, family, and landlord-tenant cases contain at least one self-represented litigant.

Ab Currie, a prominent Canadian researcher on the Canadian justice system, advocates for the use of community-based Access to Justice solutions. What this means is to empower individuals to play a more active role in constructing solutions to their justice problems. This is necessary because reforms of the legal system occur slowly and do not necessarily keep pace with the changing expectations of society. Therefore, there needs to be more efforts to provide alternative methods to address the Access to Justice concerns.

One such way is through the use of information technology. Information technology is a multifaceted solution that empowers both litigants with the information to resolve their legal issues independently, and it also empowers legal aid providers with a tool to improve their services.

Now, what is MyOpenCourt? Through MyOpenCourt, we seek to empower users with information to assess the feasibility of their case, using a combination of both simple decision trees and complex predictive analytics through the application of machine learning. To date, MyOpenCourt has attracted over 10,000 Canadian users. It's also interesting to note that there were a significant number of American users attempting to access our tools, emphasizing the demand for such services in the US.

While MyOpenCourt is mainly focused on employment law issues, our goal is to address all areas of law disproportionately affecting those in need. We noticed that, especially during COVID when mass layoffs and terminations were occurring, a substantial number of users wanted to understand, one, their legal entitlements, two, the viability of the claim, and three, how to take action, either directly themselves or through legal professionals from both public and private practice. Now we will show you two of our most popular tools and kind of demonstrate how we've addressed some of these three concerns.

In order to figure out the legal entitlement for corporate-related employment benefits, there needs to be an assessment of a worker's status. Similar to the US, Canadian contractors are not entitled to statutory employment benefits such as minimum wage, overtime, benefit payments, and termination entitlements such as notice, severance and so on. This is the very first tool that we built. We annotated over 700 court and tribunal decisions for a set of decision making criteria considered by adjudicators in

rendering a decision, and used that variety of statistical methods to draw a correlation for worker status.

Through this tool, users can answer a series of questions and be provided with a prediction of worker status at around 90% accuracy. When they answer our questionnaire, we'll provide them with a description of their entitlements, their work status, and a list of citations for the most common cases that are analogous to the situation, and as well as the summary of the results.

Users can do two things with these cases. One is to verify the relevance of our case law results, and two, use the information to build their own case. In the event they seek representation, we're able to refer them with their results directly to our partnered firms through our platform to expedite the client intake and preliminary research process, thereby reducing the overall billable cost.

Similarly, we also created a termination compensation calculator. While the name seems simple, the tool actually contains a guided pathway to determine what type of notice a worker is entitled to, for example statutory minimum, common law, or some unique form of notice, such as in the case of federal or unionized employees.

Through this tool they are able to generate a template demand letter, which they can send to their employers, which contains a breakdown of damages, and which also accounts for mitigating factors. Similar to the work classification tool, this can be used to pursue the claim independently, or it can be provided to a lawyer to expedite the legal work while minimizing the intake and research costs.

Now, there are several functions of direct-to-public legal tools, which is what we're trying to offer. As we mentioned first, MyOpenCourt can assess the feasibility of cases using predictive analytics, and this is only possible because we operate through an interdisciplinary collaboration with both the Business School and the Engineering School where we're able to share our knowledge and build these types of algorithms.

Two, MyOpenCourt serves to provide relevant legal information for users to build their case. It also acts as a prescreening mechanism to help legal service providers assess the case more efficiently. Users can provide their lawyers with the list of citing cases that we provide, and an outline of the factual matrix, thereby eliminating much of the groundwork involved in this initial intake stage.

Three, direct-to-public tools can also provide valuable information in terms of guiding the users on a procedural process and taking action. With enough users' interest, it can lead to new avenues to resolve disputes, including exploring judicial methods and alternative dispute resolution processes.

Now, this is a new current project that we're working on called OpenJustice. I'll leave it to Professor Dahan to tell us a little bit more about it.

Professor Samuel Dahan:

OpenJustice is a generative AI built upon ChatGPT-3.5. As many of you know already, there's been a lot of problems with using large language models when it comes to law. So, over the last three years we've been working on this. I mean, ChatGPT is not so new- large language models have been around for quite a while, and there's been some legal applications.

The idea of this platform is that it provides answers to both substantive and procedural questions posed by the user, but we've done it in a different way. What we're trying to do is to use a prime language model. It's a combination between guided pathways, if you will, questionnaires, so that we can prime a language model so that I can use the context before enabling natural language input interface. Why is that? Because prompt engineering is a complex task that many people are not, especially if they're not lawyers, they're not good at. Apparently prompt engineering is becoming a whole science on its own. So...

