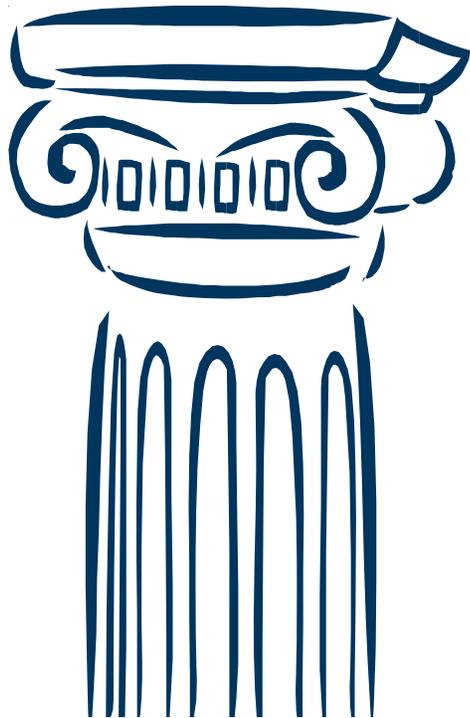


Handling Your Case in Family Court



www.selfrepresent.mo.gov

Committee on Access to Family Courts
Office of State Courts Administrator
2112 Industrial Drive
P.O. Box 104480
Jefferson City, MO 65110

Your family law matter is important. It may affect your status as a spouse or parent, your property rights, or the parenting of your children. Information about the resources available online and in your community will assist you in making an informed decision about how to handle your case.

Don't make the mistake of assuming you can't get legal help. There are options available to obtain professional legal assistance. You should not assume you can't afford to hire a lawyer. It is worthwhile to talk with a lawyer first. The *Client Resource Guide* published by The Missouri Bar contains helpful information about hiring a lawyer. State and local bar associations also can help you find a lawyer.

Talk about the fee at your meeting with a lawyer. The lawyer wants you to be pleased with services and expects to discuss fees with you. The lawyer may provide a "consultation" at a fixed price. Visit www.selfrepresent.mo.gov for information about how lawyers set fees. Low-income persons may be eligible for free assistance through Legal Services or other non-profit legal services organizations. Also, many lawyers donate time to the Volunteer Attorney Projects operated by Legal Services.

Visit www.selfrepresent.mo.gov for more information about handling your family matters in Missouri, including:

• Litigant Awareness Program

Take an assessment to determine whether your abilities, skills and personal circumstances make representing yourself advisable. The program describes the litigation process and discusses the risks and responsibilities of representing yourself. Check with your local circuit clerk for instructions about completing the litigant awareness program in your area. You also can do the program online and print a certificate of completion. You may be required to show the court you have completed this program when you represent yourself in a family law matter.



If you decide to represent yourself, free forms are available for use in Missouri family law matters at www.selfrepresent.mo.gov.

Legal clinics offer limited legal services. You may need to meet certain income guidelines.

Pro Se Dissolution Classes: Legal Aid of Western Missouri

- Kansas City (816) 474-6750
- Joplin (800) 492-7095
- Springfield (800) 444-4863
- St. Joseph (800) 892-2101
- Warrensburg (800) 892-2943

• University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law Family Violence Clinic: (573) 882-9728

• Saint Louis University Law School Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry: (314) 977-3993

• Law school libraries can assist in finding legal reference materials (do not provide legal advice).

Getting a Lawyer

Before you decide to represent yourself, it is worth seeing if you can find a lawyer to help you. You may be able to get help from a lawyer for free if you meet certain financial criteria. Check with the Legal Services office in your area to find out whether you qualify. Non-profit organizations and law school clinics also may provide free help. If you don't qualify for free legal services, you may want to contact a lawyer to see if options are available that will allow you to afford hiring counsel. Look to the resources in this brochure to explore these options.

• **Legal Services of Missouri** offers free legal services in some family law cases, particularly when domestic abuse is involved, if you meet certain income guidelines. Find the Legal Services office that covers your county on the web at www.lsmo.org.

Legal Services of Eastern Missouri

- St. Louis office: (314) 534-4200
- Hannibal office: (800) 767-2018
- Union office: (636) 583-7877

Legal Services of Southern Missouri

- Springfield/West Plains office: (800) 444-4863
- Rolla office: (800) 999-0249
- Charleston/Cape Girardeau office: (800) 748-7456

Legal Aid of Western Missouri

- Kansas City office: (816) 474-6750
- Joplin office: (800) 492-7095
- St. Joseph office: (800) 892-2101
- Warrensburg office: (800) 892-2943

Mid-Missouri Legal Services

- Columbia office: (800) 568-4931
- Jefferson City office: (888) 476-4545

• **Not-for-profit organizations** also may be a source to find free legal assistance. Ask your local court, churches, law schools and social services agencies about resources in your area.

The Samaritan Center in Jefferson City serves mid-Missouri residents. For more information, visit www.midmosamaritan.org or call (573) 634-7776.

Other Resources to Find a Lawyer

• **LawyerSearch**, a service of The Missouri Bar, is an online list of lawyers who have indicated they currently are accepting clients.

• The **Official Missouri Directory of Lawyers** makes it possible for citizens to check whether a lawyer is in good standing using the Internet. Access both of these resources at www.mobar.org.

Bar Association Lawyer Referral Services



It is always worthwhile to talk with a lawyer. Contact the following bar associations to obtain lawyer referrals:

• **www.mobar.org** (573) 636-3635

The Missouri Bar Lawyer Referral Service offers referrals on a statewide basis, except for St. Louis and Springfield. The service is available 9 a.m.-noon and 1-3 p.m. weekdays, except for holidays. A \$25 fee entitles you to a consultation of up to 30 minutes with an attorney.

• **www.bamsl.org** (314) 621-6681

St. Louis Metropolitan Bar Lawyer Referral Service offers referrals in the St. Louis area.

• **www.smba.cc** (417) 831-2783

Springfield Metropolitan Bar Association offers referrals in the Springfield/southwest Missouri area.

• Help for Domestic Violence

Domestic violence involves the use of power and control by one person over his or her intimate partner. This control may include physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse. If you think you may be in such a relationship, there are resources that can help. Visit www.mocadsv.org or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-7233.

Services available may include different types of shelter; court and legal assistance, such as help with understanding the order of protection process; crisis intervention; support groups; counseling and therapy; support if you need to go to the hospital as a result of domestic abuse or assault; child care; adult and GED education; and batterer's intervention programs.

The circuit clerk's office in your county may provide information and assistance to you to seek an order of protection.