

What Information Can I Provide to Court Patrons?

The [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Assistance to Court Patrons by Circuit Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians, and Court Volunteers](#) 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.



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 patrons ask for legal advice

Court patrons 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 litigant what they can do | Tell a litigant what they should do |
| Explain a process to a litigant | Make a prediction for a litigant |
| Share all available options | Suggest one particular option |
| Give a litigant information that may help them make an informed decision | Make a decision on behalf of a litigant |
| Provide forms and basic instructions | Fill out forms (except for specific exceptions) |
| Refer to bar associations and legal aid | Refer to individual private attorneys |
| 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 litigant's words in any way |
| Refer a litigant to legal and non-legal resources inside or outside the courthouse | Represent a litigant in the courtroom |
| Assist a litigant 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 litigants with limited English proficiency or disabilities |
| Inform all litigants 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 |

Self-Help Resources and Referrals

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| Illinois Court Help | Statewide hotline for legal information & court process: Call 833-411-1121 or go to https://www.ilcourthelp.gov/ |  |
| Illinois Legal Aid Online | Free legal information and forms for most legal problems: https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/ | |
| Standardized Forms | Statewide forms and instructions, some available in six languages: http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/approved/ | |
| Language Access Tools | Circuit language access plans and statewide interpreter registry: http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/CivilJustice/LanguageAccess/default.asp | |
| Private Attorneys | Illinois LawyerFinder: Call (800) 922-8757 or visit http://www.illinoislawyerfinder.com/ | |
| Legal Aid & Pro Bono Attorneys | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CARPLS (Cook County): Call (312) 738-9200 or visit https://www.carpls.org/ • Prairie State Legal Services (Northern Illinois): For contact information visit https://pslegal.org/ • Land of Lincoln (Southern Illinois): Call (877) 342-7891 or visit https://lincolnlegal.org/ | |
| Illinois Free Legal Answers | Virtual Help Desk where you can ask lawyers questions about your civil cases in circuit court or appellate court: https://il.freelegalanswers.org/ | |
| Legal Self-Help Centers | List of programs in Illinois: https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/get-legal-help/lshc-directory | |
| Mediation & Arbitration | List of programs in Illinois: https://www.aboutrsi.org/court-adr-across-illinois | |
| Social Service Providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health programs in Illinois: http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=3089 • Emergency and transitional housing programs in Illinois: http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=646863 • Supportive housing programs in Illinois: http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=64687 | |
| Domestic Violence Programs | DV programs in Illinois: http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=31886 | |
| Other | Check your local resources or 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

Litigants 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 litigants 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.