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**The Use and Effectiveness of
Videoconferencing Equipment at
Pine Tree Legal Assistance**

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Submitted by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Findings	1
I. The PTLA Videoconferencing System	5
II. Uses of the System	6
III. Effectiveness for Meetings and Trainings	9
IV. Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Trainings	11
V. Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences	12
VI. Other Uses	17
VII. Conclusion	18

Summary of Findings¹

Use of Equipment

Since October 2001, Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA) has had videoconferencing equipment in of its six offices. The equipment has been used regularly since it was installed, typically several times a week for a total of roughly six hours. In some weeks the equipment has been used as much as 15 hours or more. PTLA management reports that there is frequent competition for scheduling use of the system.

The equipment has been used primarily for internal PTLA meetings and conferences, most often for the following:

- Case intake meetings, typically involving staff from one of PTLA's smaller offices and supervisors in either Portland or Bangor
- Meeting of the Volunteer Lawyer Project linking its principal office in Portland and outreach office in Bangor
- PTLA substantive task forces and committees
- Management and union meetings
- Training programs
- Meetings involving external committees and groups in which PTLA staff participate
- PTLA Board meetings
- Case consultations among advocates.

Less frequently, the equipment has been used for:

- Attorney-client consultations
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for hearing-impaired clients
- Administrative hearings.

PTLA also makes the equipment available for rental by outside groups, generating income that will help defray the cost of the system. Income in 2003 will exceed the \$3000 that PTLA anticipated in its budget for the year.

Meetings and Trainings: Impact and Effectiveness

There is broad agreement among PTLA management and staff that the videoconferencing equipment has had a major positive impact on the program. Most significantly, the equipment has been very effective in:

- Reducing travel expenses and making the program more efficient by saving time that would have been otherwise spent on travel between offices.

¹ The report was prepared as a supplement to the *Final Evaluation Report on the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project*, by Robert Echols and Karen Monahan, December 2003.

- Promoting better coordination among offices and improving program management by making it easier to hold meetings.
- Improving supervision and mentoring by making it easier for advocates to confer and co-counsel on cases.
- Improving training by making it easier to have training sessions involving staff from widely separated offices.
- Increasing program cohesion and morale by making it easier for staff in all PTLA offices, most importantly those in remote locations, to keep in touch with one another on a regular basis.

More broadly, users (including users who are not PTLA staff) believe that the equipment has been effective in:

- Supporting other civil legal assistance programs in Maine with training programs and opportunities to participate in substantive task forces.
- Supporting groups involved in expanding access to justice in the state and promoting the development of a “state justice community” in Maine and a sense of connection with PTLA on the part of members of the judiciary and private bar, by bringing them into PTLA offices for meetings.

Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Training

The principal factors contributing to the effectiveness of videoconferencing for meetings and training at PTLA are as follows:

- The configuration and administrative structure of PTLA offices is well suited to frequent use of videoconferencing for meetings and training:
 - Six offices with two hub offices
 - Distance between offices
 - Number of small offices
 - Management structure and distribution of expertise around the program
 - Possible for all staff to meet via video relatively easily.
- PTLA has many meetings and conferences involving two or more offices, so there are many occasions for use of the videoconferencing equipment; because it is used regularly, staff are familiar with its operation, perceive its usefulness, and do not hesitate to make use of it. Use of the equipment for meetings and training has become part of the program’s culture.
- The equipment is on-site at PTLA offices; staff members at each office are familiar with maintaining and operating it and technical staff are generally available for troubleshooting.

Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences

PTLA has used videoconferencing for attorney-client conferences less than originally expected. This is consistent with the experience of other programs.

Two PTLA attorneys have used videoconferencing very effectively for conferences with clients to prepare testimony before court appearances:

- A domestic violence specialist in the Portland office regularly used videoconferencing to confer with clients at a shelter in Bath.
- An attorney in PTLA's Bangor office used videoconferencing for conferences with two clients, using remote units at PTLA's Machias office and a hospital in Lubec.

Their experiences indicate that videoconferencing is effective for attorney-client conferences where three factors are present:

- There is a benefit over a telephone conference (typically witness preparation).
- Travel for an in-person conference would impose a burden on the attorney or client.
- The videoconference can be arranged conveniently.

The balance of benefit and convenience will be determinative. Using videoconferencing for initial intake interviews is unlikely to be effective because in many cases there will be little benefit above a telephone interview and it will be less convenient. Once a need for a visual component to the attorney-client interaction has been established, then videoconferencing may be an effective option.

In general, client acceptance does not appear to be a barrier. While some programs have reported attorney reluctance to use videoconferencing, this does not seem to be an issue at PTLA, where attorneys use videoconferencing regularly for other purposes, feel comfortable with the medium, and appreciate its value.

PTLA could increase the effective use of videoconferencing for client conferences by:

- Increasing staff awareness of the successful use of videoconferencing by PTLA attorneys.
- Establishing protocols for using existing videoconferencing units at hospitals, clinics, or other sites in some key locations around the state, rather than leaving it to the attorney involved to locate and make arrangements to use equipment at a remote site on an as-needed basis.

Until the cost of videoconferencing equipment becomes more affordable, purchase and support of additional units for the limited purpose of attorney-client conferences is probably not warranted, with the possible exception of domestic violence

shelters. Given the successful experience with the Portland-Bath conferences, replication of this capacity at other shelter or advocacy sites should be effective. PTLA and domestic violence agencies or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence should explore whether grant funding might be available to purchase additional videoconferencing units to locate in shelters or advocacy offices. The equipment could also be used for trainings and meetings of the domestic violence community.

Other Uses

American Sign Language Interpretation. While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for deaf clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date (one use over a six-month period) indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal.

Administrative Hearings. Use of videoconferencing for this purpose is likely to increase as videoconferencing capacity is expanded at state and federal agencies.

Courts. PTLA's leadership in the use of videoconferencing has increased interest in the potential uses of the medium within the court system. PTLA's involvement in court discussions about potential uses will benefit low-income people in the state.

Other Partnerships. The availability of the videoconferencing capacity at PTLA has promoted the development of relationships with other institutions dealing with low-income people in the state, such as health care providers, by putting PTLA in touch with those entities to discuss possible videoconferencing-based collaborative projects, even where those projects have not yet been developed. These relationships have potential for benefiting PTLA's client community.

Conclusion

PTLA's videoconferencing system has had a major positive impact on the program, particularly for uses involving meetings and training sessions, which indirectly benefit clients by making the program more efficient and effective. Under current circumstances, the potential for effective use of the system for interviews and conferences with clients is less than was originally anticipated (limited primarily to witness preparation); however, PTLA could more fully exploit this limited potential. As videoconferencing becomes more affordable and more widely used, the potential for use of videoconferencing in expanding client access to services is likely to increase.

I. The PTLA Videoconferencing System

The Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA) video conferencing system consists of ISDN-based Polycom video conferencing units with 35" monitors in each of PTLA's six offices: Portland, Augusta, Lewiston, Bangor, Presque Isle and Machias. The equipment in Portland and Bangor was funded as part of the 2000 TOP grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce for the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project.² The equipment in the remaining Pine Tree office locations (Augusta, Lewiston, Presque Isle and Machias) was funded with a 2001 Legal Services Corporation Technology Innovation Grant (TIG).³

PTLA's videoconferencing system allows point-to-point conferencing between any two locations and multi-point conferencing between up to four offices through PTLA's hub locations in Portland and Bangor. (All six offices can be linked at an additional cost.)

Portland is Pine Tree's administrative center, largest office, and home of the Volunteer Lawyers Project, Maine's *pro bono* program, operated by Pine Tree in partnership with the Maine Bar Foundation. For this reason, by far most videoconferences include the Portland location, whether the calls originate there or not. Portland is 296 miles from Presque Isle and 133 miles from Bangor, PTLA's other hub office. Regional Directing Attorneys with supervisory responsibility over other offices are located at either Bangor or Portland. Augusta is the state capital and site of the offices of two other civil legal aid providers, Legal Services for the Elderly and Maine Equal Justice. Presque Isle is a two-attorney office that serves the largest and most remote region of the state; it is 163 miles from Bangor. The other two offices (Lewiston and Machias) are currently minimally-staffed outreach offices.

² Videoconferencing was also available in PTLA's outreach office in Rockland for several months. The equipment was originally intended to go in the office of New Hope for Women, one of the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project's test sites. However, New Hope for Women decided it did not have an appropriate space for the equipment and it was placed in the PTLA outreach office instead. The office is not currently staffed.

³ The TIG grant also contemplated expansion of the videoconferencing network into healthcare facilities, working with staff at the Maine TeleMedicine System, which served as the vendor for the videoconferencing units and ISDN lines. (The Maine TeleMedicine System was originally created to support use of videoconferencing for diagnostic purposes in healthcare facilities around Maine.) The goal of the revised grant was to create partnerships with various healthcare facilities that would support direct client intake with Pine Tree locations. Before that goal could be realized, internal staff disputes at Maine Telemedicine System led to the departure of the original MTS team with which Pine Tree had been working and it became clear that this goal would not be realized within the two year period originally contemplated by the 2001 grant. Effective October 1, 2003, Pine Tree severed its remaining contractual relationships with Maine TeleMedicine System.

II. Uses of the System

At PTLA's Portland office, a log has been maintained of videoconferencing use since the original system was acquired in the fall of 2001. The log appears to be relatively complete, although interviews with staff indicate that they do not always remember to complete the log. At other PTLA offices, logs have been maintained far less regularly.

Taken together, the logs indicate that PTLA has used the equipment regularly since it was installed, typically several times a week for a total of roughly six hours. In some weeks the equipment has been used as much as 15 hours or more. PTLA management reports that there is frequent competition for scheduling use of the system. Use of the system is scheduled through the program's electronic calendaring system.

The Portland log alone documents more than 244 videoconferences involving the Portland location, usually along with at least one other Pine Tree office location as well, during the two-year period ending September 30, 2003. Partial year entries in other office locations suggest that the Bangor office was involved in videoconferences with at least one other Pine Tree location 160 times during the same two-year period. The Augusta office location was the next most frequent participant in videoconferences, participating an estimated 140 times during the two-year period. Lewiston logs indicate a total of 98 uses during this period, primarily for case meetings with Portland; and Presque Isle and Machias for an estimated 72 times at each location, typically for case meetings or staff support from Bangor.

The videoconferencing system has supported a wide range of uses over the past two years. The log for the Portland office indicates that during the one-year period from October 1, 2002, through September 30, 2003, the system was used for the following purposes (number in parentheses indicate the number of sessions logged in for this use in the Portland logs; because this number does not include the information from the other office logs, it understates program-wide use):

- Case and staff meetings, usually involving the Augusta office, which is jointly managed with Portland. (41)
- Substantive law task forces (including the family law task force, the benefits task force and the housing task force) involving Pine Tree and Main Equal Justice. These task forces grew out of a 2002 staff retreat focused on re-energizing Pine Tree's systemic advocacy. They were specifically designed to utilize the efficiency of the videoconferencing system; the old substantive law task forces had stopped meeting in the mid-1990's because of the drain on staff time and program funding that was required for travel. (14)
- Volunteer Lawyers Project staff meetings. The VLP is based in Portland but added an outreach office in Bangor in 2000. In addition to regular staff meetings between the two office locations, the VLP used the system to conduct interviews with prospective applicants for the VLP Project Director position this past spring. (10)

- Meetings relating to internal program management, including meetings of Pine Tree's internal Project Advisory Committee (in which staff representatives from the local offices and unions provide input to the management team on various program issues), meetings of just the program managers, and meetings related to collective bargaining or other union business. (12)
- Meetings of the PTLA Board of Directors. The first Board meeting held by videoconference took place when a snowstorm threatened travel to the Board's usual location in Augusta; 16 Board members were able to participate in that Board meeting in February, and the April meeting was then rescheduled as a videoconferenced meeting, with equally high attendance. The Board recently agreed to hold all winter board meetings via videoconference based on the success of this approach. Two separate board trainings were also held via videoconference, one focused on the LSC regulations and the other on understanding the Pine Tree budget. (6)
- Statewide training sessions, several of which involved other legal services organizations, such as Maine's Legal Services for the Elderly. By using the Portland location to anchor the training sessions, the cost of using out-of-state trainers (travel and time) was minimized, as well as the costs of Pine Tree staff participation in the training events. Three of these events also satisfied Maine's Continuing Legal Education requirement for all attorneys and were directed at private attorneys interested in providing *pro bono* services. (7)
- Meetings of various legal aid state planning groups, including the Advisory Committee of Providers, committees of the Justice Action Group, the Volunteer Lawyers Project Advisory Board of the Maine Bar Foundation, and other statewide policy and advisory boards and committees. These include judges and private attorneys as well as legal aid staff. On at least one occasion, videoconferencing made possible a presentation by a leader from outside the state to a Justice Action Group Committee. (16)
- Conferences with clients, primarily supporting interviews with domestic violence victims in sheltered locations. (8)
- Provision of American Sign Language interpretation for a deaf client using the videoconference connection with an ASL interpretation service in Scarborough. (1)
- An administrative hearing (a PET involving a special education proceeding) involving a Pine Tree client. (1)

PTLA has also used videoconferencing to provide training to other entities. For example, it conducted training on collection and preservation of evidence and maintenance of medical records in cases of domestic violence to staff at a hospital in Caribou, Maine. This training would not have been otherwise available to the staff of this remote hospital, more than 300 miles from the office where the domestic violence litigation and training staff is located.

