

*Guidelines & Instructions
for Clerks Who Assist Pro Se Litigants
in Iowa's Courts*



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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the U.S. an increasing number of litigants are bringing their legal problems before the courts without the assistance of lawyers (i.e., *pro se*). Court users who are not attorneys often ask court clerks for information or advice that requires at least some legal expertise. Court staff know the maxim that they may not give legal advice, but in many situations it is difficult to discern what constitutes “legal advice”. Due to fear of stepping over the line and providing legal advice, some clerks might be overly cautious in providing assistance and information. In these situations, some court users might leave the courts unnecessarily frustrated and may lose confidence in the court system. This training and reference manual is intended to help clerks determine the appropriate way to respond to most questions from *pro se* litigants, thereby providing the best service possible within the limits of their responsibilities.

This manual contains two general sections: 1) *Guidelines for Clerks Who Assist Pro Se Litigants*, and 2) *Suggested Responses to FAQs from Pro Se Litigants*. The *Guidelines* section provides both general policy principles and specific directions for staff for determining when and how to respond to requests for assistance or information. Subsection C.2 of the *Guidelines* may be of particular interest to clerks’ office staff. It provides 15 specific examples of “legal advice” that court staff should avoid. The comments following some of the guidelines clarify their meaning or discuss exceptions. Together, the *Guidelines* and comments should provide a substantial degree of clarity for court and clerks’ office staff regarding the appropriate level of assistance to provide *pro se* litigants.

Section 2 of the manual, *Suggested Responses to FAQs from Pro Se Litigants* (hereafter, *FAQs*), provides a long list of frequently asked questions from *pro se* litigants and appropriate responses for clerks. Clerks’ staff should become very familiar with the *Guidelines* and *FAQs* as soon as possible. Clerks might even refer *pro se* litigants to the reference manual, which could be placed at the counter where *pro se* litigants are likely to appear to ask questions.

Naturally, this manual cannot anticipate all the possible questions that *pro se* litigants might ask clerks. When new questions raise concerns about giving legal advice, clerks’ staff should refer to the general principles set forth in the *Guidelines*. If they do not have time to look at the *Guidelines*, or if they refer to the *Guidelines* but still are not clear about how to respond to the question, they should consult with their supervisor. If a supervisor is not available, or if the question clearly calls for legal advice, the clerk should explain to the *pro se* litigant that clerks are not allowed to provide legal advice. Remember, litigation can be a mine field for those who do not know what they are doing. Most litigants truly would benefit from consulting with legal counsel. So – when in doubt – suggest that the *pro se* litigant consult an attorney. But **do not recommend specific attorneys**. You may refer parties to the **Statewide Lawyer Referral Service (800-532-1108)**. Also see the list of phone numbers on the last page of this document.

There are other sources of information that might be helpful to *pro se* litigants. The Iowa State Bar Association provides several pamphlets in a variety of areas of the law. They include the following topics:

Auto Accidents	Joint Tenancy
Client Protection Fund and Judicial and Attorney Ethics	Jury Handbook
Complaints of Misconduct or Ethical Violations by Iowa Lawyers	Lawyers Fees
Consumer Guide to Iowa Law	Mental Health Commitment Procedures and Individuals Rights in Iowa
Do You Need A Will?	So now you are a Conservator or Guardian
Estate Planning	Sound Steps in Purchasing a Home
Executor's Handbook	The Legal Profession
How to be a Good Witness!	The Rights of Young People
How to Use Small Claims Court	The Role of the Legal Assistant in Iowa
Iowa's New Court System	Court in Motion Day Pamphlet

They are written in easy to understand language and would be very helpful to *pro se* litigants. You can find the pamphlets on the Iowa State Bar Association web site (www.iowabar.org); go to the site and click "Public Information Pamphlets". The pamphlets page is on the web at:

www.iowabar.org/pamphlet.nsf

Or people can call the Iowa State Bar Association at: (515-243-3179).

The **Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (800-532-1503)** also provides a helpful guide on landlord/tenant cases. Your office should try to maintain a current version of this handbook, and the ISBA's handbook on "How to Use Small Claims Court" at the clerk's counter.

Finally, some of the responses to the *FAQs* include references to chapters of the Iowa Code or rules of procedure. These may be offered to the litigant. You should also consider having the most recent version of the Iowa Code available for public use, to make it easier for people to follow up on these references. If the most recent version is not available, clerks should caution *pro se* litigants that the Iowa Code section may have been amended by subsequent legislation. Clerks should caution each *pro se* litigant that besides the Iowa Code sections cited in this manual, ***there may be other code sections – or case law (supreme court or court of appeals decisions) -- that apply*** in a particular case. **Parties should not rely solely on the information provided by the clerk's office.** In most cases, litigants should consult an attorney.

