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CODEX SOURCE ARCHIVE

Computational Law Apps Fighting COVID-19

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Introduction

While social distancing the legal needs of citizens do not go away. In Vermont the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" Executive Order from Governor Scott has created a greater volume of legal needs in certain areas and uncertainty about how to best offer remote legal services to clients. While the Vermont Secretary of State has promulgated emergency rules to address the difficulties of notarization and our legislature has addressed the remote notarization and execution of wills, accessing the emergency legal services needed has not become more affordable or faster during the pandemic. The nature of our healthcare crisis makes some of these legal needs urgent in ways they were not a month ago. We need remote legal services, and we need them now. Each year, the Vermont Law School eLawyering class takes on document automation and legal guidance projects as part of the course curriculum. This year our original class assignment required students to build a legal application using Community.Lawyer (cofounded by VLS alum, Toma Officer, Community.Lawyer the go to access to justice product used by LSC). Toma Officer kindly gave a guest lecture in the class and demonstrated how students could build applications to provide legal guidance or documents using Community.Lawyer. Using a tool like Community.Lawyer, students apply legal reasoning and problem solving as well as design and technical skills to build a legal application that provides legal guidance or completes a legal document.

Before spring break in mid-March, most students had submitted application concepts in their preferred area of law. Then the pandemic happened, and students pivoted to address the rising legal needs stemming from the virus's impacts on society. The COVID-19 emergency has provided law students with new legal application opportunities to explore and a more pressing need for their exploration.

On Monday, April 6th and Wednesday, April 8th the Vermont Law School eLawyering class demonstrated COVID-19 Response legal application prototypes. The video of the Monday demonstrations are available here and the Wednesday demonstrations are available here. What you will see in either of these videos is a demonstration of student ideation and legal reasoning ending in their completed application prototypes. These preliminary functional models will require tweaking - legally, technically and in their design – before they are ready for public use. The second step is underway as students find attorney stakeholders to partner with to publish their completed applications.



Monday Demonstrations



Wednesday Demonstrations

If you have any interest in reading or connecting on these projects, please reach out to Jeanette Eicks via email at: JEICKS@vermontlaw.edu

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Overview of Projects

Relief From Abuse Order

by Kelly Olszuk

This App will guide you through a step-by-step process to request a Relief From Abuse (RFA) order. You may file a request for an RFA for yourself, your children, or both if you are 16 years of age or older. To get a court order for an RFA, you must show the court that the defendant is a family member or household member, that the defendant has abused you or your child[ren], and that there is a danger of further abuse if an RFA is not issued.

Is your Business Essential?

by Eric Lee Chee

This app that tells you whether your business is critical in Vermont and is allowed to operate under the Governor's executive order. The app asks questions regarding the industry, sector, and business type to determine if it is eligible to continue operating legally.

You Got Legal Power!

by Jacqueline Waller

You Got Legal Power! is an app to produce a power of attorney for terminally ill patients. The app will allow the patient or patient representative to answer a few simple questions in an effort to generate a Power of Attorney in the event there is a loss of consciousness, competency and more so a loss of life. This tool will serve as a preventative measure to avoid lengthy probate matters in court.

COVID and Eviction Defenses

by Christopher Long

With COVID19 disrupting lives and incomes, a great number of people are going to be at risk of eviction. This app walks tenants through the eviction process in Vermont and helps them find any defenses they have, including the current moratorium on evictions from properties that received funding from HUD.

Are you an Essential Worker?

by Steven Rivas

As COVID-19 forces more and more areas to limit groups and travel, essential employees are still allowed to work. Even in this time of crisis unscrupulous business owners are forcing employees to work, even though they do not fit the state definition of an essential worker. This app will inform the layperson of what the law defines an essential worker as and present them with the benefits they should be receiving if there are any. Many states offer increased pay during times of crisis to essential workers and by simply not being informed the general public stands to miss out on money they deserve.

Vermont's Do Not Resuscitate/Clinician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment

by Hunter Sutherland

While this document is not typically prepared by a lawyer, it has a substantial impact on an individual's legal rights. Amid this global pandemic, this form will need to be invoked more often. Implementing community.lawyer's document assembly process will streamline the process to be completed quickly by a health care clinician in coordination with a patient. This form provides the opportunity to use the conditional logic features of community.lawyer.

California Restraining Order App

By Dan Brown

This app provides an avenue for those seeking relief from stalking or other forms of harassment. The app allows users to generate a filled restraining order application PDF, which they can print themselves or email to a legal professional, to be signed and filed with the court.

Solving the Problem of Apprised Public Defense

by Raynald Carre

This app catalogs the charged offenses as the would-be client understands them for input over tablet or phone device.

WillMaker

by Derek Tanizaki-Hudson

This app goes through much of the will-making process and auto-populates a form for the user. Given the current state of affairs in this country, a mobile will app is especially important as people are being isolated and falling into life-threatening situations rather quickly. Those people may not have time to contact an attorney to draft a will. This app aims to lessen that burden on the user and help them draft a quality will that, in the event of something drastic happening to them, can help ease the hardships of this process during such stressful times. As such, the app will be directed primarily at everyday people who need a will.

For more information about Vermont Law's Center for Legal Innovation, visit their website at: www.vermontlaw.edu/academics/centers-and-programs/center-for-legal-innovation

For more information about apps being built on Community.Lawyer for COVID-19, check out their featured apps page at: https://community.lawyer/featured-apps

For more information about apps being build using Docassemble (the underlying architecture of Community.Lawyer), check out the Suffolk Legal Innovation & Technology Lab's Document Assembly Line Project, which is working to rapidly create mobile-friendly accessible versions of online court forms and pro se materials in multiple-languages for key areas of urgent legal need amid the COVID-19 crisis. More information about getting involved with this project is available at: https://suffolklitlab.org/doc-assembly-line/