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Secondary Use of Legal Information to Optimize Public Service and Promote Justice

In legal proceedings, vast and varied information is collected about events and their causes. This information, assembled and analyzed at considerable public expense, is usually used only for the purpose of determining the outcome of the legal dispute and is typically “discarded” after its resolution.

This article proposes to use the information generated in legal proceedings for other purposes as well, particularly for improving public service and preventing future injustices and failures stemming from actions or omissions of the authorities. Towards that end, the article offers procedures that would facilitate the collection and transmission of the information, both to the authority responsible for the failure and to a centralized database.

The article provides justifications for secondary use of legal information and for removing existing barriers that currently hinder such use. Furthermore, the article discusses potential objections, disadvantages and dangers, and concludes with a call to the State Comptroller’s office to adopt a pilot program for such secondary use of information.