



Illinois Supreme Court Policy

On Assistance to Court Patrons by Circuit

Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians, and Court

Volunteers

Effective April, 2015

**ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT POLICY ON ASSISTANCE TO COURT PATRONS
BY CIRCUIT CLERKS, COURT STAFF, LAW LIBRARIANS, AND COURT
VOLUNTEERS**

(a) Purpose and Scope.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to circuit clerks, court staff, law librarians, and court volunteers acting in a non-lawyer capacity as to what services may and may not be offered to assist court patrons to achieve fair and efficient resolution of their cases.

No court patron should be denied services permitted under this policy on the basis of being a self-represented litigant. Services to court patrons should be provided in a nondiscriminatory manner to all applicants without regard to race, color, religious creed, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, disability, sexual orientation or any category prohibited by federal or Illinois law.

(b) Definitions.

- (1) "Court patron" means any individual who seeks information to file, pursue or respond to a case on his or her own behalf or on the behalf of another.
- (2) "Self-represented litigant" means any individual who seeks information to file, pursue or respond to a case on his or her own behalf where a licensed attorney has not filed an appearance on behalf of that individual.
- (3) "Legal information" means general factual information about the law and the legal process. Legal information is different from legal advice, which involves giving guidance regarding an individual's legal rights and obligations in light of his or her particular facts and circumstances. Legal information is neutral.
- (4) "Approved forms" mean standardized forms and related instructions that have been approved pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 10-101; forms included in the Illinois Supreme Court Rules; and local circuit court forms adopted to facilitate local case-processing procedures.

(c) Prohibited Services. Circuit clerks, court staff, law librarians, and court volunteers—acting in a non-lawyer capacity on behalf of the court—shall not:

- (1) Recommend whether a case should be brought to court or comment on the merits of a pending case;
- (2) Give an opinion about what will happen if a case is brought to court;
- (3) Represent litigants in court;
- (4) Provide legal analysis, strategy or advice to a court patron, or perform legal research other than assistance in self-guided legal research for any court patron;

- (5) Disclose information in violation of a court order, statute, rule, case law or court directive;
- (6) Deny a self-represented litigant access to the court or any services provided to other court patrons.
- (7) Tell a litigant anything he or she would not repeat in the presence of any other party involved in the case;
- (8) Refer a litigant to a specific lawyer or law firm for fee-based representation; or
- (9) Otherwise engage in the unauthorized practice of law as prohibited by law.

(d) Permitted Services. To assist court patrons, circuit clerks, court staff, law librarians, and court volunteers—acting in a non-lawyer capacity on behalf of the court—may, as resources and expertise permit:

- (1) Provide legal information about court rules, court terminology and court procedures, but not limited to providing information regarding; requirements for service, filing, scheduling hearings and compliance with local procedure;
- (2) Inform court patrons of legal resources and referrals if available, including but not limited to:
 - a. Pro bono legal services;
 - b. Low-cost legal services;
 - c. Limited scope legal services;
 - d. Legal aid programs and hotlines;
 - e. Law and public libraries;
 - f. Non-profit alternative dispute resolution services;
 - g. Lawyer referral services;
 - h. Internet-based resources;
 - i. Court-sponsored or -affiliated educational classes, including, but not limited to, parenting education and traffic safety classes and alternative dispute resolution services;
 - j. Units or departments of government; or
 - k. Domestic violence resources.
- (3) Encourage self-represented litigants to obtain legal advice from a lawyer;
- (4) Provide information about security protocols at the courthouse and directions around the courthouse, including, but not limited to, photocopier and telephone locations, children's waiting room locations and other courthouse offices;
- (5) Offer educational classes and informational materials;
- (6) Assist court patrons in identifying approved forms and related instructions based on the court patron's description of what he or she wants to request from the court, including but not limited to, providing approved forms for the waiver of filing fees. When necessary, explain the nature of the information required to fill out the approved forms. Where no approved form exists to accomplish the court patron's request, inform the litigant of that fact and direct him or her to other legal resources;

- (7) Record verbatim information provided by the self-represented litigant on approved forms if that person is unable to complete the forms due to disability or literacy barriers;
- (8) Review finished forms to determine whether forms are complete, including checking for signature, notarization, correct county name and case number;
- (9) Provide assistance to litigants pursuing self-guided research;
- (10) Provide docket information, including but not limited to:
 - a. Stating whether an order has been issued
 - b. Explaining how to get a copy if one was not provided
 - c. Reading the order to the individual if requested
 - d. Providing instructions about how to access such information;
- (11) Inform court patrons of the process for requesting a foreign language or sign language interpreter;
- (12) At the direction of the court, review documents for completeness prior to hearing;
- (13) Provide a court patron with access to a case file that has not been restricted by statute, rule or order, or instructions about how to obtain such access;
- (14) Provide the same services and information to all parties to an action, as requested;
- (15) Provide services based on the assumption that the information provided by the court patron is accurate and complete;
- (16) Provide other services consistent with the intent of this policy.

(e) Unauthorized Practice of Law and Privilege.

Services provided in accordance with section (d) of this policy do not constitute the unauthorized practice of law. Information exchanged in accordance with section (d) of this policy is neither confidential nor privileged, except as otherwise protected by law. Services provided in accordance with section (d) of this policy do not create an attorney-client relationship. It should be communicated through the use of signage or a direct, in-person disclosure to court patrons that information and services provided in accordance with section (d) of this policy are not confidential, privileged or create an attorney-client relationship.

(f) Rules of Professional Conduct. Circuit clerks, court staff, law librarians, and court volunteers—who are licensed attorneys, licensed law student interns and other persons working under the supervision of an attorney—must abide by all applicable Rules of Professional Conduct when providing services and information in accordance with section (d) of this policy.

(g) Copy Fees. Court patrons may be required to pay a reasonable printing or reproduction fee for forms and instructions. However, the fee may be reduced or waived for persons who are otherwise eligible to sue or defend without cost pursuant to the Code of Civil Procedure.