In addition, PTLA has leased use of the system to the private bar and other groups.⁴ A statewide committee of the Maine State Bar Association holds its monthly meeting via videoconference between Portland and Augusta; and Consumers for Affordable HealthCare, a nonprofit foundation based in Augusta, uses the system regularly for meetings.

⁴ The one commercial videoconferencing center in Maine charges \$325 per hour for use of its system (which is of slightly higher quality than PTLA's system). Pine Tree makes use of its systems available to the private bar for between \$125 and \$150 per hour per site. For the non-profit community, the cost is between \$65 and \$85 per hour.

III. Effectiveness of Videoconferencing for Meetings and Training

PTLA staff and other users agree that videoconferencing is more effective than telephone conferencing for meetings and training. The visual element added by videoconferencing makes communications easier and increases the level of engagement of the participants.⁵ In some situations, videoconferencing has made possible events (particularly training sessions) that could not have been conducted effectively by telephone conferencing.

The development of the videoconferencing capacity has had a major positive impact on PTLA. It has reduced travel costs and made the program more efficient by saving time that would have been otherwise spent on travel between offices. Management-related meetings are held more frequently, promoting coordination and effective management.

The impact of videoconferencing has been particularly strong on the program's legal work. It has promoted high-quality legal work by increasing the level of supervision and mentoring (by making it easier for advocates to confer and co-counsel on cases), training (by making it easier and less expensive to have training sessions involving staff from widely separated offices), and coordination and collaboration. Many of the events conducted through videoconferencing would not have taken place but for the availability of this capacity: for example, restoring regular substantive task force meetings was a direct consequence of the development of the videoconferencing capacity. In addition, trainers from outside the program who might not otherwise have been available have been able to share their knowledge with PTLA staff. For example, two U.S. attorneys presented a training session on federal domestic violence law.

More broadly, videoconferencing has boosted program morale and cohesion by making it easier for staff in all PTLA offices, most importantly those in remote locations, to keep in touch with one another on a regular basis. For example, occasional "patchwork meetings" are organized at which each office makes a short presentation on something that is going on in the office that would be of interest to other staff. Newer staff at Presque Isle, PTLA's most remote office, say that the training and orientation made available through videoconferencing when they joined the program was invaluable both in conveying information and in making them feel connected to the rest of the program.

It is difficult to quantify the savings in time and mileage reimbursement resulting from use of the system because so many meetings are scheduled that might not otherwise have occurred. PTLA suggests that a conservative estimate would be that the videoconferencing system is saving the program a minimum of \$10,000 per year in

⁵ The only problem that was identified is that when more than two points are involved in the conference, one site occasionally loses its connection. This happens relatively frequently: one user estimated that it occurs during one out of every four meetings involving more than two points. When it happens, it is disruptive for the meeting. However, users are generally happy with the way the system functions, despite this problem.

mileage reimbursement alone and is freeing up an estimated 750 hours of staff time previously spent on travel to meetings, almost equivalent to 50 percent of a full-time attorney position.⁶

Moreover, Pine Tree is generating income by leasing its system to the private bar and other non-profits. The program budgeted \$3000 in income from this source for this year; actual income will be in the range of \$5000. This income will help subsidize the system-wide cost of \$21,600 per year going forward. It is likely that there will be increasing demand for videoconferencing depositions and remote hearings as time passes.

PTLA's videoconferencing capacity also benefits the other legal aid programs in the state, which participate in trainings and task forces. In addition, it has supported the work of groups involved in expanding access to justice in the state and promoted the development of a "state justice community" in Maine and a sense of connection with PTLA on the part of members of the judiciary and private bar by bringing them into PTLA offices for meetings.

⁶ For example, prior to the launch of the videoconferencing system, Pine Tree held four to six staff meetings a year in Augusta to discuss internal program management issues at an average cost of \$500/meeting for 10-12 participants in mileage reimbursement alone, not including staff travel time of between 2-4 hours per person per meeting. The monthly VLP advisory meetings also required Pine Tree staff to travel to Augusta from Portland 6 times per year, at a projected cost of \$80 per meeting and 4 hours per meeting. Training events involving 20-25 staff from a minimum of 4 Pine Tree offices traveling to a single location (again, typically in Augusta) would incur an estimated \$1000 per training in mileage reimbursement and an estimated 60 hours of travel per training. Staff participation in the other types of activities referenced in the videoconferencing logs would involve an estimated additional \$2,500 in mileage reimbursement each year and an estimated 200 hours of travel time

IV. Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Training

The configuration and administrative structure of PTLA offices is particularly well suited to frequent use of videoconferencing for meetings and training. The program has six offices. There are two hub offices, Portland and Bangor, located at a distance from one another. Regional Directing Attorneys at these two offices supervise staff at outlying offices. It is easy for staff in four offices to be connected by videoconferencing and relatively easy for all staff to gather at four offices (the two smallest offices are within reasonable driving distance from one of the other offices: Lewiston-Portland, 30 minutes; Machias-Bangor, 90 minutes).

PTLA has many meetings and conferences involving two or more offices, so there are many occasions for use of the videoconferencing equipment. Because it is used regularly, staff are familiar with its operation, perceive its usefulness, and do not hesitate to make use of it. Use of the equipment for meetings and training has become part of the program's culture.

The equipment is on-site at PTLA offices. Staff members at each office are familiar with maintaining and operating it and technical staff are generally available for troubleshooting.

Other groups in Maine share many of the same characteristics as PTLA. The development of a videoconferencing capacity could have a similar benefit to them. The domestic violence community is one example. Legal aid programs with a similar configuration could also benefit from development of a videoconferencing system.

V. Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences

In contrast to meetings and training events, PTLA's videoconferencing capacity has been used only occasionally for conferences and interviews with clients at remote sites. Because one of the major challenges facing PTLA is the delivery of services to remote areas of the state, this would appear to be an important potential use of videoconferencing.

PTLA's experience in this regard is consistent with that of the *Legal Aid Society of Hawaii*, which has had a videoconferencing system in place for three years. The designers of the system expected that its primary value would be in expanding access for clients. However, the system has been used only occasionally for client conferences, while it has been extensively for internal meetings.⁷

The PTLA attorneys who have used videoconferencing to confer with clients report that the clients have been satisfied with the experience. Reports from other programs also indicate that clients generally feel comfortable with the medium, associating it with watching television rather than an unfamiliar use of technology.⁸ Thus client acceptance does not appear to pose a barrier to use of video for this purpose.

Videoconferencing has been used at PTLA to confer with clients in the following circumstances:

- A domestic violence specialist in PTLA's Portland office has conducted roughly a half a dozen video interviews with clients at a domestic violence shelter in Bath, approximately 45 minutes away from Portland, prior to hearings on protective orders. The videoconferencing unit was placed in the shelter through the grant-funded HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project. The grant paid for the videoconferencing unit and initially paid for the telephone line to support it. When the grant period ended, on September 30, 2003, the agency operating the shelter decided that it could not afford to maintain the telephone line supporting the equipment. However, it has subsequently reconsidered and plans to continue using the equipment for attorney-client interviews.
- An attorney in PTLA's Bangor office conducted several witness preparation sessions with one client prior to her divorce hearing. The attorney anticipated that the client would be a difficult witness and would require careful preparation. The client lived near Lubec, several hours away from Bangor, and had transportation problems. The attorney arranged to use videoconferencing equipment at a hospital in Lubec. The hospital staff was cooperative in arranging for a test run and the subsequent interviews.
- The same attorney in Bangor conducted a witness preparation session with a client in a divorce case who lived in the Machias area. The client came to PTLA's

⁷ Based on interviews with staff at the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii and evaluation data filed with the Legal Services Technology project at lstech.org.

⁸ Evaluation data from Hawaii at lstech.org.

Machias office for the interview. The session was set up by PTLA staff at the Machias office.⁹

The two attorneys found that using videoconferencing for these purposes was very effective. The domestic violence specialist in Portland was disappointed when the link to the Bath shelter was discontinued and now anticipates using it productively again. The attorney in Bangor said that she would definitely use videoconferencing again in similar cases.

The circumstances involved in these cases provide some useful insights into the factors that determine when the medium can be used effectively for attorney-client conference.

Benefit. In all of the cases, there was a significant benefit to using videoconferencing rather than conferring by telephone. The client had a pending court appearance in which her demeanor and credibility were important, so the fact that the attorney was able to see the client made the video interview much more valuable than a telephone interview. From the client's perspective, the visual component promoted trust and comfort with the attorney prior to the hearing. Using videoconferencing instead of meeting in person either saved time for the attorney or reduced travel and stress for the client, depending on which party would have had to travel.

Convenience of set-up. In all but one of the cases, the attorney knew that it would be easy to set up the videoconference: there were supportive, identified staff contacts at the remote site to set up the conference; the equipment at the remote site was dedicated to the purpose involved, so there was no competition for its use at the other end; there was reasonable flexibility for scheduling the appointment, so it could be set for a time when the equipment was available at the PTLA end. In the case involving the use of equipment at the hospital, the conference proved to be convenient to set up, although the attorney could not have been sure of this in advance, and there were potential problems at the other end—identifying the appropriate staff person, finding a time when the equipment was not being used for other purposes, dealing with technical issues, and so on.

Convenience for client. In the domestic violence cases, the client was at the shelter, so there was no inconvenience or burden placed upon her in connection with the interview. In the cases involving the attorney in Bangor, the clients had to travel to the hospital in Lubec and the Machias PTLA office, respectively, but this was relatively convenient for them—certainly more convenient than traveling to Bangor.

Whether or not videoconferencing will be effective for an attorney-client conference will depend on the balance of these factors. For example, the attorney in Bangor might not have found it worth the effort to set up the video conference at the hospital in Lubec if the witness had not been so in need of preparation. If she had encountered difficulties in setting up the conference, she might have decided to drive to

⁹ The equipment at PTLA's outreach office in Rockland was also reported used on at least one occasion for a client interview, but no further information has been obtained.

Lubec herself, and she would probably be less likely to attempt to set up a conference under similar circumstances in the future. Or, if the client had been a distraught victim of domestic violence, the attorney might have decided that asking her to deal with yet another institution (the hospital) in this period of crisis would be placing too great a burden on her.¹⁰

Similarly, consideration of the benefit and convenience factors involved in using videoconferencing for initial intake interviews indicates that this would not be an effective use of the medium, because the benefit (as compared to a telephone interview) would be limited and likely outweighed by lack of convenience: the client would have to travel to the remote site, rather than simply calling; and the interview would have to be scheduled in advance, to insure that the equipment was available at both sites.¹¹ However, if it were established in an initial telephone interview that there was a need for the attorney and client to see one another while they conferred, such as preparation for a court hearing, then the balance could come down the other way, making it effective to set up a video interview for a subsequent conference.¹²

In summary, the potential for more effective use of PTLA's videoconferencing system for client conferences seems limited to a specific set of circumstances: where there is a clear benefit over using the telephone, usually for witness preparation; where either the client or the attorney would have to travel a substantial distance to meet in person; and where the videoconference can be set up conveniently.

PTLA should take steps to increase staff awareness of this potential. The program staff interviewed for this report generally were not aware that videoconferencing had

¹⁰ The PTLA attorney who has been using videoconferencing for conferences with the Bath shelter said that for this reason, rather than arranging for a client to go to a nearby hospital for a video interview, she would probably just talk to the client by telephone.