Guidelines for Clerks Who Assist *Pro Se* Litigants

A. The primary goal of court and clerks' staff is to provide high quality service to court users. Court staff strives to provide accurate information and assistance in a prompt and courteous manner. However, in many or most situations involving *pro se* litigants (or represented litigants who come to the clerk's office without their attorneys), the best customer service might be to advise the litigant to seek the assistance of an attorney.

B. Absolute duty of impartiality. Court staff must treat all litigants fairly and equally. Court staff must not provide assistance for the purpose of giving one party an advantage over another, nor give assistance to one party that they would not give to an opponent.

C. Prohibition against giving legal advice. Court staff shall not provide legal advice. (*See Guideline C.2 for examples of legal advice.*)

1. If a court user asks for legal advice, court staff should advise the person to seek the assistance of an attorney.
2. Court staff should not apply the law to the facts of a given case, nor give directions regarding how a litigant *should* respond or behave in any aspect of the legal process. For example, court or clerks' staff **should not**:¹
 - a. Recommend whether to file a petition or other pleading.
 - b. Recommend phrasing or specific content for pleadings.²
 - c. Fill in a form for the *pro se* litigant.
(**Exception:** If a litigant has a physical disability or is illiterate and therefore unable to fill in a form, and the litigant explains the disability to a clerk's staff member and requests appropriate assistance, then the staff member may fill in the form. However, the clerk's staff member must write down the *exact words* provided by the litigant, and another staff member must witness the action.)
 - d. Recommend specific people against whom to file petitions or other pleadings.
 - e. Recommend specific types of claims or arguments to assert in pleadings or at trial.
 - f. Recommend what types or amount of damages to seek or the specific litigants from whom to seek damages.
 - g. Recommend specific questions to ask witnesses or other litigants.
 - h. Recommend specific techniques for presenting evidence in pleadings or at trial.³

¹ COMMENT on C2: This list provides examples of prohibited types of assistance. It is not comprehensive. In general, clerks must avoid advising litigants that they *should* include specific content in what they write or say or that they *should* take a particular course of action.

² COMMENT on C2b: Clerks may inform litigants that some *general content* may be required in a pleading (*e.g.*, identification of the other parties involved in the accident; a description of the facts surrounding the accident). But clerks may not tell a litigant whom to identify or which particular facts might be relevant in the pleading.

³ COMMENT on C.2.h.: Clerks should provide, or identify the place where someone can obtain, pamphlets or

- i. Recommend which objections to raise to an opponent's pleadings or motions at trial or when and specifically how to raise them.
 - j. Recommend when or whether a litigant should request (or oppose) a continuance.
 - k. Recommend when or whether a litigant should settle a dispute.
 - l. Recommend whether a litigant should appeal a judge's decision.
 - m. Interpret the meaning or implications of statutes or appellate court decisions as they might apply to an individual case.
 - n. Perform legal research.⁴
 - o. Predict the outcome of a particular case, strategy, or action.
3. If you are uncertain whether the advice or information constitutes "legal advice" -- seek the assistance of a supervisor. If a supervisor is not available, inform the litigant that you are not able to provide the information and that the litigant should seek help from an attorney.

D. Authorized information and assistance. When a *pro se* court user seeks help -- excluding legal advice -- court or clerks' staff should respond to questions to the best of her or his ability. Court and clerks' staff are authorized to:

- 1. Provide public information contained in:
 - a. dockets or calendars,
 - b. case files,
 - c. indexes, and
 - d. other reports.
- 2. Recite common, routinely employed:⁵
 - a. court rules,
 - b. court procedures, and
 - c. administrative practices.
- 3. Show or tell the *pro se* litigant where to find pertinent statutes or rules of procedure.
- 4. Identify forms that might meet the needs of the *pro se* litigant, and provide forms that the supreme court has mandated for the guidance of *pro se* court users.⁶

other documents that address this issue and that have been prepared for general distribution to the public (*e.g.*, *How to Use Small Claims Court*, prepared by the Iowa State Bar Association).

⁴ COMMENT on C.2.n.: Clerks may refer litigants to sections of the Iowa court rules or Iowa Code for rules or statutes that govern matters of routine administration, practice, or procedure; and they may give definitions of common, well-defined legal terms used in those Code sections. However, clerks may not *interpret* the meaning of statutes or rules.

