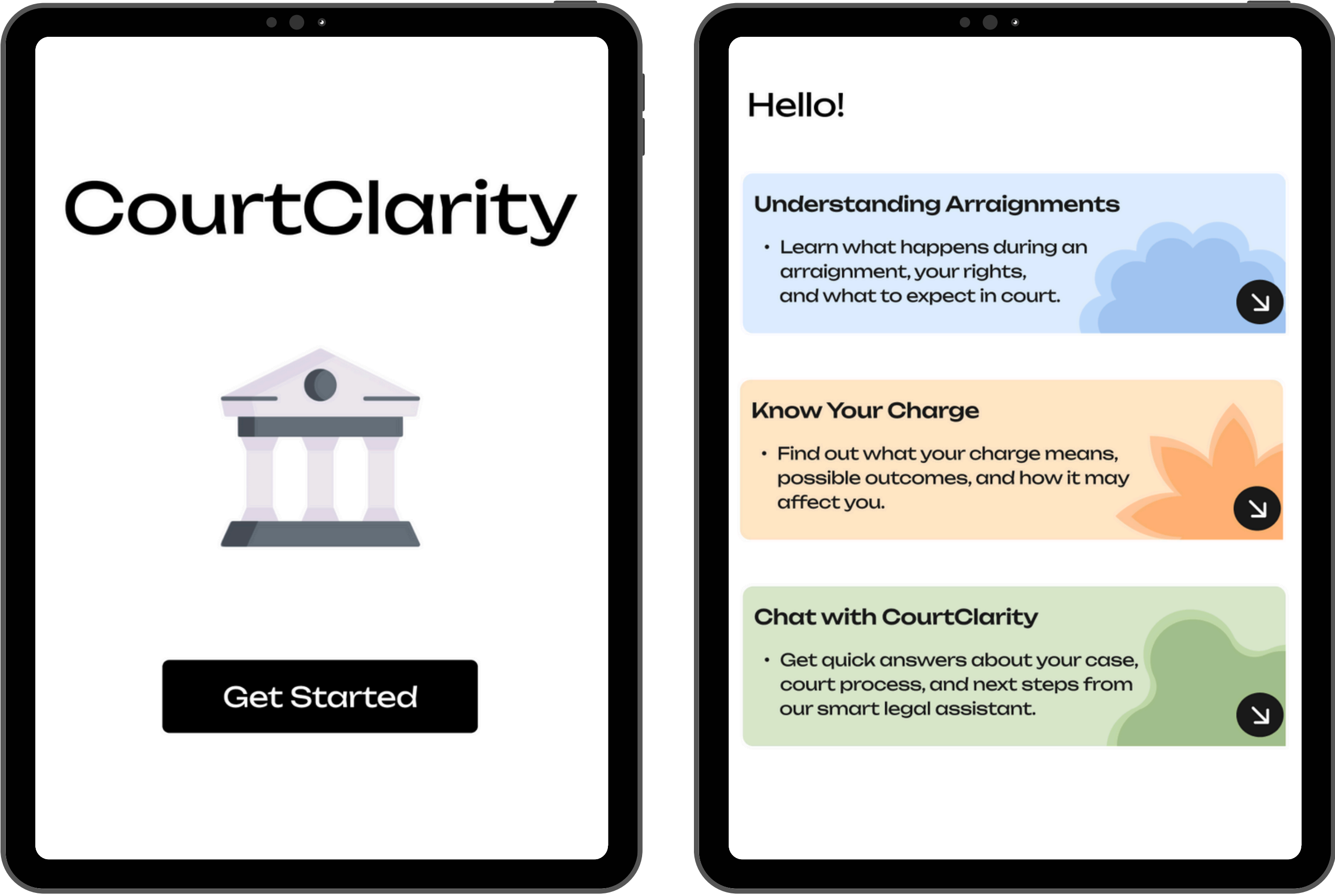


Can Technology Empower & Educate Defendants During Arraignments?

