

News for Immediate Release

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Online information to assist those wishing to represent themselves now available

HARRISBURG — Free online information is available to assist the growing number of Pennsylvanians who want to file their own family law cases in courts across the state.

Beginning today, standardized court forms for divorce and custody matters may be obtained on a dedicated page of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania's website at <http://www.pacourts.us/learn/representing-yourself> and forms related to child support through a link from that page to www.childsupport.state.pa.us.

The "Representing Yourself" page is designed to provide a place for interested parties without the ability to retain counsel to explore resources needed to represent themselves in court. It is not intended to provide legal interpretations or advice — those services can only be provided by an attorney. Indeed, while the courts are providing these forms and instructions, all who can retain an attorney are urged to do so. Representing yourself in any legal proceeding can result in lost rights, and should not be done unless one has no other option.

Instructions for completing the forms are included on the site. Also provided are links to counties in which each family court is located to provide self-represented litigants with details on how and where to file the documents. Additional resources include a directory of local self-help centers, Web links to free and low-cost legal aid and search mechanisms to help find mediators and guardianship agencies.

Although exact numbers are unavailable, court managers agree family court is where a significant percentage of self-represented — or *pro se* — civil filings take place. The trend has fed a desire to respond to those who require assistance in completing their forms as well as a better understanding of court process. The effort to provide information and forms was overseen by Supreme Court Justice Max Baer, a former Allegheny County family court judge.

"This is a win-win situation – both from the standpoint of the effective administration of the courts, and in providing meaningful access to justice," Justice Baer said. "Our courts will operate more efficiently, and confidence and respect in our legal system will be strengthened."

Nearly half of Pennsylvania's 67 counties already have some type of family court forms available online for those who need to file their own cases. Assuring consistent, reliable information is available to assist self-represented litigants means courts can save time, reduce confusion and mistakes and help families with limited funds have greater access to justice.

Link to self-help page: <http://www.pacourts.us/learn/representing-yourself>