⁵ COMMENT on D.2: Reciting a common rule is permissible, but court staff should not attempt to apply the rule to the facts in the litigant's case. Sometimes, after a clerk recites a rule (*e.g.*, "After a judge enters a judgment in your small claims case, you have 20 days to file an appeal."), a *pro se* litigant will ask whether or how the rule would apply, or if the rule might be applied differently, given the facts in his or her case. This calls for an *interpretation* of the law or rule of procedure. *Court and clerk's office staff must avoid offering interpretations of laws or rules.*

⁶ COMMENT on D.4.: When a clerk is reasonably certain about which form is most appropriate for use by a given litigant, the clerk should identify the appropriate form. However, clerks should avoid telling litigants that they *should* or *must* use a particular form. The appropriate approach in most situations is to tell the litigant:

a) a particular form probably will meet the individual's needs; b) clerks *cannot guarantee* that this is the correct

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5. Answer questions about how to complete forms (*e.g.*, where to write in particular types of information), but **not** questions about how the litigant *should* phrase his or her responses on the forms.
6. Define terms commonly used in court processes.
7. Provide phone numbers for lawyer referral services. (See appendix of this manual.)

E. Prohibition against revealing the outcome of a case before the information is officially released to the litigants or public. Court or clerks' staff shall not disclose the outcome of a matter submitted to a judge for decision until the outcome is part of the public record, or until the judge directs disclosure of the matter.

F. *Ex parte* communications.

1. If a litigant or attorney submits an *ex parte* **written** communication for a judge (*e.g.*, to grant a continuance; to stop or limit a garnishment), court staff **must** deliver it to a judge who should decide what action, if any, is appropriate.
2. If a party makes a **verbal** request that a judge take some type of **action** in a case, the clerk should tell the litigant to **put the request in writing** and:
 - a. address the request to the court;
 - b. include the case number (if any) on the document;
 - c. write the date on the document;
 - d. sign the written document;
 - e. print the person's name under the signature;
 - f. write the person's address and telephone number on the document;
 - g. deliver the written request to the clerk's office; and
 - h. serve a copy of the document on opposing litigant or litigant's attorney (in a manner consistent with Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 106).
3. If a party or attorney contacts a district court clerk by telephone with a verbal request for judicial **action** and there is **insufficient time to deliver a written request** to the clerk's office (*i.e.*, an **emergency situation**), the clerk **shall** communicate the request to a judge in accordance with rules established by the chief or presiding judge(s) for handling such communications. The clerk, however, should tell the caller that the clerk cannot guarantee that the judge will grant the request.

form; and c) the litigant should read the form very closely or consult an attorney to determine the appropriateness of the form for the litigant's purposes.

Suggested Responses to FAQs from *Pro Se* Litigants

I. General Questions

A. ASSISTANCE FROM CLERKS

**I have asked you several questions and you won't answer them.
Why aren't you more helpful???**

The clerk should **politely** advise that, first, many questions require the clerk to explain or interpret the law or how the law would apply in the litigant's case. This constitutes legal advice, and **the law prohibits clerks from providing legal advice to litigants**. Second, if a litigant misunderstands a statement by a clerk, or a clerk gives an incorrect answer to a question -- and the litigant loses his or her case as a consequence -- the litigant might blame the clerk. For these reasons, clerks must refrain from answering many questions that people ask and refer people to competent legal counsel.

B. ATTORNEYS (RECOMMENDING ONE)

What attorney should I call to handle my case? Who would be good?

Clerks are not allowed to recommend specific attorneys or law firms. Parties should contact the Iowa State Bar Association's attorney referral service. Call toll free: **1- 800-532-1108** [This is a free service.] Parties could also check the yellow pages in the phone book or ask their friends for a recommendation.

C. COMMUNICATION WITH JUDGES

Can I talk to a judge?

Clerks must be cautious about allowing people to talk to a judge because judges must avoid *ex parte* contacts with litigants. [For guidance on this issue, *see Guideline F.*] The clerk should ask for the person's **name** and **why** she or he needs to talk to the judge.

If the issue is **unrelated to any case before the court**, the clerk should refer the question to the judge, if available.

If the issue involves an **emergency scheduling matter** (e.g., request for a continuance due to car problems on the morning of a hearing), the clerk should write down the request and contact the judge. Tell the person that the judge will decide whether the scheduling request will be granted. (If the issue is just a scheduling matter, some judges might talk to the person.)