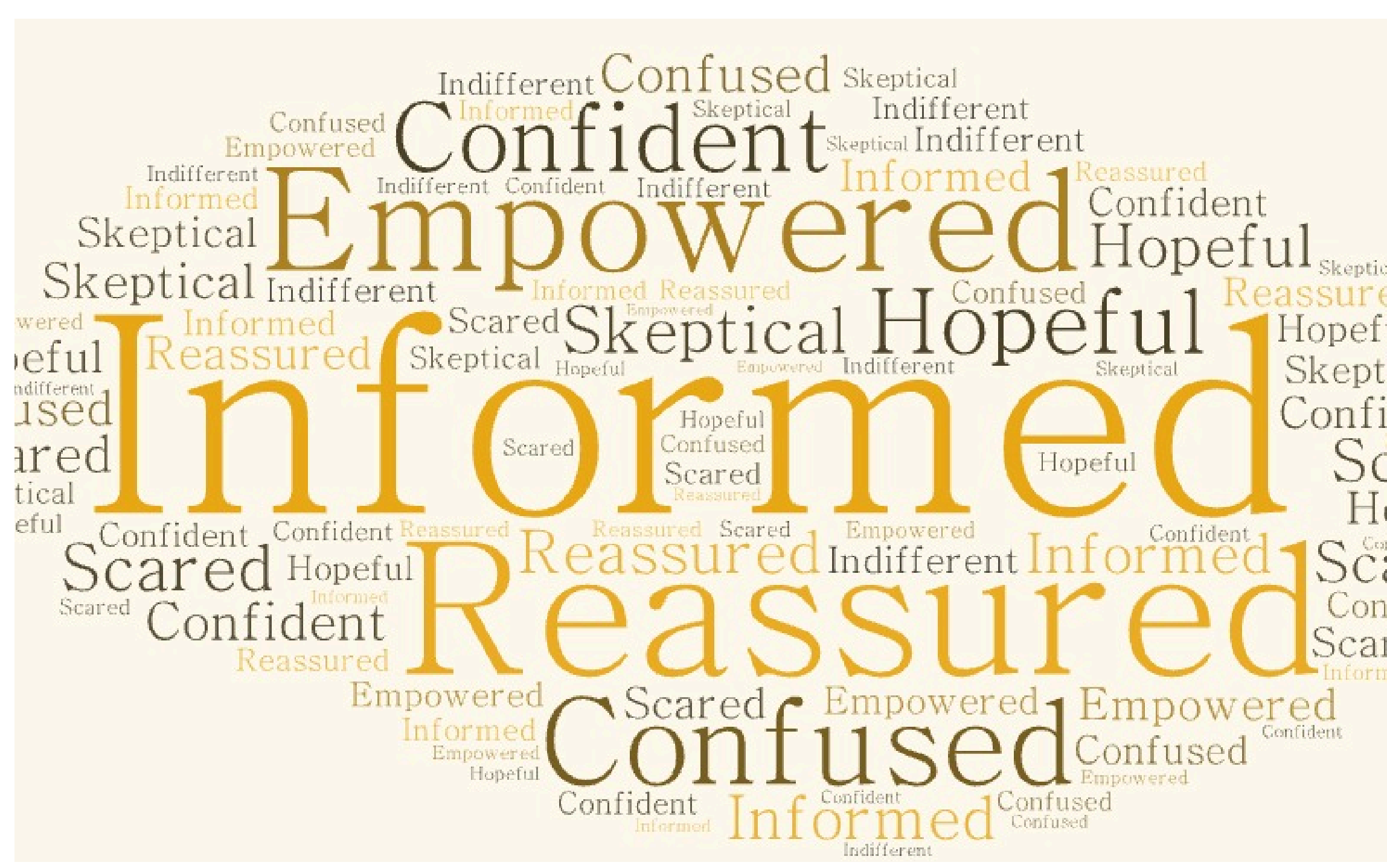
Zoie Geronimi, Eric H. Holder Jr. Initiative for Civil and Political Rights Research Fellows Program

Background

- Criminal Justice Act (1964) guarantees right to counsel, but systemic inequities persist.
- Nearly 90% of federal defendants rely on court-appointed attorneys.
- Public defenders face overwhelming caseloads, therefore creating limited time with clients.
- Defendants often enter arraignment uninformed, which can lead to disadvantages.
- **So what can we do, with our current resources, to solve this issue?**



“How do you feel about receiving legal information from an online app?”



Goals

- Explore how, and if, technology can empower and educate defendants.
- Determine to what extent technology can affect decision making during arraignments.

