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Utah Supreme Court announces new project aimed to help people access free legal advice on housing issues

SALT LAKE CITY, UT - The Utah Supreme Court's Office of Legal Services Innovation, in partnership with Innovation 4 Justice (i4J), an access-to-justice lab associated with both the University of Arizona and the University of Utah, announce a groundbreaking project. The project aims to empower community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide free, reliable, limited-scope legal advice on housing issues to the people they serve by participating in the Court's legal regulatory sandbox (the Sandbox).

Housing instability is a significant challenge in Utah and across the nation, and many people facing eviction and foreclosure have difficulty accessing legal help. The new Housing Stability Legal Advocate (HSLA) Pilot Program will train and certify nonlawyers working within CBOs as HSLAs, bridging the gap in access to justice for vulnerable populations.

i4J will offer a free HSLA curriculum and certify individuals who complete the program with satisfactory scores. Once certified, HSLAs will provide free, limited-scope legal advice on housing-related issues through CBOs authorized to practice in the Sandbox. i4J will also continue to support participating CBOs with legal mentoring and assistance in complying with the Sandbox's regulatory requirements.

The Utah Supreme Court has issued a Standing Order authorizing the HSLA Pilot Program. This order allows i4J-certified HSLA providers and their CBO employers to operate within a safe harbor, protecting them from enforcement actions based on the unauthorized practice of law, provided they comply with the Standing Order, the regulatory requirements of the Office of Legal Services Innovation, and all other applicable state and federal statutes and regulations.

The HSLA Pilot Program will focus on four key areas:

- Issue spotting for housing stability issues during CBO client intake

- Providing legal advice and assistance with identified housing issues before they advance to court
- Providing legal advice and assistance with post-judgment procedures
- Providing legal advice and assistance related to other state and federal assistance programs

It is important to note that HSLAs are not authorized to represent others in any Utah state court at this time.

This innovative approach to addressing housing issues is a significant step forward in the Supreme Court's efforts to bridge the access to-justice gap. By leveraging the expertise of CBOs and providing necessary training and support, the HSLA Pilot Program has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of those facing housing instability in Utah.

For more information about the Housing Stability Legal Advocate Pilot Program please visit <https://www.innovation4justice.org>.

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