If the issue involves a **non-emergency request for a continuance**, most judges require the request to be submitted in writing. (This might vary by county or district.) But the clerk should refer the

question to the judge, if available.

If the person wants to talk to a judge about **issues under litigation**, the judge usually cannot allow such communication unless all parties involved in the case are present (i.e., at a hearing). If the person wants to give the judge information pertinent to a case or wants the judge to take some action related to a case, the person must: 1) put the request *in writing*; 2) file it in the clerk's office; and 3) provide copies to the other parties in the case. (*See Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 106; see also Guideline F.2*).

D. JUDICIAL DECISIONS

What will the judge say?

Clerks may not speculate on what a judge might say or do.

E. LEGAL RESEARCH

Where can I find information on Iowa's laws and rules?

[➔ NOTE: **Court clerks cannot do legal research for litigants.**]

Iowa's statutes (laws passed by the state legislature) are in the Code of Iowa (also known as the Iowa Code). The Iowa Court Rules contain the procedures that litigants must follow in Iowa's courts. Your city or county library and most district court clerks' offices should have copies of these volumes. The Iowa Code can be searched on the Internet at: www2.legis.state.ia.us/Code.html

Most of Iowa's eight judicial districts also have Local Rules that govern certain aspects of the court process. (For information on Local Rules you can check the Iowa Judicial Branch web site at: www.judicial.state.ia.us/rules/local/). Further, in some circumstances a litigant might have to examine decisions by the Iowa Supreme Court or Iowa Court of Appeals to see how these courts have interpreted the laws and rules. A person might have to go to a law school library to find up-to-date research materials on appellate court decisions. Ask a librarian for assistance with these materials. (Recent decisions by the Iowa Supreme Court and Court of Appeals are available on the Iowa Judicial Branch web site at: www.judicial.state.ia.us/decisions.)

It can be difficult to know and understand all the laws and procedures that might apply in a particular case. If a person is uncertain about the laws or procedures involved in the case, the person should consult an attorney.

F. SCHEDULING & COURT APPEARANCES

1. Do I have to be in court today?

The clerk may review whatever notice the party has to determine whether the party must appear in court and where the hearing (if any) will be held.

2. Can I reschedule (continue) my hearing to a later date?

Only the judge can continue a hearing. If the party files a written request with the clerk and provides a copy of the request to the other parties (or the prosecuting attorney in a criminal case), the judge will consider the request.

3. My car won't start, so I can't get to the hearing today. Can you tell the judge?

The answer to this answer depends on local custom. Some clerk's offices will convey a message regarding case scheduling to a judge, but others prefer that the party speak directly to the judge.

G. SEALED RECORDS

Can I see my sealed file? (e.g., adopted person seeking information)

Clerks are not authorized to provide sealed records to the public. The person should submit a written and signed request to the judge who has authority to make a determination regarding: whether a sealed record exists on the matter at issue; and whether the requesting party has a right to view information in the sealed file. The written request should include the following:

- 1) sufficient information so the judge can determine whether such a record exists (e.g., nature of the case; case number; names of parties; dates of possible case filings, judgments or events; date of birth [if the case involves an adoption]);
- 2) the reason(s) supporting the requestor's right to view the sealed record; and
- 3) the requestor's name, address, and phone number.

II. Civil (Non-Domestic) Cases

A. FILING A PETITION

1. How long do I have to file my petition?

Iowa Code chapter 614 addresses this question, but other Code chapters could apply depending on the type of case and facts involved. The party should consult an attorney

2. How do I serve my petition on the opposing party?

The clerk may point out the various means of service that are set out in Iowa Rules of Civil Procedure 56.1 through 64. The inquirer should consult an attorney to determine the proper means of service for the party's particular case.

3. \$80.00 seems like a high filing fee? Why is it so steep?

Filing fees are set by the legislature, not by the court or clerk's office.

4. In what county [or state] do I file my case? (How do I know where venue lies?)

The answer to this question depends on the type of case that is being filed, where litigants live, and where events took place. Sorting out the impact of these factors would constitute legal advice. The clerk should advise the party to consult an attorney.

B. ANSWERING A PETITION

1. How do I file an answer?

A litigant's answer should be in writing (preferably typed) and filed with the clerk within 20 days after the petition was served on the party. (For information on calculating deadlines, *see* Iowa Code section 4.1(34).) The litigant **must** provide a copy to the opposing party. The clerk may point out the various means of service set forth in Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 106. The answer includes a response to each specific allegation or paragraph in the petition or pleading to which the defendant is responding. (*See* Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 72.) Since the answer should also incorporate any affirmative defenses the clerk should suggest that the party consult with an attorney.

