

The Resource Page: Focus on Pro Se Litigants

A PRIME RESOURCE

A single, new publication provides a thorough, readable manual for helping *pro se* litigants, with an appendix of additional resources, including contact names and a bibliography. It reports the findings and recommendations of an American Judicature Society/Justice Management Institute study financially supported by the State Justice Institute. The publication, authored by Jona Goldschmidt, Barry Mahoney, Harvey Solomon and Joan Green, is *Meeting the Challenge of Pro Se Litigation: A Report and Guidebook for Judges and Court Managers* (1998) (113 pp. plus 30-page appendix). The monograph is available for \$15 plus \$3.50 postage and handling from the American Judicature Society, Suite 600, 180 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60601 - (312) 558-6900. Many of the resources and much of the information contained on this page is based upon information presented in that monograph.

For a review of efforts in Minnesota since 1994 to improve resources for *pro se* litigants, see John M. Stanoch, *Working with Pro Se Litigants: The Minnesota Experience*, 24 Wm. Mitchell L. Rev. 297 (1998).



INTERNET SITES FOR FOR USE BY PRO SE LITIGANTS

Maricopa County Superior Court Self-Service Center

<http://www.maricopa.gov/supcrt/ssc/ssscheme.html>

Designed and developed with the help of more than \$800,000 in grant funds, Maricopa County has opened self-service centers in two physical locations plus this Internet site. More than 400

"Lest the citizenry lose faith in the substance of the system and the procedures we use to administer it, we can ill afford to confront them with a government dominated by forms and mysterious rituals and then tell them they lose because they did not know how to play the game or should not have taken us at our word."

Teegarden v. Director, Arkansas Employment Security Division, 267 Ark. 893, 899, 591 S.W. 2d 675, 678 (1979) (Newbern, J., dissenting).

forms in areas such as divorce, paternity, juvenile, and probate cases, plus detailed instructions for handling such proceedings, are included.

Utah Courts Internet Site and QuickCourt

<http://courtlink.utcourts.gov/index.htm>

The Utah state courts have an excellent Internet site, providing "how to" advice for things like fighting an eviction notice, obtain a protection order or file for divorce. The site also has a glossary of legal terms and forms for domestic violence and small claims cases. Information is also available about the Utah QuickCourt kiosk system, through which kiosks at four locations provide forms for divorce and landlord-tenant matters for a \$10 fee.

Supreme Court of Florida Internet Site

<http://www.firn.edu/supct/sctintro.html>

The Florida Supreme Court has a Self-Help Center, which includes divorce forms, plus links to general legal information prepared by the Florida Bar Association.



COURT STAFF GUIDELINES: HELPING PRO SE LITIGANTS

Staff should:

- Provide information contained in docket reports, case file, indexes and other reports.
- Answer questions concerning court rules, procedures and ordinary practices (such questions generally beginning, "Can I...?" or "How do I...?").
- Provide examples of forms or pleadings for the guidance of litigants.
- Answer questions about the completion of forms (when forms are court-provided).
- Explain the meaning of terms and documents used.
- Answer questions about deadlines or due dates.

Staff should not:

- Give information when they are unsure of the correct answer; transfer such questions to supervisors.
- Advise litigants whether to take a particular course of action. Don't answer questions that begin, "Should I...?" Suggest that a lawyer may be able to answer those questions.
- Take sides in a case or proceeding pending in court.
- Provide information to one party that you would be unwilling or unable to provide to all other parties.
- Disclose the outcome of a matter submitted to a judge for decision until it is part of the public record or as otherwise directed by the judge.

SOURCE: *Meeting the Challenge of Pro Se Litigation*, citing Graecen, "No Legal Advice from Court Personnel - What Does That Mean?," JUDGES' J. 10 (Winter 1995).

NOTE: Restrictions on the unauthorized practice of law vary from state to state.



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NEW PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Timothy R. Murphy, et al., *Managing Notorious Trials* (1998) (225 pp.).

All you really need to know about this book is that Judge Hiller Zobel, who presided over the Louise Woodward (nanny) case, told attendees at AJA's annual meeting in Orlando that the first thing a trial judge should do if he or she gets assigned to a well-publicized case is to get this book because it is "literally packed with suggestions you can use." Topics covered include pretrial matters, dealing with the media, handling the jury, and planning for appropriate security. A detailed appendix provides background legal materials, form orders and a sample courthouse security plan. To order, send \$30 (which includes postage & handling) to National Center for State Courts, Fulfillment Dept., P. O. Box 580, Williston, VT 05495-0580 - or call 1-888-228-NCSC - or e-mail: ncsc.orders@aid-cvt.com.

National Center for State Courts, *Through the Eyes of the Juror: A Manual for Addressing Juror Stress* (1998) (90 pp.).

This monograph presents a simple proposition - that jurors, even in routine cases, may face stress they do not face in their normal pursuits - and provides a thorough discussion of ways judges and others in the court system can reduce juror stress. Includes results of surveys of more than 800 persons summoned for jury duty and more than 800 trial judges. To order, send \$5 to cover postage & handling to National Center for State Courts, Att.: Lynn R. Grimes, P. O. Box 8798, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8798 - or call 1-757-259-1841 - or e-mail: lgrimes@ncsc.dni.us.

David Rottman, et al., *A Guide to Court and Community Collaboration* (1998) (107 pp.).

The NCSC research staff has prepared this guide to help courts (whether individual judges, entire trial courts or even courts of an entire state) develop programs and systems that let courts and communities cooperate in identifying problems and developing strategies to address them. Exemplar programs discussed include the First Impressions Project, a Los Angeles program introducing elementary school children from underprivileged neighborhoods to the municipal courts; the Detroit Handgun Intervention Program, begun by a trial judge; and a Citizen Advisory Council to the Norfolk, Virginia, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Includes a detailed bibliography and a directory of resource organizations and contacts. To order, send \$5 to cover postage & handling to National Center for State Courts, Att.: Lynn R. Grimes, P. O. Box 8798, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8798 - or call 1-757-259-1841 - or e-mail: lgrimes@ncsc.dni.us.



INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST

The United States Department of Justice has quite a number of Internet sites that offer useful resource materials. Here is a list of some of them:

Main DOJ Site
<http://www.usdoj.gov>

From the home page, you can choose "Publications & Documents" to get to a listing of a great number of DOJ publications available on line. On line reports include background materials on domestic violence, drug courts and juvenile justice.

DOJ Office of Justice Programs (OJP)
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>

OJP publications available on line include the OJP Resource Guide. OJP administers many DOJ programs, including ones involving drug courts, violence against women and justice statistics.

Drug Courts Program Office
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/dcpo>

The Drug Courts Program Office, part of OJP, has a site providing grant application information, drug court resources and other related publications.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
<http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjdp>

OJJDP, another part of OJP, has a site providing grant application information, plus many juvenile justice publications and news releases available on line.

Violence Against Women Office (VAWO)

<http://www.usdoj.gov/vawo>

VAWO, also part of OJP, has a site providing a great deal of background research information about domestic violence, along with links to domestic violence coalitions in each state.

Justice Information Center (JIC)
<http://www.ncjrs.org>

The JIC provides general access to information tracked by DOJ about the justice system, including a search engine that searches more than 140,000 published and unpublished resources cataloged by DOJ from the early 1970's to the present.



PRO SE LITIGANT RESOURCES

Resources for use in handling pro se litigants are found on page 35.