



**EZ PLEA**  
**Online Plea Bargain System**  
**Southern University Law Center**  
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**The Problem**

Louisiana is facing a constitutional crisis. The U.S. Constitution guarantees every criminal defendant the right to counsel. But if you're poor in Louisiana, that guarantee is an empty one. Many Louisianans can't get the legal help when they need it and resolve their cases quickly. Why? Because prosecutors and public defenders don't have the resources to keep the wheels of justice turning.

In particular, public defenders lack the funding to keep up with demand. Public defenders handle more than 80 percent of criminal cases in Louisiana. Yet, the Louisiana public defender system only has the capacity to handle 21 percent of the workload.

As a result, criminal defendants, many poor and black, are forced to waive their right to a speedy trial. Their lives are put on hold, for months or even years, as their cases are waitlisted.

The gap between available lawyers and the thousands of Louisiana poor who need their help is vast. EZ Plea will help close the gap.

**The Solution**

EZ Plea is an online dispute resolution service, or "ODR" for short.

A team of Southern University law professors and students designed EZ Plea in the fall of 2019. The app design won the Digital Technology Category of the BizTech Challenge as part of the Bayou Classic. Since then, SULC has been developing the application for beta testing and, hopefully, widespread usage by prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, and the courts. (Here is a link to the student pitch leading to the win: <https://youtu.be/8Yp3CA5eQAw>.)

Hillar Moore, the East Baton Rouge Parish district attorney, believes that the sooner you can get prosecutors and defense lawyers talking, the sooner you can resolve cases. In fact, he estimates that jail populations can be cut by 25% if lawyers from both sides are available in the jails as defendants enter the justice system.

EZ Plea can bring lawyers together anywhere, anytime.

Through ODR, parties settle their disputes online. ODR saves time and money by enabling people to share information online and to work out their differences at a distance.

Initially used outside of the justice system to resolve millions of private disputes, courts now use ODR for many minor cases, like traffic tickets and small claims.

EZ Plea brings ODR to the criminal justice system with a new approach to plea bargaining. . .a fair plea through technology.

Over 95% of criminal cases end in plea bargains. EZ Plea has benefits beyond simply bringing peace of mind to criminal defendants. Prosecuting attorneys and public defenders can focus on more complex cases, courts will have greatly reduced caseloads, and the jails will be less crowded.

### **The App**

So how does EZ Plea achieve a fair plea through technology?

It allows a defense attorney—typically, a public defender—to meet online with the district attorney, with or without other interested parties—like the defendant, police, or victims—with all the information at their fingertips essential to make a fair deal.

Our long-term goal is to use EZ Plea not only to make negotiating pleas vastly more convenient, but also to make the plea-bargaining process itself fairer through artificial intelligence and machine learning. Computer applications with AI perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, like the decision-making required of attorneys negotiating plea deals.

Machine learning, a subfield of artificial intelligence, enables computers to learn on their own. We hope to use EZ Plea data to recommend unbiased, consistent plea deals that aren't unduly influenced by the implicit biases or inexperience of the negotiating attorneys.

We've already been consulting with one of our mentors, Dr. Brian Keller—Head of Data Science at BlueVoyant, an international cybersecurity consulting firm—about the feasibility of implementing AI in EZ Plea. Within a few months, says Dr. Keller, EZ Plea should generate sufficient data to make fairer deals through machine learning.

We have also met with the local district attorney, Hillar Moore, and a member of the Louisiana Public Defender Board, Donald North. Both recognized the benefits of EZ Plea. They feel that anything that can speed up the resolution of criminal cases benefits everyone in the justice system.

Meanwhile, here's a look at the EZ Plea one sheet describing the app's benefits and features. No worries if you'd like to study it more closely. We've attached a copy to our executive summary.

For the moment, let me introduce you to EZ Plea's main components.

EZ has different portals for different users, primarily defense lawyers, prosecuting attorneys, and other stakeholders—like criminal defendants, police officers, and crime victims.

Different types of users will have different dashboards. For example, a defense attorney will see a schedule of cases to be negotiated, access evidence relating to each case, and create notes about strategy and other issues. The attorney may also send messages to opposing counsel and start a conference.

When attorneys are conferencing, they can click on a case file, which has four sections.

First, information about the case, like the defendant's picture, his background, the court case identification number, pending charges, prior convictions, and other details vital to the bargaining process.

Next, lawyers can share and view the key evidence, such as police reports, crime video, and other materials.

Also, while a bargaining session is taking place, the attorneys will be able to refer to old notes and create new ones in their versions of the case file.

Finally, each EZ Plea case file tracks the plea-bargaining process, from the prosecuting or defense attorney's initial proposals to the final deal.

As we mentioned before, we hope to program EZ Plea to harvest all the data from each deal to guide future deals. Imagine if every lawyer involved in an EZ Plea negotiation could draw on the collective wisdom of prior plea bargains, reflected in the app's database of all deals and processed through an AI algorithm, to ensure the fairest deal for his client.

The sooner a criminal case is resolved, the more potential for savings. Police, prosecuting and defense attorneys, the courts, and the corrections system devote time and money to every defendant whose case is pending. Making plea bargains more convenient, timely, and inexpensive will resolve cases more quickly and spare the expense of investigating, trying, and jailing defendants. Perhaps, most importantly, EZ Plea will help resolve the constitutional crisis now facing Louisiana and other states, freeing up resources so that criminal defendants have access to counsel, a right guaranteed to all Americans under the Constitution.

That's the goal of EZ Plea. . .A fair plea through technology.



# EZ PLEA

EZ Plea is a web-based app that brings online dispute resolution (ODR) to the criminal justice system. Over 95% of criminal cases end with plea bargains instead of trial. EZ Plea uses technology to allow defense lawyers and district attorneys to meet online, with critical case information at their fingertips, to resolve criminal cases more efficiently and more fairly. Soon, EZ Plea hopes to apply artificial intelligence and machine learning to plea bargaining data as it is collected to recommend fairer, consistent deals. By making plea bargaining more timely, convenient, and effective, EZ Plea hopes to ensure that criminal defendants are afforded the protections guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution, like the right to counsel and to a speedy trial, yet reduce the burden and expense on the criminal justice system of unnecessarily keeping thousands of defendants in the system awaiting a plea deal that is, in all but a handful of cases, inevitable.

## EZ COLLABORATION TOOLS



Video conferencing



Stakeholder participation



Evidence sharing



Deal data collection



Messaging



System analytics



Notetaking



AI and machine learning



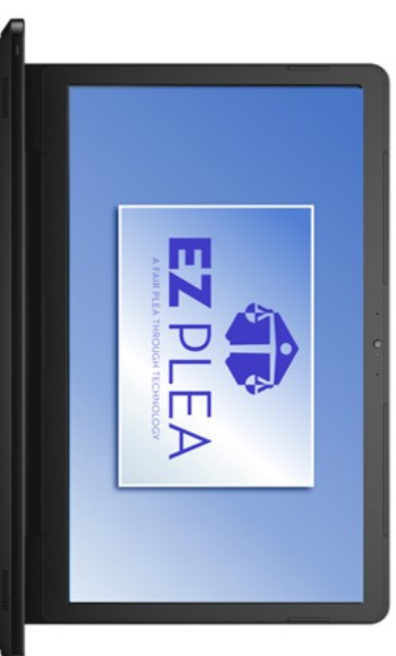
Deal tracking



Deal recommendations



Calendar



EZ Plea... a fair plea through technology.