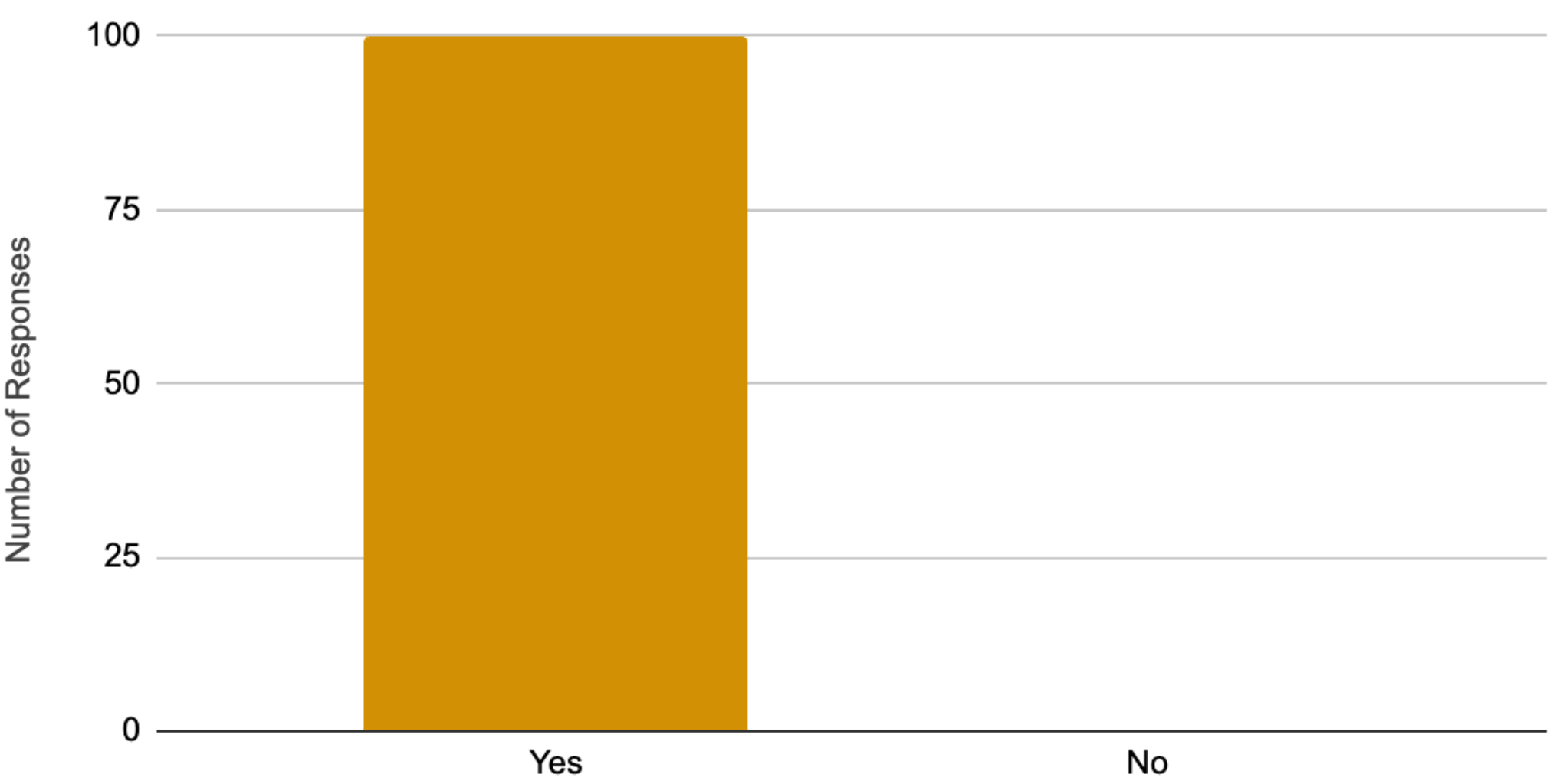
Hypothesis

1. Increasing the accessibility of legal information will make defendants feel more prepared during arraignment.
2. If individuals who pled guilty had been provided with clear legal information beforehand, they may have been more likely to enter a non-guilty plea.

