Supreme Court of Illinois

September 8, 2026

SECOND DISTRICT APPELLATE COURT ANNOUNCES NEW PROGRAM TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

The Illinois Appellate Court Second District is pleased to announce the launch of a new pilot program aimed at assisting self-represented litigants (SRLs) in the appellate court. The number of appeals filed by SRLs now makes up approximately 50 percent of filings and continues to increase. This innovative program is designed to address the difficulties experienced both by SRLs and the other party by offering free mediation with volunteer attorneys as mediation advocates.

“I have seen first-hand the difficulties litigants without attorneys face in court,” said Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth M. Rochford, who launched the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit’s Self-Represented Litigant’s first family law courtroom when she was on the trial court. “The legal jargon is daunting and our rules around courtroom procedures mystify SRLs. We are confident that the Second District’s program will be a welcome resource for SRLs.”

The new program will feature mediation, which is a settlement conference facilitated by a trained mediator with the goal of resolving the matter that brings the litigants to court by voluntary agreement. During mediation, a volunteer lawyer will provide guidance and support to the SRL, helping them to better understand the process.

“We think the program will improve the experience of those involved with appeals brought by SRLs. People without attorneys who file appeals have a difficult time navigating our rules of procedure,” said Second District Presiding Justice Christopher M. Kennedy. “Our goal is to solve the problem that brought the parties to court in the first place. A trained mediator may be able to end the controversy in a way that satisfies both sides.”

The program is funded by a grant from the Access to Justice Commission, chaired by Judge Jorge Ortiz of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit in Lake County.

“This initiative provides a thoughtful and forward-looking approach to improving the appellate process for court users who most need support,” Judge Ortiz said. “We expect this pilot program to enhance access to justice and the quality of engagement, understanding, and resolution for the litigants it serves.”

The program will require both lawyer-mediators and *pro bono* mediation attorneys. Please watch for future announcements regarding free CLE trainings coming this fall hosted by the Appellate Lawyers Association and the Public Interest Law Initiative.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: James Brunner, Public Information Officer of the Illinois Supreme Court at 217.208.3354 or jbrunner@illinoiscourts.gov.)