¹¹ The potential use of videoconferencing for intake has been a major focus of discussions in the legal services community. PTLA originally anticipated that it would use the Maine TeleMedicine System for intake with clients at remote sites. Florida Rural Legal Services developed a remote-access intake system in which computer, videoconferencing and fax access to intake services was available at all libraries served by its Lakeland office (approximately 20 libraries), as well as other sites frequently used by low-income people. The program stopped supporting the system approximately two years ago because it was so lightly used. As noted above, the system at the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii was initially focused on expanding access for clients. However, staff there indicate that for intake, clients generally find it easier to use the telephone "hotline." A chart dated March 13, 2003, filed at lstech.org showing evaluation data from the program indicates that videoconferencing has been used 11 times for intake since its installation, as compared to 73 times for case conferences. Because videoconferencing requires clients to travel to a particular site, it has the disadvantages of the traditional "walk-in" intake system that the telephone intake model was designed to overcome.

¹² A project of the Montana Legal Services Association uses videoconferencing for attorney-client conferences and representation in court. However, the initial intake is conducted by a paralegal at the remote site. Once the attorney decides to take the case, the paralegal arranges for a video interview with the attorney, who subsequently appears in court via video. It should be emphasized that the video interview does not take place until it has been determined that the attorney will be representing the client in court by video, thus establishing the need for the video interview. The project is currently being evaluated by an outside evaluator, but the attorney who originally participated in the project (who is no longer with the program) considers it to be successful.

been used for client conferences as much as it had. While some programs have reported attorney reluctance to use videoconferencing, this does not seem to be a problem at PTLA, where attorneys use videoconferencing regularly for other purposes, feel comfortable with the medium, and appreciate its value. Rather, the issue seems to be that attorneys simply do not consider the option when it might be appropriate.

One obvious example of when videoconferencing would be effective for attorney-client interviews is when a PTLA attorney with expertise in a particular substantive area represents a client who lives in an area served by another office. Under these circumstances, it would be easy and effective to use videoconferencing between the two PTLA offices for any conference with the client that could not be accomplished effectively by telephone.

A more frequent situation is where the client lives at some distance from any PTLA office, as is the case in many of the northern and western parts of the state. Typically, in cases involving a court appearance, PTLA attorneys either interview and confer with their clients by telephone, meet them at court immediately before the hearing to confer, meet them at court on an occasion when the attorney has to be there for another hearing, or ask the client to come to the PTLA office to meet in person. Videoconferencing would offer an effective alternative if arrangements could be made to use a unit at a site more convenient for the client. Hospitals, health clinics, and the state Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services might be potential sites.

Rather than leaving it to the attorney involved to make arrangements to use equipment at a remote site on an as-needed basis, PTLA should explore possibilities for arranging to make regular use of equipment at some likely sites around the state. If PTLA attorneys knew that a video conference could be arranged with reasonable convenience by contacting a particular staff person at the location involved, they would be more likely to do so.

Several factors need to be considered in selecting prospective sites. They should be easy to get to for a substantial number of clients. The equipment must be in a location affording privacy and available at the site reasonably often. Most important, there must be easily reachable and supportive staff contacts, who will be available to set up the appointment and launch the conference. While identifying potential sites and establishing contacts and procedures would require time and effort on PTLA's part, the potential benefit is likely to warrant this investment.¹³

The above discussion has been limited to consideration of using videoconferencing equipment that is already available, either at a PTLA office or another site. Ideally, videoconferencing equipment dedicated to attorney-client conferences

¹³ It was originally anticipated that PTLA's contract with Maine TeleMedicine Services (see above), would facilitate such relationships. However, Maine TeleMedicine Services was unable to fulfill this function to date and PTLA has terminated its relationship with the vendor. However, there may still be some potential for effective use of the service's network.

would be made available at sites around the state convenient to clients. Possible sites might be public housing projects, courthouses, homeless shelters or food banks, or CAP agencies. However, until the cost of videoconferencing equipment becomes more affordable, purchase and support of additional units for the limited purpose of attorney-client conferences is probably not warranted.

The one exception might be at domestic violence shelters. As suggested above, it would probably not be effective to try to use videoconferencing equipment at a site other than a shelter or domestic violence advocacy agency for the client end of the interview in domestic violence cases, because any additional inconvenience would be likely to increase stress for the client. Given the successful experience with the Bath shelter, replication of this capacity at other shelter or advocacy sites should be effective. Moreover, additional units could provide the basis for a domestic violence videoconferencing network that could be used for statewide meetings and trainings. PTLA and domestic violence agencies or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence should explore whether grant funding might be available to purchase additional videoconferencing units to locate in shelters or advocacy offices.

VI. Other Uses

American Sign Language Interpretation. Since March 2003, PTLA has had the capacity to use videoconferencing to provide ASL interpretation, with the interpreter working from the offices of the Pine Tree Society in Scarborough and the client and advocate at a PTLA office. Over a six-month period, videoconferencing was used for this purpose on one occasion. While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for deaf clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal.

Administrative Hearings. PTLA has used its videoconferencing system for one administrative hearing to date. Use of videoconferencing for this purpose is likely to increase as videoconferencing capacity is expanded at state and federal agencies.

Courts. PTLA's leadership in the use of videoconferencing has increased interest in the potential uses of the medium within the court system. The courts currently have three videoconferencing units provided through PTLA's HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project, and have begun to use this system for meetings involving court personnel and other participants from around the state. The Judicial Branch's Office of Information Technology has recently created an internal committee on implementing videoconferencing in the Maine court system, on which PTLA's Hugh Calkins has been asked to serve. The committee meets by videoconference. PTLA's involvement in court discussions about potential uses will benefit low-income people in the state.

Other Partnerships. The availability of the videoconferencing capacity has also promoted the development of relationships with other institutions dealing with low-income people in the state by putting PTLA in touch with those entities to discuss possible videoconferencing-based collaborative projects, even where those projects have not yet been developed. For example, PTLA has sought funding for a joint project with the Maine Medical Center in Portland. These relationships have potential for benefiting PTLA's client community in a variety of ways.

VII. Conclusion

PTLA's videoconferencing system has had a major positive impact on the program, particularly for uses involving meetings and training sessions, which indirectly benefit clients by making the program more efficient and effective. Under current circumstances, the potential for effective use of the system for interviews and conferences with clients is less than was originally anticipated (limited primarily to witness preparation); however, PTLA could more fully exploit this limited potential. As videoconferencing becomes more affordable and more widely used, the potential for use of videoconferencing in expanding client access to services is likely to increase.

**Final Evaluation Report:
HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Findings and Recommendations	1
I. Background	5
II. Off-Site Filing and Related Use of Videoconferencing	7
A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions	7
B. Implementation	9
C. Findings and Recommendations	11
III. Use of Videoconferencing for Attorney-Client Conferences	14
A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions	14
B. Implementation	14
C. Findings and Recommendations	14
IV. Use of Videoconferencing for ASL Interpretation	16
A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions	16
B. Implementation	17
C. Findings and Recommendations	18
V. Other Uses of Videoconferencing	19
A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions	19
B. Implementation	19
C. Findings and Recommendations	20

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The principal objective of the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project was to remove barriers to filing for emergency protection from abuse orders in three pilot locations by making it possible for domestic violence victims to file from the safety of a domestic violence shelter or advocacy office. The technological innovations enabling these off-site filings to take place were electronic filing of the complaint and videoconferencing equipment allowing the judge and victim to confer when necessary. The original intended outcome was an increase in number of filings for emergency orders in the pilot locations.

This component of the project was unsuccessful. At one of the pilot sites (Belfast court, Rockland advocacy office), the project was never fully implemented. At a second site (West Bath Court, Bath shelter), the project was implemented but the equipment was never used for off-site filing. At the third planned site (Lewiston court and advocacy office), implementation was initially delayed by court construction and eventually cancelled after the failure of the project in the other two sites.

Following are some broad findings that may help explain the lack of success of the off-site filing component of the project.

- The underlying rationale, that fear of encountering the abuser at the courthouse was preventing victims from filing for emergency protective orders, was flawed. Although some participants in the system have observed confrontation between victims and abusers at or near the courthouses, most of the advocates and court personnel interviewed did not believe that fear of such a confrontation actually prevented women from filing.
- Fear of having to confront the abuser at the court hearing on the *final* order may be a much more significant barrier to victims, causing them to not appear at the final hearing, or possibly not to begin the process in the first place.
- Even if a victim were to file for her protection order electronically from a shelter, under current procedures the process could be not completed without either the petitioner or an advocate going to the courthouse to pick up the signed order and taking it to the local law enforcement agency for service. This factor negates most of the potential advantages of filing electronically.
- The rationale underlying the use of videoconferencing to support off-site filing was also flawed. Most requests for emergency protection orders are granted. Only in rare cases do judges meet face to face with plaintiffs. Informal protocols currently being used in the courts currently provide a workable way for a judge to obtain additional information when necessary. Specifically, if a judge deems a petition insufficient, he or she can ask the clerk to inform the petitioner that additional information is needed, and can speak to the petitioner by telephone if necessary.
- Factors inherent in the project's design also posed potential barriers to the use of the computer and videoconferencing equipment for electronic filing. These

include the relative complexity of the procedures involved and the requirement that domestic violence advocates must become notaries in order to attest to the petitioner's signature. These problems were exacerbated by frequent staff turnover among domestic violence advocates and the fact that many advocates are uncomfortable with technology.

- Domestic violence advocates were involved in planning the project only at the program director and state coalition level. There was little or no consultation with advocates working directly with victims regarding the utility and practicality of electronic filing. Had they been involved in the process, they might have provided information that would have changed the design or the location of such a project, resulting in more effectiveness.
- Court personnel are inconsistent in their practices regarding the provision of information to victims filing for protective orders about the availability of assistance from the domestic violence agency in their community. Some judges and clerks believe that there is a policy ruling that prohibits them from telling victims about the availability of DV counseling services.

The videoconferencing equipment was also intended to be used for conferences between victims in a shelter and attorneys at an office of Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA), decreasing stress for victims and avoiding the necessity of traveling to a PTLA office, which can pose a problem for some victims. This component of the project was successful at one site. According to the PTLA attorney involved, in some cases it led to earlier involvement on her part, making the victim's overall legal issues easier to deal with than if she had not become involved until after an emergency protection order had been issued. Being able to see the witness enabled the attorney to prepare better for the hearing. Having an opportunity to "meet" the attorney by videoconference in advance of the court hearing also reduced the stress of the hearing for the client.

Another objective of the project was to make it easier for deaf victims of domestic violence, and deaf low-income people with legal needs generally, to obtain American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation services, by using the videoconferencing equipment to obtain access to ASL interpreters. Objectives were to increase filings for protective orders by deaf victims and, more broadly, to increase use of legal services and domestic violence advocacy resources by hearing-impaired clients.

Implementation of ASL interpretation component of the project was not completed until March 2003. During the final six months of the project, the videoconferencing equipment was used once for ASL interpretation. While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for deaf clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal. With regard to deaf victims of domestic violence, the fact that domestic violence advocacy projects have no TTY lines and do not have the necessary resources to respond to deaf victims currently prevents effective use of this technology.

Although not a primary objective of the project, it was also anticipated that the videoconferencing equipment placed at PTLA, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the pilot site domestic violence advocacy offices, and the pilot site courts would be used for other purposes, such as training sessions, administrative meetings, and client conferences, which would improve services and increase efficiency, ultimately benefiting victims of domestic violence, other PTLA clients, and the public generally.

In addition to the videoconferencing equipment obtained through the TOP grant, PTLA obtained four units from another grant, creating an effective videoconferencing system within the program. This system has been extremely effective in saving travel expenses and time that otherwise would have had to have been devoted to travel between offices, permitting training sessions and meetings that might otherwise not have been possible, and promoting relationships between PTLA and the bar, the courts, and other stakeholders in the provision of civil legal assistance. It has had a major impact on the program, increasing the sense of program identity and cohesion among offices. Its potential for use in attorney-client interviews other than those involving domestic violence victims is less than was originally anticipated; and PTLA is not currently realizing that limited potential.

By the end of the project period, three videoconferencing units provided through the project had been relocated to three key locations in the court system, the Judicial Center in Augusta and courthouses in Portland and Bangor. The court system has begun to use them for statewide meetings, and the availability of the units has promoted interest in potential uses of videoconferencing. The Judicial Branch's Office of Information Technology has recently created a committee to explore the use of videoconferencing in the court system.

Because of staffing issues, the videoconferencing equipment originally provided to the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence was relocated, and consequently the domestic violence network has not used videoconferencing for meetings or trainings.