Chris Schwartz:

Oh, I think we lost the professor. Can you pick it up, David?

David Liang:

Yeah. So, for prompt engineering-

Professor Samuel Dahan:

... this is really the next step.

So, here's the early findings that we've been able to gather. It's more precise than the general language model. It hallucinates less, so this is the jargon of the computer scientist to say that it makes things up. It is more transparent, so we are capable of connecting the prompt with legal citation, relevant citation.

And finally, one finding that's not so great is that it's not good about legal reasoning. There's no evidence that legal reasoning is getting better, that it can grasp the complexity of legal concepts, but at the same time not losing hope because I believe that legal reasoning in many ways is statistical. We lawyers cherry-pick precedents from the past and tweak them into slightly new facts. So, I'm hopeful that a large language model can make progress in that regard.

Finally, there are still some challenges- privatization of data, unauthorized practice of law, and also when it comes to applying these tools to mediation agreements, it creates another level of complexity.

So, I think that's about it. I believe we've got time for questions, or we've got a little bit more time.

Chris Schwartz:

Yeah, that's great. You are right on time, and we are going to have one more presentation and then we'll open it up. I see there are some questions in chat already, so if you just wait for the end of the presentation, we'll open it up for Q&A. And presenters I notice are answering some of the questions in the chat. Feel free to do that. We're probably going to repeat those questions to the larger audience as well. I know Teams is a little confusing with, 'where's my chat window' and 'where's this' and 'where's that?' So, we'll make sure that we get those questions out to the larger audience.

And last but not least, obviously, our friends from Cornell and Cornell Law School. We've got Eliza Hong and Kyle Burrus up to talk to us about the tenant rights chatbot. And on your mark, I will start your timer.

Eliza Hong:

Sure. I'm ready.

Chris Schwartz:

Great.

Eliza Hong:

I'm really excited to be talking to everyone about the process for making this chatbot today. I started this chatbot back in August as part of a social entrepreneurship class. Since then, we've had some student volunteers and students in a Tenant Advocacy Practicum, including Kyle who's presenting with me today, work on the chatbot. As of yesterday, it is live, and you can go to ithacatenantresources.org and try it out yourself. But right now, I'm going to just show you how this works through a short video.

So, when you click on it in the website, it'll pop up similar to this and introduce itself. We're incorporating images and .gifs to maintain the user's attention, and acknowledgements for the possible unauthorized practice of law issue. We want to make sure they know we're not giving legal advice. And then we have a bunch of choices that come from the table of contents in the Tenants' Rights Guide that we drew the language from.

I'll show you just a few buttons that you can click on. As you can see, the user can kind of say what their situation is and it'll give you the relevant information. And at any point they can click on 'Contact Info' at the top and it'll lead to the link to the hotline, Tenants Legal Hotline, and the Tenants' Rights Guide.

Right now, it's part of the Tenant Advocacy Practicum and will be funded by the Experiential Learning Program at Cornell in the future. It's also part of the Tenants Legal Hotline, which is a local group. We drew the language from the Tenants' Rights Guide on the website and there is a hotline, but the hotline is often backed up and it could be months before someone's issue gets resolved. So, the chatbot makes it easy for a user to get the information that they need right away if it's a simple issue, and that leaves the hotline more free to deal with the more complex issues.

As you can see, the Tenants' Rights Guide is very comprehensive, but it takes a long time to scroll through all of them. A lot of tenants in this area are students, as I am and a lot of people at Cornell or college are, and the student is kind of unlikely to go through all of this information. Even if they do, it's hard to find what applies to them specifically. And as you know, students like to text, so we're kind of imitating that format with the chatbot to maintain the user's attention and for them to be able to get the information that they need more easily.

Why I created this is because I heard a lot about different stories of people finding black mold in their bathroom – causing asthma – and their landlord wouldn't let them fix it, or they couldn't get their security deposit back, or the heat was broken and they were heating up their house using their oven- very dangerous. Knowing about their legal rights could really help that.

Last summer when I was working for the Commission on Human Rights in New York City, we used technology tools like JustFix, and I learned how much more efficient legal aid could be through using technology. Someone from JustFix, Stephanie Rudolph, told me, "Maybe you can make a chatbot as a way of incorporating technology into the Ithaca area." So, we already had the Tenants' Rights Guide and these communities in place, and making a chatbot would be much more simple because there are no code builders out there that, say law students, could use.

