



Informational Guide for Self-Represented Litigants

PLEASE READ THIS INFORMATION CAREFULLY

A self-represented litigant, also known as a pro se litigant, is someone who represents themselves in court without an attorney. The term "pro se" comes from Latin and means "on one's own behalf". A person can only represent their own interests in the case in the Court of Common Pleas. A parent/guardian may represent a child.

There are different procedures for representation in the courts. For example, the Municipal Court has more simplified rules of civil procedure, so it may be more straightforward for a self-represented litigant to represent oneself. The Court of Common Pleas has strict rules of civil procedure to follow that may be more demanding of a self-represented litigant to follow. See the Rules of Civil of Civil Procedure listed below.

Legal Advice

If you need legal advice, you should seek the services of a lawyer or help from a legal aid organization. The Office of Judicial Records – Civil is not permitted to give legal advice. The Office is permitted to answer questions regarding procedure and how to access legal forms and reference materials. Listed below is a guide as to what information the staff of the Office of Judicial Records – Civil can and cannot provide:

*The Clerk's Office **Can** Provide Information Including:*

- Information regarding Court policies and procedures
- Information from your case docket and how to obtain information from a public computer terminal located in the Office and on the Court's website
- Court forms and court schedules
- Legal definitions and terminology
- Provide proper forms for the type of pleading if available

*The Clerk's Office **Cannot** Provide Advice Including:*

- Legal advice
- Guidance on whether or not you should file a case or other pleadings
- Instructions on what to write in court documents and what to say in court proceedings
- Interpretation of court orders
- Direct communication with the assigned judge on your behalf
- Direction on what to do next in your case

Filing Fees

There are fees to file certain documents with the court. These costs vary from the type of document, or pleading, in which you are filing. Some court filing costs may be in the hundreds of dollars. *See the Informational Guide for the Office of Judicial Records - Civil Fee Schedule and the [Office of Judicial Records Fee Schedule](https://www.courts.phila.gov/pdf/prothyfees.pdf)* (<https://www.courts.phila.gov/pdf/prothyfees.pdf>).

If you cannot afford to pay these fees, you will need to complete the [Petition to Proceed In Forma Pauperis](https://www.courts.phila.gov/s/IFP) (<https://www.courts.phila.gov/s/IFP>).

Service of Filings

All documents filed with the court must be served on the opposing party. This is called service. You must complete this step of the process before your case can move forward. Service must be completed as provided by the rules of civil procedure. *See the Informational Guide for Service of Filings Form.*

Rules of Civil Procedure

The Court of Common Pleas is driven by the rules of civil procedure. There are extensive state and local court rules for this Court. Self-represented litigants are held to the same standards as attorneys admitted to the bar of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Representing yourself does not exempt you from understanding and following statewide and local Rules of Court.

- [Philadelphia Local Rules](https://www.courts.phila.gov/localrules/) (<https://www.courts.phila.gov/localrules/>)
- [Pennsylvania State Rules](https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/) (<https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/>)

Notices from the Court

- You must keep your mailing address and/or email address updated with the court because all court notices will be sent to the contact information provided on your case.
- You must comply with all orders and deadlines that are provided by the court.
- You are not permitted to contact a judge for updates about your case.

Filing Confidential Information and Documents with the Court

All litigants must identify confidential information and confidential documents as required by the [Case Records Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania](https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20210515/224512-file-7031.pdf) (<https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20210515/224512-file-7031.pdf>). *See the Informational Guide for Confidential Information and Documents Form and the [UJS Public Access Policy](https://www.courts.phila.gov/common-pleas/trial/civil/)* (<https://www.courts.phila.gov/common-pleas/trial/civil/>) on the Court's website.

Videos for Common Legal Topics

The National Center for State Courts has [A2J Videos](https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/a2j-videos) (<https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/a2j-videos>) to educate the public about common legal topics. Closed captioning is available in multiple languages.

Please note: All forms, guides, and policies referenced in this document are available in the Civil Filing Center, Room 296, City Hall.

NOTICE: This document is not intended to be legal advice or take the place of an attorney. If you need assistance finding an attorney, our court staff can give you information on legal service organizations that may be able to help you.