Recommendations

- PTLA should maintain and strengthen relationships with domestic violence advocacy organizations and the state coalition to use as a foundation for planning and cooperation around future grant proposals targeting victims of domestic violence. Staff who will be directly involved in implementation of projects should be consulted in the planning process.
- The courts should explore possibilities for permitting testimony via videoconference for victims of domestic violence at court hearings on the final order of protection.
- The courts should clarify court policy to ensure that court clerks provide information to victims filing for protection orders regarding the availability of assistance from the domestic violence agency in their community.
- PTLA and domestic violence advocacy organizations should explore possibilities for expanding the use of videoconferencing for interviews between PTLA

attorneys and victims of domestic violence in shelters distant from PTLA offices, as well as for training and meetings involving the domestic violence community.

- PTLA should work with advocates for the hearing-impaired, domestic violence advocates, legal advocates, and the Pine Tree Society to promote the effective use of videoconferencing technology to benefit hearing-impaired clients, including deaf victims of domestic violence.
- PTLA and the courts should continue to explore potential uses for videoconferencing to benefit low-income people and the public generally, including opportunities for partnerships between PTLA and the courts and with other entities.
- PTLA should take steps to make more effective use of its videoconferencing system for client interviews.

I. Background

The HelpMe Law Domestic Abuse Project is a technology initiative that was designed to reduce barriers to filing petitions for protective orders by victims of domestic violence, including hearing impaired victims, in three pilot project areas in Maine. The primary hoped-for outcome at the beginning of the project was that the removal of these barriers would result in an increase in the number of those filings taking place in the pilot site courts. The project was developed by Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA), in partnership with the Maine Judicial Branch and the Maine Coalition to end Domestic Violence.

The core of the project as originally conceived was the development of videoconferencing and electronic filing capacity between domestic violence advocacy programs and courthouses at three sites: the advocacy program serving Brunswick and Bath and the West Bath courthouse; the advocacy program serving Rockland and the Belfast courthouse; and the advocacy program serving Lewiston and the courthouse in Lewiston. The videoconferencing capacity was also to extend to two PTLA offices, Portland and Bangor, and the office of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence in Bangor.

The electronic filing equipment was intended to permit victims of domestic violence to file petitions for protective orders electronically from the protection of a domestic violence shelter or advocacy office rather than at the courthouse in person, thus reducing the likelihood that the victim would be confronted by the abuser and the fear and possibility of intimidation associated with such confrontations. Electronic filing was made possible by a change in the court rules which allowed a properly notarized person to attest to the authenticity of an electronically submitted protection order complaint and affidavit. The videoconferencing equipment was to be used if the judge wished to speak directly with the petitioner before granting the order.

Videoconferencing was also intended to permit victims to confer with PTLA attorneys from the shelter or advocacy office, without traveling to the PTLA office.

Finally, videoconferencing was to be used to provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for deaf victims of domestic violence without requiring the interpreter to be physically present. As a result of changes during the implementation of the project, the capacity to provide ASL interpretation through videoconferencing was expanded to all PTLA clients, not just those in domestic violence shelters.

Although not a primary objective of the project, it was also anticipated that the videoconferencing equipment placed at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the pilot site domestic violence advocacy offices, and the pilot site courts would be used for other purposes, such as training sessions, administrative meetings, and client conferences, that would improve services and increase efficiency, ultimately benefiting victims of domestic violence, other PTLA clients, and the public generally.

The following sections evaluate the effectiveness of the project, respectively, in these areas:

Section II: Off-site filing and related use of videoconferencing

Section III: Use of videoconferencing for attorney-client conferences

Section IV: Use of videoconferencing for ASL interpretation

Section V: Other uses of videoconferencing.

Methodologically, this report is based on face-to-face and telephone interviews with the following:

- Judges and court clerks at pilot sites
- Domestic violence advocates at pilot sites
- PTLA domestic violence attorneys and supervisors
- Pine Tree Society staff
- Court system administrative staff
- Advocates for hearing impaired
- Leaders in domestic violence advocacy community.

II. Off-Site Filing and Related Use of Videoconferencing

This section considers the core of the project, the development of the capacity for electronic filing of petitions for protection from the security of a domestic violence shelter or advocacy office and the use of videoconferencing for interviews between clients and judges, where necessary to support the petition.

A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions

Beginning in early 2001, face-to-face interviews were conducted with judges, court clerks, domestic violence advocates, legal services attorneys and other staff, advocates for the deaf and hearing impaired, and others to determine the nature and extent of the barriers to filing for petitions for protection from abuse and how the project might help to overcome them. As a result of delays in the implementation process, these interviews overlapped with the implementation process and consequently also involved discussion of implementation issues. The following summarizes the key points that emerged from these interviews and their implications for the reasonable outcomes to be expected from the project. This information was incorporated into the Interim Evaluation Report completed in the spring of 2003.

Potential for use of electronic filing to overcome barriers to filing

Those interviewed generally agreed that the nature of the barriers to filing for petitions for protection from abuse were as follows:

- Isolation, distance from courthouses, and transportation problems
- Fear of the abuser, including fear that the order may provoke further abuse
- Specific fear of seeing the abuser when the victim goes to court to file
- Shame, guilt, and embarrassment about raising personal matters in a public place (the courthouse)
- Emotional, financial, and safety issues relating to readiness to leave the abuser.

Those interviewed did not agree about the reality of courthouse safety or intimidation issues. Some advocates and one judge reported knowing of instances where the abuser had confronted the victim at the courthouse with threats or attempts at reconciliation. However, other advocates and court clerks and one judge said that they knew of no such instances. Considering the number of cumulative years of experience working with victims of domestic violence among those interviewed, the number of these cited instances was not significant.

Advocates and attorneys generally agreed that electronic filing had the potential for making the experience less stressful for victims by reducing the fear and embarrassment factors. However, they did not agree that victims who would not otherwise file would do so only because of the electronic filing.

- *Based on the information provided in these interviews, it was determined that an increase in the number of plaintiffs filing for temporary orders as a result of the availability of the electronic filing was not a reasonable outcome.*

Potential for use of videoconferencing in conjunction with electronic filing

Court clerks, advocates and judges agreed that most requests for emergency protection orders are granted. If a judge deems the information in a petition insufficient, her or she usually asks the clerk to instruct the petitioner to provide additional information. Only in rare cases do judges meet face to face with petitioners. Typically, this occurs when the facts recited by the petitioner are not sufficient to support issuance of a protective order, but the petitioner wishes to proceed anyway.

Clerks and judges reported that informal protocols were already in existence permitting judges to obtain additional information from petitioners when they are at a different location from the petitioner and there is insufficient information in a petition for the judge to grant it. This occurs when there is no judge sitting at the court where the plaintiff has filed and the clerk faxes the petition to the judge at another court. If the judge feels that the petition is insufficient, he or she may contact the clerk and either tell them to instruct the plaintiff to add more information to the petition or ask to speak personally to the plaintiff on the phone.

- *Based on the information provided in these interviews, it was determined that an increase in the number of plaintiffs filing for temporary orders as a result of the availability of videoconferencing to support the electronic filing was not a reasonable outcome.*

Revised Evaluation Questions

Based on the above information, the questions to be answered in the evaluation of this component of the project were slightly modified from those set forth in the preliminary draft evaluation plan. Specifically, the quantitative aspect of the evaluation was eliminated, given the conclusion that an increase in the number of temporary protective order filings as a result of the project was not a reasonable outcome. The evaluation questions identified for this component of the project were the following:

- *Is the computer equipment being used for electronic filing? If so, does the project improve the quality of the experience of applying for a protection from abuse order for victims of domestic abuse in general?*
- *Is the videoconferencing equipment being used in conjunction with the electronic filing technology? Does its availability promote use of electronic filing or make it work more effectively?*

B. Implementation

Initial delays

A number of factors beyond the direct control of Pine Tree Legal Assistance resulted in delays in the implementation of the technologies and equipment, or in the failure to install them as planned or at the original locations. These included the following:

- Changes in the technological approach such as using ISDN lines to connect the videoconferencing sites rather than wide area network (WAN) connections, to allow for more mobility for the domestic violence projects to relocate the equipment¹ and to enable the VC sites to connect with the Pine Tree Society, which was preparing to provide ASL interpreting services from its office location in Scarborough. (In the late spring of 2001, PTLA began negotiating with TOP for approval for changes in the budget to reflect the different hardware and contracts for services and support that would be required by this alternative approach. The approval was granted in July 2001. The change in approach led to delays in purchasing equipment, establishing line connections, and installing equipment.)
- Resignation of the staff of the Maine State Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the grant partner with responsibility for coordinating installation and providing training at the three pilot site domestic violence projects.²
- Delays in the drafting and approval of new court rules allowing the electronic filing procedure and videoconferencing technology to be used by the courts. The new rules were approved by the acting Chief Justice in November of 2001.
- Issues relating to the installation of multiple phone lines in the courthouses, which delayed the installation of computers and the VC equipment. The equipment was installed in the Belfast court in early 2002, but installation was not completed in the West Bath court until late summer 2002.
- Delay in completion of the new courthouse in Lewiston, originally envisioned for October 2002, leading to a delay in implementing the project at the third pilot site. The courthouse was scheduled for completion in early 2003.
- Continuing staff changes at domestic violence advocacy sites during the implementation period, requiring new people to become familiar with the project and its goals. Various staff people had different perspectives and attitudes toward the project.

¹ All three domestic violence advocacy programs involved in the project changed their local offices in the first few months of the project.

² The videoconferencing equipment at the Coalition's office was moved to the Maine Judicial Center in early 2002. PTLA created a position of domestic violence coordinator to take on the training and technical assistance responsibilities originally assigned to the Coalition as of February 1, 2002, on a part-time basis.

- New court rules developed for the project required the advocates who would be attesting to the petitions to become notaries. This process took several months, compounding the delays created by staff changes.
- The need to educate court personnel at the two pilot sites, West Bath and Belfast, about the project and its potential benefits, which required a substantial investment of time.

Implementation failure at Rockland/Belfast site

At the Belfast courthouse site, a specific logistical problem with the project's design emerged. The project called for the computer for the electronic filing of petitions to be located at the domestic violence advocacy program in Rockland, New Hope for Women (NHW). The plan was that victims would be assisted by a notarized advocate, whose signature would be recognized by the clerks at the courthouse in Belfast, which is approximately 45 minutes away and in another county.

The current practice is that once the judge has signed the order, it is given to the plaintiff to deliver to the sheriff for service. While this practice is not specifically required by court rules, it generally works effectively, and there do not appear to be reasonable alternatives that will result in swift service on the defendant, which is an important factor in protection order situations. At this time, court rules do not permit faxing or electronically transferring the signed complaint.

This means that after a petitioner had filed electronically from Rockland with the court in Belfast, either the petitioner or an advocate would have to have driven from the office in Rockland to the court in Belfast to pick up the signed order and hand carry it to the sheriff's office of the jurisdiction where the defendant was to be served. Obviously, this would negate most of the benefits of the off-site filing.

In mid-April 2002, NHW notified Pine Tree Legal that it had decided not to use the electronic filing capacity. The reason for this decision was the logistical problem concerning the need for someone to pick up the signed order at the courthouse.

The logistical problem would have been identified earlier there had been consultation with staff at the Rockland DV advocacy program who are actually involved in assistance with protective orders. (The director of the program had been involved in the grant proposal). If direct-service staff had been consulted, they would have reported that they did not believe that having to appear at the courthouse to file for an emergency protection order at the courthouse was a barrier for victims. They would have pointed out that it does not make sense for them and/or the victims to file from their office if they were required to travel to the Belfast Court to pick up the signed orders. This illustrates the dangers inherent in not talking to the persons who deliver the services directly to the population targeted to benefit from the intervention prior to designing a project of this kind.

Even if the logistical problem had not existed, it is possible that NHW would have decided not to utilize the equipment. The advocacy staff there do not use computers regularly and generally are not comfortable with them. This issue too might have become apparent had there been more consultation with staff at the provision-of-service level.

The electronic filing equipment was installed at the Belfast courthouse and at the NHW office, but was never used for its intended purpose. The videoconferencing equipment originally intended for the NHW advocacy office was installed at PTLA's Rockland outreach office, where it was regularly used for training, meetings, and occasional client interviews, until staff changes resulted in the office being closed. The videoconferencing equipment installed in the Belfast court was never used for its intended purpose. In the summer of 2003 it was moved to the Bangor District Court.