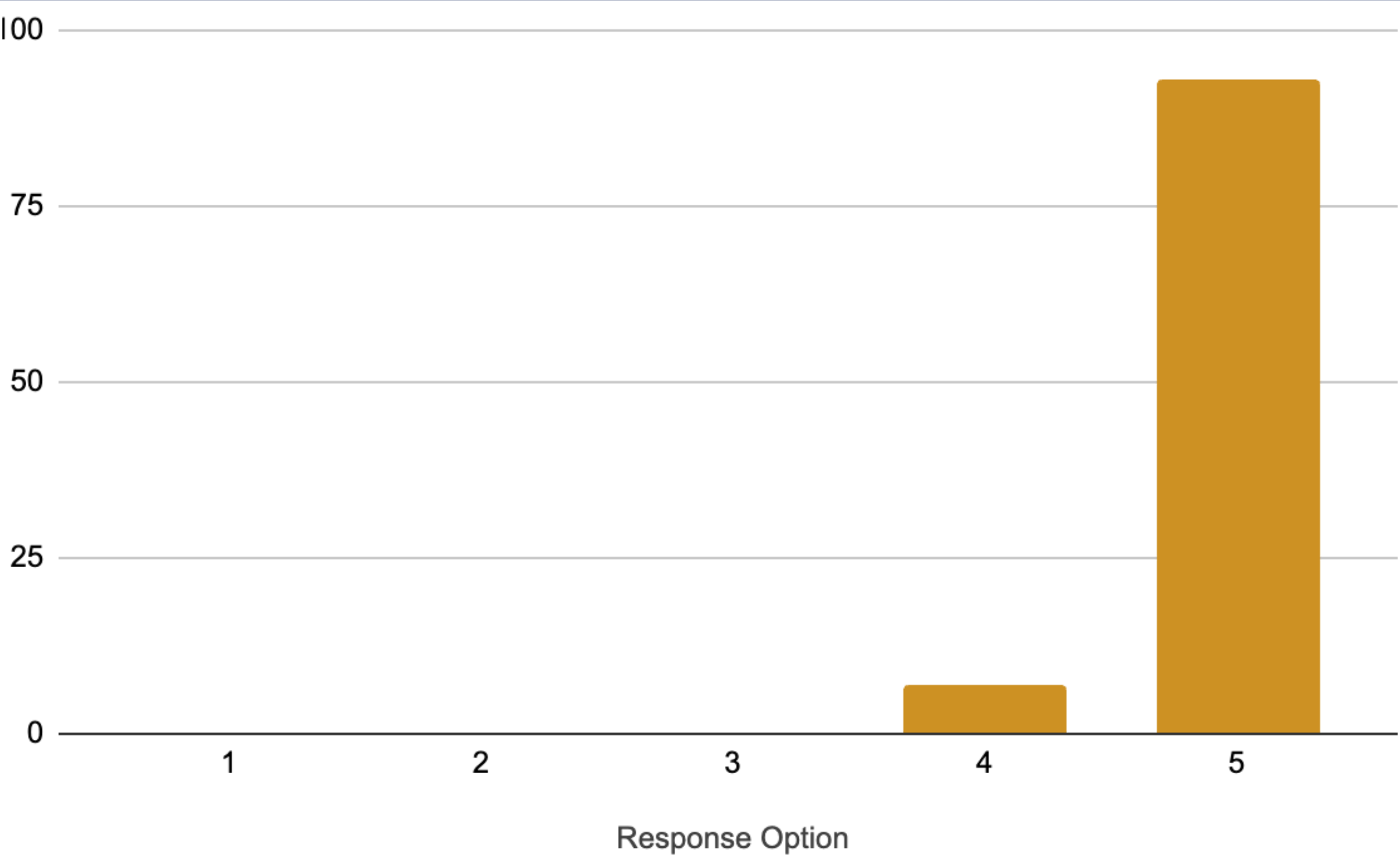
Research Methods

- Prototype of CourtClarity was created and shown to participants.
- Survey was administered to 100 individuals with prior arraignment experience.
- Sample split between urban and rural jurisdictions.

“If available, would you have used this tool at your arraignment?”



“On a scale of 1 to 5, how much would this tool have influenced your understanding of the arraignment process?”



Conclusions & Future Directions

- Hypothesis 1 supported: defendants believe they would have felt more prepared and informed.
- Hypothesis 2 mixed: access to the app did not always change plea decisions.
- Release of CourtClarity on the app store for Louisiana
- Increased research, surveys, interviews, and feedback for thesis.



Technology Used

Figma, HTML, CSS, JavaScript, App Store Connect

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