Kyle Burrus:

Going more into how we built the bot- in trying to decide what program we're going to use, we contacted a few different people who do similar work. For example- Rentervention in Chicago, Unlock NYC, who although it deals with housing discrimination, uses Landbot as an intake form.

We, as Eliza already mentioned, really settled in on this one because of the lack of code necessary, as on the left you can see, it really just goes into the form of you can input a message to send to the user, ask a question or ask them to input some information. Depending on their response, it directs you into different branches that we have, and kind of just like a tree, branches out from there. Each of those different ones, if you click on it down the line on the right, it opens up a whole new window. So, we currently, at the beginning of the screening you might have seen in the video, have repairs covered, evictions, issues with leases, security deposits, discrimination in housing, disability accommodations, and a ton more.

After we decided on how to build it, the two main issues we were facing when building it, I think, were probably the unauthorized practice of law issue, just to ensure that we're not giving legal advice- we're

just helping people obtain it for themselves. We did that both with speaking to other companies who have created a similar thing, but also through professors in the experiential learning part of Cornell who have reviewed it to make sure everything that we're saying is correct, but also that we're doing in a format that is kind of somebody just more conversing with the bot than it is the bot describing the issues to them.

And then importantly as well, we obviously included the disclaimers that that's not what we're providing, which are also available on the website next to the chatbot itself, which is kind of all on the same website we got everything that's in it as well. So, it's information that was kind of already out there for people, but just making it more easily accessible.

And to go again just into what Eliza was talking about, we just noticed throughout our community, both in students but in people just here in general, there's a big housing crisis and not just as a shortage, but there are, in the condition that a lot of the houses are in, a lot of issues. And so in building it, we really wanted to get feedback from the community. And even though it went live today, we have had a bunch of user testing done where we have solicited feedback from other students or other people in the area facing housing discrimination issues and had them run through the bot and see if they were able to find help for what they were needing and give us additional feedback and things that it might be missing in areas of law to cover about things that they faced.

It also included just things about how to make it more conversational. I think that legal writing or just legally it can sometimes be a bit confusing for people not too familiar with it, and so we really wanted to go out and get people from the area's feedback on how we can improve it. And it also, when you go through the bot, gives an option for user feedback so that we can continue to add those and make those adjustments as it lives on.

Eliza Hong:

Yeah. So, for example- what we did with the other students, they would say, "Oh, at this part there's too much information and it's too convoluted." So, then we could see, 'oh, this makes sense to me' because I've been staring at it for three days, but we can make this information more concise. Especially when a law student says that you know we definitely need to make it more friendly to the layperson.

That kind of user testing can also be done in the future with larger groups and with someone narrating their experience as they go through the bot. And so they'll say, "Maybe it'd be good for a link to be included here to the law or to an existing resource where the tenant can draft a letter to their landlord." And so that user testing is part of what we're going to work on next year, especially now that we're officially part of the Tenants Advocacy Practicum- we can have the students in that practicum test the chatbot as we go through different iterations.

We're also going to try to collaborate with more local groups such as the Ithaca Tenants Union and Ithaca Housing Collective, because the tenants are already going to them for their problems, and we can really make it based in the community and user-centered.

The other area where we can do more user research is the Landbot's analytics feature, because now that people like you can go in and use it, we can see, for example, when a user drops off. And if a lot of users drop off at a certain point, then we can go into that point and see, 'oh, maybe we need to change this' and 'there's not enough buttons, we need to create another option for someone to click on', for example.

But then the second area of expansion is collaborating with nonprofits or legal aid organizations like ones that you all might be working for. So, if you think that our chatbot is something that would be good on your website or maybe incorporate with resources for tenants on your website, then please contact

us and we can collaborate with you and have it kind of branch out to different legal aid organizations. That way it can also be a kind of center place for a tenant to go to and have different links to resources that are already existing, instead of them having to Google it and find the different websites themselves.

Chris Schwartz:

And that's time. Thank you, Eliza. Thank you, Kyle. Very, very nicely timed and awesome program. Lots of enthusiasm in the chat.

Folks, here is the contact information. First of all, I know we probably can't hear your applause, but I would deeply like to thank all of the speakers today. You folks all did a great job. Here's their contact info. You'll be able to see about some of their projects at their websites, if not try out some of their projects themselves.

