



CUYAHOGA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS DIVISION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Help Center for Self-Representeds Opens in Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court

CLEVELAND – The Domestic Relations Division of the Common Pleas Court announces the opening of its new Help Center to serve the residents of Cuyahoga County.

Acting on the growing number of people choosing to represent themselves in court proceedings, the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court is opening a new help center to provide legal information and resources to self-represented parties. The Center supplements services currently offered by the Cuyahoga County Bar Association, the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Law Library through associated legal clinics for the indigent. The Center is the next step in the Court's quest to provide enhanced customer assistance which began with the creation of comprehensive court forms made available to all in the early 2000s; an Information Center which opened in 2010 to provide forms to self-represented parties and review judgment entries for sufficiency; a model domestic violence department restructured in 2014; and a modernized user friendly website launched in 2016.

Under the supervision of a staff attorney, Help Center Specialists will provide free assistance with divorce, dissolution, and post-divorce property, child custody, and child support proceedings to those seeking help, including attorneys with procedural questions. While court staff cannot provide legal advice, they will:

- Provide court forms at no cost
- Provide instructions on how to complete court forms
- Review filled-out forms for completeness and adequacy
- Provide information about court processes, practices, and procedures
- Explain the purpose and options available through the Court
- Follow up to ensure all paperwork is ready for the final hearing
- Provide notary public services
- Help self-represented parties locate free or low cost legal services and programs, as well as mediation services.

The Center is equipped with two workstations, one for self-represented litigants and one for attorneys. Each station consists of a desk, computer, printer, and phone. One computer has limited internet access to the Domestic Relations Court website, forms and useful links.

While Help Center staff will be able to connect visitors with services that offer legal advice and guidance, they cannot provide legal advice, strategy, or research. A future goal is to coordinate with volunteer attorneys to provide free or low-cost legal advice throughout the year.

“Ensuring that our justice system is fair, accessible, and understandable is one of our highest priorities,” said Administrative Judge Rosemary Grdina Gold who spearheaded the expansion of the Information Center. “Ohio, like other states, has seen a growing number of people representing themselves in family matters out of financial necessity. Over 60% of our cases involve at least one self-represented party which adversely impacts all litigants. The Court has been working to find new ways to help these individuals navigate the court process so they can meaningfully seek justice through our Court.” Grdina Gold, who served on the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Task Force on Access to Justice, noted, “At the same time, the Center will reduce the number of cases that are delayed because of inaccurate or incomplete paperwork and challenges with in-court appearances, and help improve the flow of cases.”

The new Center is in Room 29 of the lower level of the Cuyahoga County Courthouse. Staff will provide information and resources Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. In addition, staff will be available by phone by calling 216.443.8880. Self-represented parties can also submit questions via e-mail at drhelpcenter@cuyahogacounty.us. Normal response time for e-mail questions is expected to be two to three business days.

The Domestic Relations Court is located at One W. Lakeside Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.