West Bath Courthouse/Bath shelter site

By March 2003, the equipment for electronic filing and videoconferencing had been installed in the West Bath Courthouse and the Bath domestic violence shelter and was ready for use. Staff had been trained in its use. However, the new domestic violence outreach advocate in Bath had not yet been notarized (although her predecessor in the position had gone through the process), with the result that electronic filings were not possible. The new outreach worker appeared to be ambivalent about the benefit of the off-site filing capacity. As in the Rockland/Belfast site, the need for the petitioner to pick up the order at the courthouse once it had been granted negated some of the benefit of the off-site filing, although this was a much less serious problem at this site, because the court is only a few miles from the shelter.

In the following months, there were no electronic filings of protection orders. In the summer of 2003, in the light of the interim evaluation findings and the lack of use of the equipment, PTLA decided to discontinue the electronic filing aspect of the project at this site. The videoconferencing equipment at the West Bath courthouse was subsequently moved to the District Court in Portland.

Lewiston site

As a result of delays in completion of the new courthouse, implementation of the project at the planned Lewiston site had not been commenced at the time of the Interim Evaluation Report. As a result of the findings of the Interim Report and the lack of success at other sites, PTLA decided not to proceed with implementation at this site.

C. Findings and Recommendations

The off-site filing component of the project failed at the two sites where it was implemented. The equipment was never used for electronic filing at either site.

The primary reason for the failure of the off-site filing component of the project is that the underlying rationale, that fear of encountering the abuser at the courthouse was

preventing victims from filing for emergency protective orders, was flawed. Although a few participants in the system have observed confrontation between victims and abusers at or near the courthouses, it does not appear that the possibility of such a confrontation actually prevented women from filing.

Moreover, even if a victim had filed for her protection order electronically from a shelter, the process could not have been completed without either the petitioner or an advocate going to the courthouse to pick up the signed order and taking it to the local law enforcement agency for service. This factor effectively negated most of the potential benefit of filing electronically.

Fear of having to confront the abuser at the court hearing on the *final* order may be a much more significant barrier to victims, causing them to not appear at the final hearing, or possibly not to begin the process in the first place. Permitting victims to testify via videoconference at final hearings could eliminate this barrier.

Another potentially significant barrier is the fact that some court clerks do not inform victims filing for protective orders about the availability of assistance from the domestic violence agency in their community. Court personnel in the pilot locations are inconsistent in their practices regarding the provision of this information. Some judges and clerks believe that there is a policy ruling that prohibits clerks from telling victims about the availability of domestic violence counseling services. The failure to provide information about the availability of services can create a barrier for victims who need support to file their petition.

The rationale underlying the shelter/court videoconferencing component of this project was also flawed. Most requests for emergency protection orders are granted. If there is insufficient information in the complain, the judge typically asks the clerk to obtain the additional information from the petitioner. Only in rare cases do judges meet face to face with plaintiffs. Moreover, informal protocols currently being used in the courts provide a workable way for a judge to obtain additional information by telephone from a client who is not physically present when necessary.

Factors inherent in the project's design also appear to have created barriers to the use of the computer and videoconferencing equipment for electronic filing. The project required use of fairly complex technology, some of which was not compatible with technology already in use (for example, the courts use Macs and the computers used for electronic filing were PCs). There would have been a continuing need for training and troubleshooting relating to the use of the equipment. Use of the electronic filing equipment required special protocols between domestic violence advocacy programs and court personnel at pilot sites. For example, domestic violence advocates would have had to telephone the court to alert them to the fact that the filing had been sent. The project depended on the participation of key staff people in each of the participating entities and it is likely that staff turnover would have continued to create difficulties. In addition, the new court rules permitting electronic filing required that the person attesting to the

petitioner's signature be a notary; as a result, an advocate at each of the pilot sites had to become a notary, a process that takes several months.

The project was designed by PTLA staff in consultation with upper-level management in the courts, the domestic violence projects, and the Coalition. A number of these key leaders strongly felt that the fear of encountering the abuser at the courthouse was a major barrier to filing petitions. However, there was little or no consultation with advocates working directly with victims regarding the utility and practicality of electronic filing and, as the project was implemented, it became clear that most of these advocates did not share this perception of the underlying need. They questioned the value of the project and indicated that there should have been more consultation as it was developed. Had more service-level staff been involved in the planning process, they might have provided information that would have changed the design or the placement of such a project, resulting in more effectiveness.

Recommendations

- PTLA should maintain and strengthen relationships with victim advocacy organizations and the state coalition to use as a foundation for planning and cooperation around future grant proposals targeting victims of domestic violence. Staff who will be directly involved in implementation of projects should be consulted in the planning process.
- The courts should explore possibilities for permitting testimony via videoconference for victims of domestic violence at court hearings on the final order of protection.
- The courts should clarify court policy to ensure that court clerks provide information to victims filing for protection orders regarding the availability of assistance from the domestic violence agency in their community.

III. Use of Videoconferencing for Attorney-Client Conferences

The videoconferencing equipment located in the domestic violence advocacy offices or shelters was also intended to be used for interviews between victims and attorneys at PTLA offices. Typically, PTLA attorneys did not become involved until after the petition for a protective order had been filed. The attorney often met the client in person for the first time on the date of the court hearing.

A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions

Advocates and lawyers agreed that there are victims who are helped considerably by being able to confer with an attorney early in the process, before the motion for a protective order is filed. These include cases where the abuser is represented by an attorney, cases where abuse of children is involved, and other cases involving complex or difficult situations. They also agreed that arranging for transportation and childcare to be able to meet with an attorney at a PTLA office can be overwhelming. PTLA attorneys believe that conducting an interview via videoconference is preferable to a telephone interview, and victims tell advocates that the experience is satisfactory to them.

- *Based on the information provided in these interviews, it was determined that an increase in the number of victims of domestic violence who were interviewed by PTLA attorneys before they file for protective orders was a reasonable outcome of the availability of the videoconferencing equipment in shelters or domestic violence advocacy offices.*

Evaluation Questions

- *Is the equipment being used for interviews of domestic violence victims by PTLA attorneys? Does the project make it easier for victims to consult with an attorney before filing a protective order when early consultation would be beneficial?*

B. Implementation

Once the videoconferencing equipment was installed in the Bath shelter in the March 2003, it was used regularly for conferences between clients at the shelter and an attorney in the Portland PTLA office. Use of the equipment for this purpose was increasing as the project came to a conclusion on September 30, 2003. Initially, the domestic violence agency decided that it could not afford to maintain the telephone line for videoconferencing itself, and the use of the equipment at the site ended temporarily. However, in December 2003, the agency decided to reinstitute use of the equipment for attorney-client interviews.

C. Findings and Recommendations

This component of the project was successful at the one site where it was implemented. The PTLA attorney responsible for representing victims of domestic

violence at the West Bath courthouse conducted approximately six interviews with clients in the Bath shelter during the six months that the capacity was available. Use of the equipment for this purpose was increasing as the project period came to an end. The attorney reports that as a result of the availability of the equipment, she consulted with more victims before they filed a protective order than she otherwise would have been able to do. She believes that the early consultations, and the visual component (as compared to a telephone interview) were beneficial to the clients' cases and made them more comfortable as they went into the proceedings. The agency has decided to maintain its videoconferencing capacity for this purpose.

Given the success of this component of the project, the possibilities for replicating it in other sites should be explored. As the cost of videoconferencing becomes more affordable, it should be feasible to develop a videoconferencing system among domestic violence shelters and advocacy offices, which could be used for interviews with PTLA attorneys. In the interim, it might be feasible to expand the videoconferencing capacity to a few additional sites, possibly with grant funding.

One option would be to consider using video units at nearby sites such as a hospital or health clinic. However, this would be considerably less convenient and more complicated logistically than having a unit at the shelter. Given the pressures on victims of domestic violence at this stage of the process, it is likely that the additional complications that setting up a video interview at another site would outweigh the potential benefits of videoconferencing as compared to a telephone interview.

Recommendation

- To the extent feasible, the use of videoconferencing for interviews between PTLA attorneys and victims of domestic violence in shelters distant from PTLA offices should be expanded to other sites.

IV. Use of Videoconferencing for ASL Interpretation

The project as initially envisioned would have made deaf interpretation services available to domestic violence victims, advocates and attorneys at pilot project sites from an interpreter physically located in PTLA's Portland office. However, once implementation of the project began, PTLA learned that the Pine Tree Society had received a TOP grant enabling it to purchase its own videoconferencing equipment to provide interpretation services to hospitals and other entities from its Scarborough office. PTLA modified the technological basis of the project in part so that it could access interpreters from the Pine Tree Society's Scarborough office rather than having to arrange for an interpreter to come to PTLA's Portland office.

Because ASL interpretation requires a higher-quality image than is necessary for other purposes, the telephone lines used in the project will only support videoconferencing between two points for that purpose (as compared to four or more points for other purposes). Thus the videoconferencing capacity permits interpretation between two parties only when both parties are at the same site or one party is at the same site as the interpreter. As a practical matter, this means that the most likely potential use of videoconferencing equipment for ASL interpretation would be with an interpreter at the Pine Tree Society's office in Scarborough and a victim with an advocate and/or attorney at a domestic violence advocacy site where the equipment is available or at any PTLA office. (Originally it was anticipated that the interpreter would come to PTLA's Portland office and the victim would be at the shelter site.) It will not be possible to provide interpretation between an interpreter at one site and a victim and advocate, attorney or judge at two different sites. Consequently, the equipment cannot be used for deaf victims in all the ways that were envisioned for other victims (unless the interpreter were to go to one of the other sites, such as the shelter, PTLA office, or court).

As a result of these factors, the scope of this component of the project was broadened beyond deaf victims of domestic violence specifically, to include deaf low-income people with legal needs in general.

A. Baseline interviews and evaluation questions

Domestic violence advocates reported that they believe that domestic violence is a serious problem in the deaf community and that most victims are not currently using the services of their advocacy network. The domestic violence advocacy community does not engage in outreach to the deaf community because they feel that their capacity to provide services is currently too limited.

Court personnel at the two sites where interviews were conducted did not remember ever serving a hearing-impaired victim of domestic violence.

Advocates for the hearing-impaired community, court personnel and legal services attorneys agreed that setting up ASL interpretation in the courts or at PTLA offices has been a major problem due to scheduling issues and the chronic shortage of

legally certified interpreters. This is compounded by the fact that hearing-impaired victims may have cognitive problems and have limited experience with the courts and similar institutions. As a result, interviews can take much longer than for other victims; for example, it can take as long as four to five hours to complete the petition for a temporary order.

- *Based on the above information, it was determined that an increase in protective orders for hearing impaired victims of domestic violence and, more broadly, an increased use of legal services and domestic violence advocacy resources by hearing-impaired clients are reasonable outcomes of the availability of videoconferencing equipment at the PTLA offices and advocacy offices and shelters.*

Evaluation questions

- *Is the videoconferencing equipment being used to provide interpretation services for hearing-impaired domestic violence victims in their conferences with advocates or attorneys? Has the project resulted in more utilization of legal services and domestic violence advocacy resources by hearing impaired victims?*
- *Has the project resulted in an increase in the numbers of protection from abuse orders granted for hearing impaired victims of domestic violence in the pilot jurisdiction?*
- *Is the videoconferencing equipment being used to provide interpretation services for other hearing-impaired PTLA clients? Has the project resulted in more utilization of legal services by hearing-impaired clients?*

B. Implementation

Implementation of the Pine Tree Society's videoconferencing system required various approval processes that delayed implementation of this part of the project. The Pine Tree Society drafted protocols for use of the equipment for interpretation, which were adapted to apply to PTLA. In February 2003, the Pine Tree Society provided PTLA staff with training on the protocols and other issues relating to using the videoconferencing equipment for ASL interpretation.

As of March 2003, implementation of this part of the project was complete and the videoconferencing equipment at the PTLA offices was available for use for this purpose. During the final six months of the project, the videoconferencing equipment was used on only one occasion for ASL interpretation at PTLA's Portland office.

Although the videoconferencing equipment at the Bath shelter could theoretically have been used for this purpose, the shelter has no TTY services, so a deaf victim would have great difficulty accessing shelter services to begin with. Consequently, the most likely use of videoconferencing for ASL interpretation is between an interpreter at the Pine Tree Society's Scarborough office and clients and PTLA attorneys at a PTLA office.