We've got some questions that came in through the chat. We're going to get to those now. And in just a moment or two, we're going to display the CLE code.

The first couple of questions came in, James, for you. Basically, the gist of them were, are you operating in New York State yet or in New York City yet? If you're not, what kind of partnerships are you looking for, if you are looking for any?

James Carey:

Yeah. We're not operating yet with any New York data, but we have been working in partnership with different organizations in New York who are doing similar research to us. We are always open and looking for more data, including New York data. And if you have a line into New York court data and want to share it with the Commons, let me know.

Chris Schwartz:

There might be one or two people at this very conference who have a line or two, have a thread you can pull.

For the Maryland Justice Passport, there was a great question about if you're working with any LSC-funded organizations, specifically Legal Aid Bureau of Maryland? And if so, does the passport account for the wonderfully simple LSC screening for your clients? Is that something that you need to do? Do you hand over a warm, 'this is an LSC case' sort of referral?

Carrie McCully:

That's a great question. There is a detailed answer in the chat, but we do work with Maryland Legal Aid, which is the only LSC-funded organization in Maryland. We work with them specifically in a few case types- housing, bankruptcy and...

Nicole Kiker:

And expungement.

Carrie McCully:

And expungement. Thank you. And we work with another organization, the Maryland Center for Legal Assistance who operates the court help centers. They actually do some of the prescreening as well to make sure that those warm referrals that go to Legal Aid and our other partners are queued up and appear to meet the eligibility criteria as much as possible.

Chris Schwartz:

We had a question for the chatbot. Is the chatbot currently available in languages other than English?

Eliza Hong:

At this time, no. Because this is our first iteration, right now we're dealing that by just including links to articles in Spanish. But hopefully we can do that in the future.

Chris Schwartz:

Gotcha. Thank you.

Libby Vazquez:

Chris, I just had a question. I think the chatbot panel touched on this, but I was thinking about readability and language levels. They're often overlooked, both in terms of questions asked and information given. What, if anything, did you do to adjust your language to your client population? Did you use applications such as WriteClearly? And this is for any of the panelists who want to take this question.

Kyle Burrus:

So at least in the chatbot, we hadn't. We'd just done it through primarily user testing. I think that in using a chatbot in general, we tried to keep it as brief as possible. I think that in an interaction where you're responding back and forth, we don't want to read paragraphs of texts, so we just tried to maintain it as conversational.

But I think that it's definitely something we can do moving forward. We were kind of more concerned about getting this up and running as quickly as possible and then maintaining and making adjustments as we go.

Chris Schwartz:

How does language level factor into the work that the folks that are working with AI are doing at Queen's University? Professor, if you're talking, you are muted.

Professor Samuel Dahan:

I'm muted, sorry. So, we've actually taken a different approach. The main problem with large language models is relying too much on prompt engineering. It's already hard for experienced lawyers. So, I think now we are using something called prime models, which is basically a combination of guided pathways. It's bad for flexibility, but at least it forces users to find the right questions and it doesn't really give so much room for hallucinations and bad questions that will usually lead to bad answers.

So, the way to go for now is guided pathways and questionnaires. I think it's the best way to help users to stay focused on the right problem.

Chris Schwartz:

Great, thank you. And Professor and David, I know that you've seen some users based in the United States reach out and try to use your resources. Is that a possibility of you partnering with any organizations in the United States or sharing some of the work that you've done at some point?

Professor Samuel Dahan:

Yeah, absolutely. In fact, out of the 50,000 users, I think surprisingly half of them are Americans. So, it seems that there's a lot of need for employment law information requests in the US.

I think the next step- I'm also teaching a course at Cornell, so there's a chance that we are going to expand our legal tech clinic to Cornell next year. So, I'm talking to my colleagues, the Experiential Learning Division, and we're hoping to expand to first New York and then California. We've already gathered the data. We just need the resources to deploy the tech in the US.

Chris Schwartz:

That is super exciting to hear. And honestly, it seems like there's a lot of synergy between all of the projects that we heard today. I'm sure that, as the premiere panel today, in terms of expanding technology to increase access to justice, seeing in the future for future conferences how these systems are going to interlink and operate within the legal services world is very, very exciting.

So, thank you again to the panelists for working under pressure, for doing great with time and for presenting this information. I know we've got a hot chat, which I love. If you've got questions, please use their contact information, reach out to folks, and let's get some more projects started.

Thank you everyone. Great job. And we'll turn it back over to the emcee.