

# What Information Can I Provide to Court Users?

The [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Assistance to Court Users by Circuit Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians, and Court Volunteers](#) ("Safe Harbor Policy") outlines the services that can be provided to court patrons. Services offered in accordance with this policy do not constitute the unauthorized practice of law. You can read the policy and find additional resources at: [illinoiscourts.gov](http://illinoiscourts.gov).



## Legal Information Is...

general, factual information about the law and the legal process that is both neutral and objective.



## Legal Advice Is...

guidance regarding an individual's legal rights and obligations in light of their unique facts and circumstances.












### **Should versus Could: Responding when court users ask for legal advice**

Court users may ask for legal advice ("What **should** I do?"). You can still respond by providing legal information, instead of advice.

Example: How **should** I serve someone?  
Answer: I can't tell you what to do, but I can explain your options. There are three approved methods of service you **could** choose... Here are some resources with more information....

I Can... 	I Cannot... 
Tell a court user what they can do	Tell a court user what they should do
Explain a process to a court user	Make a prediction for a court user
Share all available options	Suggest one particular option
Give a court user information that may help them make an informed decision	Make a decision on behalf of a court user
Provide forms and basic instructions	Fill out forms (except for specific exceptions)
Refer to bar associations and legal aid	Refer to individual private lawyer for fees
Help individuals with disabilities or low literacy by reading documents out loud and/or writing down their answers word-for-word	Make suggestions about what to write on a form or change a court user's words in any way
Refer to legal and non-legal resources inside or outside the courthouse	Represent someone in the courtroom
Assist with self-guided research	Provide legal analysis or legal research
Share publicly available case information	Share information from sealed cases
Review forms for completeness	Review forms for accuracy
Give information about requesting interpreters and reasonable accommodations	Limit access or deny service for those with limited English proficiency or disabilities
Inform all court users about fee waivers	Decide who should get their fees waived
Answer questions about drop down menus in the e-filing system and walk them through the process	Make a determination about who is eligible for an e-filing exemption

# Statewide Self-Help Resources and Referrals

<b>Illinois Court Help</b>		Statewide hotline for legal information & court process explanation: Call or text 833-411-1121 or go to <a href="http://ilcourthelp.gov">ilcourthelp.gov</a>
<b>Illinois Legal Aid Online</b>		Free legal information and forms for most legal problems: <a href="http://illinoislegalaid.org">illinoislegalaid.org</a>
<b>Statewide Forms</b>		Statewide forms & instructions, some available in six languages: <a href="http://ilcourts.info/forms">ilcourts.info/forms</a>
<b>Language Access Tools</b>		Language access plans, interpreter certification information, and statewide interpreter registry: <a href="http://illinoiscourts.gov/public/find-a-language-interpreter/">illinoiscourts.gov/public/find-a-language-interpreter/</a>
<b>Private Lawyer</b>		Illinois LawyerFinder: Call (800) 922-8757 or visit <a href="http://isba.org/public/illinoislawyerfinder">isba.org/public/illinoislawyerfinder</a>
<b>Legal Aid &amp; Pro Bono Lawyers</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CARPLS (Cook County): Call (312) 738-9200 or visit <a href="http://carpls.org">carpls.org</a></li> <li>Prairie State Legal Services (Northern Illinois): Visit <a href="http://pslegal.org">pslegal.org</a></li> <li>Land of Lincoln (Southern Illinois): Call (877) 342-7891 or visit <a href="http://lincolnlegal.org">lincolnlegal.org</a></li> <li>Statewide IL Armed Forces Legal Aid Network (ILAFLAN): Call 855-IL-AFLAN or visit <a href="http://ilaflan.org">ilaflan.org</a></li> </ul>
<b>Illinois Free Legal Answers</b>		Virtual Help Desk where you can ask lawyers questions about your civil cases in circuit court or appellate court: <a href="http://il.freelegalanswers.org">il.freelegalanswers.org</a>
<b>Legal Self-Help Centers</b>		List of programs in Illinois: <a href="http://illinoislegalaid.org/get-legal-help/lshc-directory">illinoislegalaid.org/get-legal-help/lshc-directory</a>
<b>Mental Health &amp; Social Service Providers</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help is Here: Talk to Someone: <a href="http://dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=123539">dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=123539</a></li> <li>Illinois Helpline: <a href="http://helplineil.org/app/home">helplineil.org/app/home</a></li> <li>Supportive housing programs in Illinois: <a href="http://dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30361">dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30361</a></li> </ul>
<b>Domestic Violence Programs</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DV programs in Illinois: <a href="http://dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?module=12&amp;officetype=17">dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?module=12&amp;officetype=17</a></li> <li>IL Coalition Against Domestic Violence Provider Directories: <a href="http://ilcadv.coalitionmanager.org/contactmanager/contact/publicdirectory?SearchProgramTypes=14">ilcadv.coalitionmanager.org/contactmanager/contact/publicdirectory?SearchProgramTypes=14</a></li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>		Check your local resources for mediation, arbitration, public and law libraries, pro bono clinics, and help desks

## Tips for Making Strong Referrals



### Double Check

Check your resources periodically to see if services, hours, eligibility, or contact information has changed.



### Write It Down

People may be overloaded with information at court. Write it down or use a referral sheet to help.



### Be Specific

Provide information about the scope of services available, the application process, and any eligibility criteria.



### Manage Expectations

Inform people of possible limitations (e.g. referral cannot take all cases, may require waiting).



**The Access to Justice Division Can Help!** For more information or training on access to justice resources including the Safe Harbor Policy, standardized forms, language access tools, courthouse signs, and self-help templates, please contact [AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov).