C. Findings and recommendations

While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for hearing-impaired clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal. With regard to deaf victims of domestic violence, the fact that domestic violence advocacy projects have no TTY lines and do not have the necessary resources to respond to deaf victims presents serious impediments to taking the next step with this technology at the domestic violence advocacy level.

Recommendation

- PTLA should work with advocates for the hearing-impaired, domestic violence advocates, legal advocates, and the Pine Tree Society to determine the most effective use of videoconferencing technology to benefit hearing-impaired clients, including deaf victims of domestic violence.

V. Other Uses of Videoconferencing

This section considers uses of videoconferencing other than those directly related to serving domestic violence victims or hearing-impaired clients.

Although not a primary objective of the project, it was anticipated that the videoconferencing equipment placed at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the pilot site domestic violence advocacy offices, and the pilot site courts would be used for other purposes, such as training sessions, administrative meetings, and client conferences, that would improve services and increase efficiency, ultimately benefiting victims of domestic violence, other PTLA clients, and the public generally.

A. Baseline Interviews and Evaluation Questions

By the time this evaluation began, PTLA had already begun using videoconferencing extensively for meetings and trainings, and all the PTLA staff interviewed agreed that it was having a major positive impact on the program.

Several leaders in the domestic violence community indicated that they thought that there would be many possible uses for videoconferencing within the domestic violence community.

The judges interviewed were very interested in potential uses for videoconferencing by the courts. In addition to meetings and trainings, they cited possibilities for use in various court proceedings.

Evaluation Questions

- *In what other ways is the equipment is being utilized and what has been the impact of those other uses?*
- *Has it resulted in efficiencies or other benefits for the courts, legal services providers and shelter staff?*
- *Are there barriers to the use of the equipment? Where do these barriers exist?*

B. Implementation

The videoconferencing equipment was installed at the PTLA offices in Portland and Bangor in October of 2001. Other PTLA offices obtained videoconferencing equipment through another grant, providing the program with an internal videoconferencing communication capacity linking all its offices. Since its installation,

the equipment at PTLA has regularly been used for training, consultation, and meetings, as well as occasional attorney-client interviews not involving domestic violence.³

One videoconferencing unit was originally provided to the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence. It was envisioned that this unit would be used for training and other meetings involving Coalition staff and other project participants. However, the resignation of the Coalition staff in early 2002 made this impossible. Subsequently, the videoconferencing equipment at the Coalition's office was moved to the Maine Judicial Center. None of the equipment made available through the project was never used for videoconferencing among domestic violence advocates or advocacy organizations.

Following the failure of the off-site filing component of the project at the two pilot sites, the videoconferencing units at the two pilot court sites were moved to courts in Bangor and Portland. Coupled with the unit at the Judicial Center, this provided the court system with the capacity for a basic videoconferencing system, beginning in the late summer of 2003.

C. Findings and Recommendations

Because PTLA's videoconferencing system involves equipment provided by another grant, and because its impact has been much broader than what was originally contemplated for this project, the effect of videoconferencing on PTLA is considered more fully in a supplemental report.⁴

That report finds that PTLA's videoconferencing system has been extremely useful in a variety of different ways: saving travel expenses and time that otherwise would have had to have been devoted to travel between offices, permitting training sessions and meetings that might otherwise not have been possible at all, and promoting relationships between PTLA and the bar, the courts, and other stakeholders in the provision of civil legal assistance. It has had a major impact on the program, increasing the sense of program identity and cohesion among offices. By making the system available to outside entities for a fee, PTLA has also been able to pay for part of the system's operating expenses.

PTLA's system has been used far less frequently to facilitate the interaction of clients with PTLA advocates. Only a few attorney-client conferences have taken place other than those between the Portland PTLA office and the Bath shelter described above. The PTLA attorneys who have used videoconferencing for conferences with clients have done so to prepare clients for court appearances; they have found it to be very effective for this purpose. Based on the experience of PTLA and other programs, client acceptance of the technology does not appear to be a barrier. Nor, at PTLA does attorney acceptance: PTLA staff are generally comfortable with the technology and see its potential benefits.

³ Attorney-client interviews between an attorney at a PTLA office and a client in a domestic violence shelter have been considered in Section III.

⁴ "The Use and Effectiveness of Videoconferencing Equipment at Pine Tree Legal Assistance," by Robert Echols, December 2003.

However, they are not aware of the extent to which a few attorneys in the program have used the medium effectively for client conferences. Increasing staff awareness of this potential would likely result in increased use of the capacity for this purpose. Another step that PTLA could take to facilitate effective use of the equipment is to establish protocols for using existing videoconferencing units at hospitals, clinics, or other sites in some key locations around the state, rather than leaving it to the attorney involved to locate and make arrangements to use equipment at a remote site on an as-needed basis. (However, as noted above, the use of sites other than domestic violence shelters or advocacy offices is not likely to be effective for victims of domestic violence.)

In the few months in which it has been in place, the court system has begun to use its three-unit videoconferencing system for meetings involving court personnel and other participants from around the state. The availability of the units has increased the interest in potential uses of videoconferencing within the court system. The Judicial Branch's Office of Information Technology has recently created an the internal Court committee on implementing videoconferencing in the Maine court system, on which PTLA's Hugh Calkins, the principal designer of this project, has been asked to serve. The committee meets by videoconference. PTLA's involvement in court discussions about potential uses will benefit low-income people in the state.

Because of staffing issues, the videoconferencing equipment originally provided to the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence was relocated, and consequently the domestic violence network has not used videoconferencing for meetings or trainings.

Recommendations

- PTLA and the courts should continue to explore potential uses for videoconferencing to benefit low-income people and the public generally, including opportunities for partnerships between them and with other entities.
- PTLA should explore additional possibilities for effective use of its videoconferencing system for client interviews.
- PTLA and domestic violence advocacy organizations should explore possibilities for expanding the use of videoconferencing the domestic violence community (for training and meetings, as well as interviews between PTLA attorneys and victims of domestic violence in shelters distant from PTLA offices).

**The Use and Effectiveness of
Videoconferencing Equipment at
Pine Tree Legal Assistance**

December 2003

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Findings..... 1

I. The PTLA Videoconferencing System..... 5

II. Uses of the System..... 6

III. Effectiveness for Meetings and Trainings..... 9

IV. Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Trainings..... 11

V. Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences..... 12

VI. Other Uses 17

VII. Conclusion 18

Summary of Findings¹

Use of Equipment

Since October 2001, Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA) has had videoconferencing equipment in of its six offices. The equipment has been used regularly since it was installed, typically several times a week for a total of roughly six hours. In some weeks the equipment has been used as much as 15 hours or more. PTLA management reports that there is frequent competition for scheduling use of the system.

The equipment has been used primarily for internal PTLA meetings and conferences, most often for the following:

- Case intake meetings, typically involving staff from one of PTLA's smaller offices and supervisors in either Portland or Bangor
- Meeting of the Volunteer Lawyer Project linking its principal office in Portland and outreach office in Bangor
- PTLA substantive task forces and committees
- Management and union meetings
- Training programs
- Meetings involving external committees and groups in which PTLA staff participate
- PTLA Board meetings
- Case consultations among advocates.

Less frequently, the equipment has been used for:

- Attorney-client consultations
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for hearing-impaired clients
- Administrative hearings.

PTLA also makes the equipment available for rental by outside groups, generating income that will help defray the cost of the system. Income in 2003 will exceed the \$3000 that PTLA anticipated in its budget for the year.

Meetings and Trainings: Impact and Effectiveness

There is broad agreement among PTLA management and staff that the videoconferencing equipment has had a major positive impact on the program. Most significantly, the equipment has been very effective in:

- Reducing travel expenses and making the program more efficient by saving time that would have been otherwise spent on travel between offices.

¹ The report was prepared as a supplement to the Final Evaluation Report on the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project, by Robert Echols and Karen Monahan, December 2003.

- Promoting better coordination among offices and improving program management by making it easier to hold meetings.
- Improving supervision and mentoring by making it easier for advocates to confer and co-counsel on cases.
- Improving training by making it easier to have training sessions involving staff from widely separated offices.
- Increasing program cohesion and morale by making it easier for staff in all PTLA offices, most importantly those in remote locations, to keep in touch with one another on a regular basis.

More broadly, users (including users who are not PTLA staff) believe that the equipment has been effective in:

- Supporting other civil legal assistance programs in Maine with training programs and opportunities to participate in substantive task forces.
- Supporting groups involved in expanding access to justice in the state and promoting the development of a “state justice community” in Maine and a sense of connection with PTLA on the part of members of the judiciary and private bar, by bringing them into PTLA offices for meetings.

Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Training

The principal factors contributing to the effectiveness of videoconferencing for meetings and training at PTLA are as follows:

- The configuration and administrative structure of PTLA offices is well suited to frequent use of videoconferencing for meetings and training:
 - Six offices with two hub offices
 - Distance between offices
 - Number of small offices
 - Management structure and distribution of expertise around the program
 - Possible for all staff to meet via video relatively easily.
- PTLA has many meetings and conferences involving two or more offices, so there are many occasions for use of the videoconferencing equipment; because it is used regularly, staff are familiar with its operation, perceive its usefulness, and do not hesitate to make use of it. Use of the equipment for meetings and training has become part of the program’s culture.
- The equipment is on-site at PTLA offices; staff members at each office are familiar with maintaining and operating it and technical staff are generally available for troubleshooting.

Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences

PTLA has used videoconferencing for attorney-client conferences less than originally expected. This is consistent with the experience of other programs.

Two PTLA attorneys have used videoconferencing very effectively for conferences with clients to prepare testimony before court appearances:

- A domestic violence specialist in the Portland office regularly used videoconferencing to confer with clients at a shelter in Bath.
- An attorney in PTLA's Bangor office used videoconferencing for conferences with two clients, using remote units at PTLA's Machias office and a hospital in Lubec.

Their experiences indicate that videoconferencing is effective for attorney-client conferences where three factors are present:

- There is a benefit over a telephone conference (typically witness preparation).
- Travel for an in-person conference would impose a burden on the attorney or client.
- The videoconference can be arranged conveniently.

The balance of benefit and convenience will be determinative. Using videoconferencing for initial intake interviews is unlikely to be effective because in many cases there will be little benefit above a telephone interview and it will be less convenient. Once a need for a visual component to the attorney-client interaction has been established, then videoconferencing may be an effective option.

In general, client acceptance does not appear to be a barrier. While some programs have reported attorney reluctance to use videoconferencing, this does not seem to be an issue at PTLA, where attorneys use videoconferencing regularly for other purposes, feel comfortable with the medium, and appreciate its value.

PTLA could increase the effective use of videoconferencing for client conferences by:

- Increasing staff awareness of the successful use of videoconferencing by PTLA attorneys.
- Establishing protocols for using existing videoconferencing units at hospitals, clinics, or other sites in some key locations around the state, rather than leaving it to the attorney involved to locate and make arrangements to use equipment at a remote site on an as-needed basis.

Until the cost of videoconferencing equipment becomes more affordable, purchase and support of additional units for the limited purpose of attorney-client conferences is probably not warranted, with the possible exception of domestic violence

shelters. Given the successful experience with the Portland-Bath conferences, replication of this capacity at other shelter or advocacy sites should be effective. PTLA and domestic violence agencies or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence should explore whether grant funding might be available to purchase additional videoconferencing units to locate in shelters or advocacy offices. The equipment could also be used for trainings and meetings of the domestic violence community.

Other Uses

American Sign Language Interpretation. While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for deaf clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date (one use over a six-month period) indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal.

Administrative Hearings. Use of videoconferencing for this purpose is likely to increase as videoconferencing capacity is expanded at state and federal agencies.

Courts. PTLA's leadership in the use of videoconferencing has increased interest in the potential uses of the medium within the court system. PTLA's involvement in court discussions about potential uses will benefit low-income people in the state.

Other Partnerships. The availability of the videoconferencing capacity at PTLA has promoted the development of relationships with other institutions dealing with low-income people in the state, such as health care providers, by putting PTLA in touch with those entities to discuss possible videoconferencing-based collaborative projects, even where those projects have not yet been developed. These relationships have potential for benefiting PTLA's client community.

Conclusion

PTLA's videoconferencing system has had a major positive impact on the program, particularly for uses involving meetings and training sessions, which indirectly benefit clients by making the program more efficient and effective. Under current circumstances, the potential for effective use of the system for interviews and conferences with clients is less than was originally anticipated (limited primarily to witness preparation); however, PTLA could more fully exploit this limited potential. As videoconferencing becomes more affordable and more widely used, the potential for use of videoconferencing in expanding client access to services is likely to increase.

I. The PTLA Videoconferencing System

The Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA) video conferencing system consists of ISDN-based Polycom video conferencing units with 35" monitors in each of PTLA's six offices: Portland, Augusta, Lewiston, Bangor, Presque Isle and Machias. The equipment in Portland and Bangor was funded as part of the 2000 TOP grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce for the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project.² The equipment in the remaining Pine Tree office locations (Augusta, Lewiston, Presque Isle and Machias) was funded with a 2001 Legal Services Corporation Technology Innovation Grant (TIG).³

PTLA's videoconferencing system allows point-to-point conferencing between any two locations and multi-point conferencing between up to four offices through PTLA's hub locations in Portland and Bangor. (All six offices can be linked at an additional cost.)

Portland is Pine Tree's administrative center, largest office, and home of the Volunteer Lawyers Project, Maine's *pro bono* program, operated by Pine Tree in partnership with the Maine Bar Foundation. For this reason, by far most videoconferences include the Portland location, *whether the calls originate there or not*. Portland is 296 miles from Presque Isle and 133 miles from Bangor, PTLA's other hub office. Regional Directing Attorneys with supervisory responsibility over other offices are located at either Bangor or Portland. Augusta is the state capital and site of the offices of two other civil legal aid providers, Legal Services for the Elderly and Maine Equal Justice. Presque Isle is a two-attorney office that serves the largest and most remote region of the state; it is 163 miles from Bangor. The other two offices (Lewiston and Machias) are currently minimally-staffed outreach offices.

² Videoconferencing was also available in PTLA's outreach office in Rockland for several months. The equipment was originally intended to go in the office of *New Hope for Women*, one of the HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project's test sites. However, *New Hope for Women* decided it did not have an appropriate space for the equipment and it was placed in the PTLA outreach office instead. The office is not currently staffed.

³ The TIG grant also contemplated expansion of the videoconferencing network into healthcare facilities, working with staff at the Maine TeleMedicine System, which served as the vendor for the videoconferencing units and ISDN lines. (The Maine TeleMedicine System was originally created to support use of videoconferencing for diagnostic purposes in healthcare facilities around Maine.) The goal of the revised grant was to create partnerships with various healthcare facilities that would support direct client intake with Pine Tree locations. Before that goal could be realized, internal staff disputes at Maine Telemedicine System led to the departure of the original MTS team with which Pine Tree had been working and it became clear that this goal would not be realized within the two year period originally contemplated by the 2001 grant. Effective October 1, 2003, Pine Tree severed its remaining contractual relationships with Maine TeleMedicine System.

II. Uses of the System

At PTLA's Portland office, a log has been maintained of videoconferencing use since the original system was acquired in the fall of 2001. The log appears to be relatively complete, although interviews with staff indicate that they do not always remember to complete the log. At other PTLA offices, logs have been maintained far less regularly.

Taken together, the logs indicate that PTLA has used the equipment regularly since it was installed, typically several times a week for a total of roughly six hours. In some weeks the equipment has been used as much as 15 hours or more. PTLA management reports that there is frequent competition for scheduling use of the system. Use of the system is scheduled through the program's electronic calendaring system.

The Portland log alone documents more than 244 videoconferences involving the Portland location, usually along with at least one other Pine Tree office location as well, during the two-year period ending September 30, 2003. Partial year entries in other office locations suggest that the Bangor office was involved in videoconferences with at least one other Pine Tree location 160 times during the same two-year period. The Augusta office location was the next most frequent participant in videoconferences, participating an estimated 140 times during the two-year period. Lewiston logs indicate a total of 98 uses during this period, primarily for case meetings with Portland; and Presque Isle and Machias for an estimated 72 times at each location, typically for case meetings or staff support from Bangor.

The videoconferencing system has supported a wide range of uses over the past two years. The log for the Portland office indicates that during the one-year period from October 1, 2002, through September 30, 2003, the system was used for the following purposes (number in parentheses indicate the number of sessions logged in for this use in the Portland logs; because this number does not include the information from the other office logs, it understates program-wide use):

- Case and staff meetings, usually involving the Augusta office, which is jointly managed with Portland. (41)
- Substantive law task forces (including the family law task force, the benefits task force and the housing task force) involving Pine Tree and Main Equal Justice. These task forces grew out of a 2002 staff retreat focused on re-energizing Pine Tree's systemic advocacy. They were specifically designed to utilize the efficiency of the videoconferencing system; the old substantive law tasks forces had stopped meeting in the mid-1990's because of the drain on staff time and program funding that was required for travel. (14)
- Volunteer Lawyers Project staff meetings. The VLP is based in Portland but added an outreach office in Bangor in 2000. In addition to regular staff meetings between the two office locations, the VLP used the system to conduct interviews with prospective applicants for the VLP Project Director position this past spring. (10)

- Meetings relating to internal program management, including meetings of Pine Tree's internal Project Advisory Committee (in which staff representatives from the local offices and unions provide input to the management team on various program issues), meetings of just the program managers, and meetings related to collective bargaining or other union business. (12)
- Meetings of the PTLA Board of Directors. The first Board meeting held by videoconference took place when a snowstorm threatened travel to the Board's usual location in Augusta; 16 Board members were able to participate in that Board meeting in February, and the April meeting was then rescheduled as a videoconferenced meeting, with equally high attendance. The Board recently agreed to hold all winter board meetings via videoconference based on the success of this approach. Two separate board trainings were also held via videoconference, one focused on the LSC regulations and the other on understanding the Pine Tree budget. (6)
- Statewide training sessions, several of which involved other legal services organizations, such as Maine's Legal Services for the Elderly. By using the Portland location to anchor the training sessions, the cost of using out-of-state trainers (travel and time) was minimized, as well as the costs of Pine Tree staff participation in the training events. Three of these events also satisfied Maine's Continuing Legal Education requirement for all attorneys and were directed at private attorneys interested in providing *pro bono* services. (7)
- Meetings of various legal aid state planning groups, including the Advisory Committee of Providers, committees of the Justice Action Group, the Volunteer Lawyers Project Advisory Board of the Maine Bar Foundation, and other statewide policy and advisory boards and committees. These include judges and private attorneys as well as legal aid staff. On at least one occasion, videoconferencing made possible a presentation by a leader from outside the state to a Justice Action Group Committee. (16)
- Conferences with clients, primarily supporting interviews with domestic violence victims in sheltered locations. (8)
- Provision of American Sign Language interpretation for a deaf client using the videoconference connection with an ASL interpretation service in Scarborough. (1)
- An administrative hearing (a PET involving a special education proceeding) involving a Pine Tree client. (1)

PTLA has also used videoconferencing to provide training to other entities. For example, it conducted training on collection and preservation of evidence and maintenance of medical records in cases of domestic violence to staff at a hospital in Caribou, Maine. This training would not have been otherwise available to the staff of this remote hospital, more than 300 miles from the office where the domestic violence litigation and training staff is located.

In addition, PTLA has leased use of the system to the private bar and other groups.⁴ A statewide committee of the Maine State Bar Association holds its monthly meeting via videoconference between Portland and Augusta; and Consumers for Affordable HealthCare, a nonprofit foundation based in Augusta, uses the system regularly for meetings.

⁴ The one commercial videoconferencing center in Maine charges \$325 per hour for use of its system (which is of slightly higher quality than PTLA's system). Pine Tree makes use of its systems available to the private bar for between \$125 and \$150 per hour per site. For the non-profit community, the cost is between \$65 and \$85 per hour.

III. Effectiveness of Videoconferencing for Meetings and Training

PTLA staff and other users agree that videoconferencing is more effective than telephone conferencing for meetings and training. The visual element added by videoconferencing makes communications easier and increases the level of engagement of the participants.⁵ In some situations, videoconferencing has made possible events (particularly training sessions) that could not have been conducted effectively by telephone conferencing.

The development of the videoconferencing capacity has had a major positive impact on PTLA. It has reduced travel costs and made the program more efficient by saving time that would have been otherwise spent on travel between offices. Management-related meetings are held more frequently, promoting coordination and effective management.

The impact of videoconferencing has been particularly strong on the program's legal work. It has promoted high-quality legal work by increasing the level of supervision and mentoring (by making it easier for advocates to confer and co-counsel on cases), training (by making it easier and less expensive to have training sessions involving staff from widely separated offices), and coordination and collaboration. Many of the events conducted through videoconferencing would not have taken place but for the availability of this capacity: for example, restoring regular substantive task force meetings was a direct consequence of the development of the videoconferencing capacity. In addition, trainers from outside the program who might not otherwise have been available have been able to share their knowledge with PTLA staff. For example, two U.S. attorneys presented a training session on federal domestic violence law.

More broadly, videoconferencing has boosted program morale and cohesion by making it easier for staff in all PTLA offices, most importantly those in remote locations, to keep in touch with one another on a regular basis. For example, occasional "patchwork meetings" are organized at which each office makes a short presentation on something that is going on in the office that would be of interest to other staff. Newer staff at Presque Isle, PTLA's most remote office, say that the training and orientation made available through videoconferencing when they joined the program was invaluable both in conveying information and in making them feel connected to the rest of the program.

It is difficult to quantify the savings in time and mileage reimbursement resulting from use of the system because so many meetings are scheduled that might not otherwise have occurred. PTLA suggests that a conservative estimate would be that the videoconferencing system is saving the program a minimum of \$10,000 per year in

⁵ The only problem that was identified is that when more than two points are involved in the conference, one site occasionally loses its connection. This happens relatively frequently: one user estimated that it occurs during one out of every four meetings involving more than two points. When it happens, it is disruptive for the meeting. However, users are generally happy with the way the system functions, despite this problem.

mileage reimbursement alone and is freeing up an estimated 750 hours of staff time previously spent on travel to meetings, almost equivalent to 50 percent of a full-time attorney position.⁶

Moreover, Pine Tree is generating income by leasing its system to the private bar and other non-profits. The program budgeted \$3000 in income from this source for this year; actual income will be in the range of \$5000. This income will help subsidize the system-wide cost of \$21,600 per year going forward. It is likely that there will be increasing demand for videoconferencing depositions and remote hearings as time passes.

PTLA's videoconferencing capacity also benefits the other legal aid programs in the state, which participate in trainings and task forces. In addition, it has supported the work of groups involved in expanding access to justice in the state and promoted the development of a "state justice community" in Maine and a sense of connection with PTLA on the part of members of the judiciary and private bar by bringing them into PTLA offices for meetings.

⁶ For example, prior to the launch of the videoconferencing system, Pine Tree held four to six staff meetings a year in Augusta to discuss internal program management issues at an average cost of \$500/meeting for 10-12 participants in mileage reimbursement alone, not including staff travel time of between 2-4 hours per person per meeting. The monthly VLP advisory meetings also required Pine Tree staff to travel to Augusta from Portland 6 times per year, at a projected cost of \$80 per meeting and 4 hours per meeting. Training events involving 20-25 staff from a minimum of 4 Pine Tree offices traveling to a single location (again, typically in Augusta) would incur an estimated \$1000 per training in mileage reimbursement and an estimated 60 hours of travel per training. Staff participation in the other types of activities referenced in the videoconferencing logs would involve an estimated additional \$2,500 in mileage reimbursement each year and an estimated 200 hours of travel time

IV. Reasons for Effectiveness for Meetings and Training

The configuration and administrative structure of PTLA offices is particularly well suited to frequent use of videoconferencing for meetings and training. The program has six offices. There are two hub offices, Portland and Bangor, located at a distance from one another. Regional Directing Attorneys at these two offices supervise staff at outlying offices. It is easy for staff in four offices to be connected by videoconferencing and relatively easy for all staff to gather at four offices (the two smallest offices are within reasonable driving distance from one of the other offices: Lewiston-Portland, 30 minutes; Machias-Bangor, 90 minutes).

PTLA has many meetings and conferences involving two or more offices, so there are many occasions for use of the videoconferencing equipment. Because it is used regularly, staff are familiar with its operation, perceive its usefulness, and do not hesitate to make use of it. Use of the equipment for meetings and training has become part of the program's culture.

The equipment is on-site at PTLA offices. Staff members at each office are familiar with maintaining and operating it and technical staff are generally available for troubleshooting.

Other groups in Maine share many of the same characteristics as PTLA. The development of a videoconferencing capacity could have a similar benefit to them. The domestic violence community is one example. Legal aid programs with a similar configuration could also benefit from development of a videoconferencing system.

V. Potential for Increased Use for Attorney-Client Conferences

In contrast to meetings and training events, PTLA's videoconferencing capacity has been used only occasionally for conferences and interviews with clients at remote sites. Because one of the major challenges facing PTLA is the delivery of services to remote areas of the state, this would appear to be an important potential use of videoconferencing.

PTLA's experience in this regard is consistent with that of the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii, which has had a videoconferencing system in place for three years. The designers of the system expected that its primary value would be in expanding access for clients. However, the system has been used only occasionally for client conferences, while it has been extensively for internal meetings.⁷

The PTLA attorneys who have used videoconferencing to confer with clients report that the clients have been satisfied with the experience. Reports from other programs also indicate that clients generally feel comfortable with the medium, associating it with watching television rather than an unfamiliar use of technology.⁸ Thus client acceptance does not appear to pose a barrier to use of video for this purpose.

Videoconferencing has been used at PTLA to confer with clients in the following circumstances:

- A domestic violence specialist in PTLA's Portland office has conducted roughly a half a dozen video interviews with clients at a domestic violence shelter in Bath, approximately 45 minutes away from Portland, prior to hearings on protective orders. The videoconferencing unit was placed in the shelter through the grant-funded HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project. The grant paid for the videoconferencing unit and initially paid for the telephone line to support it. When the grant period ended, on September 30, 2003, the agency operating the shelter decided that it could not afford to maintain the telephone line supporting the equipment. However, it has subsequently reconsidered and plans to continue using the equipment for attorney-client interviews.
- An attorney in PTLA's Bangor office conducted several witness preparation sessions with one client prior to her divorce hearing. The attorney anticipated that the client would be a difficult witness and would require careful preparation. The client lived near Lubec, several hours away from Bangor, and had transportation problems. The attorney arranged to use videoconferencing equipment at a hospital in Lubec. The hospital staff was cooperative in arranging for a test run and the subsequent interviews.
- The same attorney in Bangor conducted a witness preparation session with a client in a divorce case who lived in the Machias area. The client came to PTLA's

⁷ Based on interviews with staff at the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii and evaluation data filed with the Legal Services Technology project at lstech.org.

⁸ Evaluation data from Hawaii at lstech.org.

Machias office for the interview. The session was set up by PTLA staff at the Machias office.⁹

The two attorneys found that using videoconferencing for these purposes was very effective. The domestic violence specialist in Portland was disappointed when the link to the Bath shelter was discontinued and now anticipates using it productively again. The attorney in Bangor said that she would definitely use videoconferencing again in similar cases.

The circumstances involved in these cases provide some useful insights into the factors that determine when the medium can be used effectively for attorney-client conference.

Benefit. In all of the cases, there was a significant benefit to using videoconferencing rather than conferring by telephone. The client had a pending court appearance in which her demeanor and credibility were important, so the fact that the attorney was able to see the client made the video interview much more valuable than a telephone interview. From the client's perspective, the visual component promoted trust and comfort with the attorney prior to the hearing. Using videoconferencing instead of meeting in person either saved time for the attorney or reduced travel and stress for the client, depending on which party would have had to travel.

Convenience of set-up. In all but one of the cases, the attorney knew that it would be easy to set up the videoconference: there were supportive, identified staff contacts at the remote site to set up the conference; the equipment at the remote site was dedicated to the purpose involved, so there was no competition for its use at the other end; there was reasonable flexibility for scheduling the appointment, so it could be set for a time when the equipment was available at the PTLA end. In the case involving the use of equipment at the hospital, the conference proved to be convenient to set up, although the attorney could not have been sure of this in advance, and there were potential problems at the other end—identifying the appropriate staff person, finding a time when the equipment was not being used for other purposes, dealing with technical issues, and so on.

Convenience for client. In the domestic violence cases, the client was at the shelter, so there was no inconvenience or burden placed upon her in connection with the interview. In the cases involving the attorney in Bangor, the clients had to travel to the hospital in Lubec and the Machias PTLA office, respectively, but this was relatively convenient for them—certainly more convenient than traveling to Bangor.

Whether or not videoconferencing will be effective for an attorney-client conference will depend on the balance of these factors. For example, the attorney in Bangor might not have found it worth the effort to set up the video conference at the hospital in Lubec if the witness had not been so in need of preparation. If she had encountered difficulties in setting up the conference, she might have decided to drive to

⁹ The equipment at PTLA's outreach office in Rockland was also reported used on at least one occasion for a client interview, but no further information has been obtained.

Lubec herself, and she would probably be less likely to attempt to set up a conference under similar circumstances in the future. Or, if the client had been a distraught victim of domestic violence, the attorney might have decided that asking her to deal with yet another institution (the hospital) in this period of crisis would be placing too great a burden on her.¹⁰

Similarly, consideration of the benefit and convenience factors involved in using videoconferencing for initial intake interviews indicates that this would not be an effective use of the medium, because the benefit (as compared to a telephone interview) would be limited and likely outweighed by lack of convenience: the client would have to travel to the remote site, rather than simply calling; and the interview would have to be scheduled in advance, to insure that the equipment was available at both sites.¹¹ However, if it were established in an initial telephone interview that there was a need for the attorney and client to see one another while they conferred, such as preparation for a court hearing, then the balance could come down the other way, making it effective to set up a video interview for a subsequent conference.¹²

In summary, the potential for more effective use of PTLA's videoconferencing system for client conferences seems limited to a specific set of circumstances: where there is a clear benefit over using the telephone, usually for witness preparation; where either the client or the attorney would have to travel a substantial distance to meet in person; and where the videoconference can be set up conveniently.

PTLA should take steps to increase staff awareness of this potential. The program staff interviewed for this report generally were not aware that videoconferencing had

¹⁰ The PTLA attorney who has been using videoconferencing for conferences with the Bath shelter said that for this reason, rather than arranging for a client to go to a nearby hospital for a video interview, she would probably just talk to the client by telephone.

¹¹ The potential use of videoconferencing for intake has been a major focus of discussions in the legal services community. PTLA originally anticipated that it would use the Maine TeleMedicine System for *intake with clients at remote sites*. Florida Rural Legal Services developed a *remote-access intake system* in which computer, videoconferencing and fax access to intake services was available at all libraries served by its Lakeland office (approximately 20 libraries), as well as other sites frequently used by low-income people. The program stopped supporting the system approximately two years ago because it was so lightly used. As noted above, the system at the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii was initially focused on expanding access for clients. However, staff there indicate that for intake, clients generally find it easier to use the telephone "hotline." A chart dated March 13, 2003, filed at lstech.org showing evaluation data from the program indicates that videoconferencing has been used 11 times for intake since its installation, as compared to 73 times for case conferences. Because videoconferencing requires clients to travel to a particular site, it has the disadvantages of the traditional "walk-in" intake system that the telephone intake model was designed to overcome.

¹² A project of the Montana Legal Services Association uses videoconferencing for attorney-client conferences and representation in court. However, the initial intake is conducted by a paralegal at the remote site. Once the attorney decides to take the case, the paralegal arranges for a video interview with the attorney, who subsequently appears in court via video. It should be emphasized that the video interview *does not take place until it has been determined that the attorney will be representing the client in court* by video, thus establishing the need for the video interview. The project is currently being evaluated by an outside evaluator, but the attorney who originally participated in the project (who is no longer with the program) considers it to be successful.

been used for client conferences as much as it had. While some programs have reported attorney reluctance to use videoconferencing, this does not seem to be a problem at PTLA, where attorneys use videoconferencing regularly for other purposes, feel comfortable with the medium, and appreciate its value. Rather, the issue seems to be that attorneys simply do not consider the option when it might be appropriate.

One obvious example of when videoconferencing would be effective for attorney-client interviews is when a PTLA attorney with expertise in a particular substantive area represents a client who lives in an area served by another office. Under these circumstances, it would be easy and effective to use videoconferencing between the two PTLA offices for any conference with the client that could not be accomplished effectively by telephone.

A more frequent situation is where the client lives at some distance from any PTLA office, as is the case in many of the northern and western parts of the state. Typically, in cases involving a court appearance, PTLA attorneys either interview and confer with their clients by telephone, meet them at court immediately before the hearing to confer, meet them at court on an occasion when the attorney has to be there for another hearing, or ask the client to come to the PTLA office to meet in person. Videoconferencing would offer an effective alternative if arrangements could be made to use a unit at a site more convenient for the client. Hospitals, health clinics, and the state Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services might be potential sites.

Rather than leaving it to the attorney involved to make arrangements to use equipment at a remote site on an as-needed basis, PTLA should explore possibilities for arranging to make regular use of equipment at some likely sites around the state. If PTLA attorneys knew that a video conference could be arranged with reasonable convenience by contacting a particular staff person at the location involved, they would be more likely to do so.

Several factors need to be considered in selecting prospective sites. They should be easy to get to for a substantial number of clients. The equipment must be in a location affording privacy and available at the site reasonably often. Most important, there must be easily reachable and supportive staff contacts, who will be available to set up the appointment and launch the conference. While identifying potential sites and establishing contacts and procedures would require time and effort on PTLA's part, the potential benefit is likely to warrant this investment.¹³

The above discussion has been limited to consideration of using videoconferencing equipment that is already available, either at a PTLA office or another site. Ideally, videoconferencing equipment dedicated to attorney-client conferences

¹³ It was originally anticipated that PTLA's contract with Maine TeleMedicine Services (see above), would facilitate such relationships. However, Maine TeleMedicine Services was unable to fulfill this function to date and PTLA has terminated its relationship with the vendor. However, there may still be some potential for effective use of the service's network.

would be made available at sites around the state convenient to clients. Possible sites might be public housing projects, courthouses, homeless shelters or food banks, or CAP agencies. However, until the cost of videoconferencing equipment becomes more affordable, purchase and support of additional units for the limited purpose of attorney-client conferences is probably not warranted.

The one exception might be at domestic violence shelters. As suggested above, it would probably not be effective to try to use videoconferencing equipment at a site other than a shelter or domestic violence advocacy agency for the client end of the interview in domestic violence cases, because any additional inconvenience would be likely to increase stress for the client. Given the successful experience with the Bath shelter, replication of this capacity at other shelter or advocacy sites should be effective. Moreover, additional units could provide the basis for a domestic violence videoconferencing network that could be used for statewide meetings and trainings. PTLA and domestic violence agencies or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence should explore whether grant funding might be available to purchase additional videoconferencing units to locate in shelters or advocacy offices.

VI. Other Uses

American Sign Language Interpretation. Since March 2003, PTLA has had the capacity to use videoconferencing to provide ASL interpretation, with the interpreter working from the offices of the Pine Tree Society in Scarborough and the client and advocate at a PTLA office. Over a six-month period, videoconferencing was used for this purpose on one occasion. While there appears to be potential for the provision of ASL interpretation through videoconferencing to increase access to legal assistance for deaf clients, the minimal utilization of the capacity to date indicates that further outreach and coordination efforts will be necessary to accomplish this goal.

Administrative Hearings. PTLA has used its videoconferencing system for one administrative hearing to date. Use of videoconferencing for this purpose is likely to increase as videoconferencing capacity is expanded at state and federal agencies.

Courts. PTLA's leadership in the use of videoconferencing has increased interest in the potential uses of the medium within the court system. The courts currently have three videoconferencing units provided through PTLA's HelpME Law Domestic Abuse Project, and have begun to use this system for meetings involving court personnel and other participants from around the state. The Judicial Branch's Office of Information Technology has recently created an internal committee on implementing videoconferencing in the Maine court system, on which PTLA's Hugh Calkins has been asked to serve. The committee meets by videoconference. PTLA's involvement in court discussions about potential uses will benefit low-income people in the state.

Other Partnerships. The availability of the videoconferencing capacity has also promoted the development of relationships with other institutions dealing with low-income people in the state by putting PTLA in touch with those entities to discuss possible videoconferencing-based collaborative projects, even where those projects have not yet been developed. For example, PTLA has sought funding for a joint project with the Maine Medical Center in Portland. These relationships have potential for benefiting PTLA's client community in a variety of ways.

VII. Conclusion

PTLA's videoconferencing system has had a major positive impact on the program, particularly for uses involving meetings and training sessions, which indirectly benefit clients by making the program more efficient and effective. Under current circumstances, the potential for effective use of the system for interviews and conferences with clients is less than was originally anticipated (limited primarily to witness preparation); however, PTLA could more fully exploit this limited potential. As videoconferencing becomes more affordable and more widely used, the potential for use of videoconferencing in expanding client access to services is likely to increase.