2. A petition was filed on me 20 days ago, now here I am to make my appearance.

A **written answer** must be filed in the clerk's office within 20 days after the petition was served on

the party. (See response in B.1 above.) The answer also must be served on the other parties in the case. (Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 106 describes alternatives for service.) A defendant may file an answer after the 20 day time period, but the clerk cannot guarantee what effect the answer will have in the case.

3. A petition was filed on me more than 20 days ago. Can I still file an answer?

The clerk can accept an answer at any time, even if it is late. But the clerk cannot speculate about the legal consequences of filing the answer late. If the plaintiff has already filed an application for default judgment or has obtained a default judgment, the defendant should definitely consult an attorney for options.

C. BANKRUPTCY

If I file bankruptcy will my debts go away?

The clerk should not speculate about how bankruptcy laws would apply in a particular case, which would be a clear example of providing legal advice. In addition, bankruptcy is a complicated area of the law. Strongly recommend that the party consult an attorney.

D. COLLECTION / ENFORCEMENT OF JUDGMENTS (Liens, etc.)

1. How do I file a mechanic's lien?

The clerk may provide the appropriate forms, if available, and basic instructions for filing, but due to potential complications concerning questions of law and notice, the clerk should advise the party to consult with an attorney.

2. Are there any liens on my property?

Clerks do not provide this service. People are free to search the records themselves in the Recorder's Office or have a title company or an attorney conduct a search for them.

3. What is a debtor's exam?

This is a process available to someone who has obtained a judgment against another party and has **attempted an execution** on the judgment, but the judgment debtor still has not paid the debt. In this situation the judgment creditor can file a request for a debtor's exam. Both parties will have to appear in court where the judgment creditor may question the judgment debtor under oath regarding the amount and location of the judgment debtor's assets (e.g., bank accounts, real property). *See* Iowa Code chapter 630.

4. How long do I have to file for a mechanic's lien?

In most cases a contractor/subcontractor who is owed money for products or services must file for a mechanic's lien within 90 days after the last of the materials was furnished or the last of the labor was performed. *See* Iowa Code section 572.9.

5. How long do I have to file an action to enforce a mechanic's lien?

An action to enforce a mechanic's lien may be brought within two years from the expiration of the 90 days for filing a claim for the mechanic's lien and not afterwards. *See* Iowa Code sections 572.27 and 572.9. Since the determination of the 90-day filing period may involve **complicated** legal issues, the party should consult an attorney as to the application of these code sections to the particular circumstances of the party's case.

E. EVICTION: RECOVERY OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

How do I get my stuff out of my house?

This assumes that the party has been removed from the home by court order. Advise the party to make an application in writing to the judge to pick up personal property with a copy provided to the opposing party. The judge will set a hearing to determine what property the party may remove, when the removal will take place, and under what conditions.

F. NAME CHANGE

How do I change my name? [Not part of divorce case.]

Follow the instructions in Iowa Code chapter 674 and pay the filing fee.

G. REAL ESTATE ISSUES

1. Can you provide me with a legal description of my property?

This information is not available in the clerk's office. The person should go to the County Auditor or Assessor or the Recorder of Deeds.

2. Is an address good enough? [RE: Legal description of real property]

An address is insufficient when a legal description of property is *required*.

3. How do I get someone's name off my property?

This could be accomplished by a petition to **quiet title**. Like most lawsuits it could become legally complicated. Advise the party to seek the assistance of an attorney.

III. DOMESTIC ABUSE

A. PROCESS

How do I get a restraining order against someone?

First, determine the type of restraining order sought by the person.

Domestic abuse: If the inquirer is seeking relief from domestic abuse, the clerk provides the forms, assistance with filing, and presenting the materials to the judge for consideration.

Other restraining orders: For other types of restraining orders the clerk should suggest the party consult with an attorney. The party might also seek assistance from a local domestic abuse assistance center.

B. APPOINTMENT OF ATTORNEY

1. Will the County Attorney represent me?

The County Attorney usually represents the state in **criminal** cases. For more information, the litigant should consult with the County Attorney.

2. Can you appoint an attorney for me?

Only a judge can appoint an attorney, and a judge may appoint an attorney only in certain cases. In most civil and domestic cases there is no provision for the appointment of counsel, but the clerk may refer the party to the Legal Aid Society or the Legal Services Corp., which often assists civil litigants who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

➡ **NOTE:** See the list of at the end of this manual for the nearest **domestic abuse victim assistance program** and for the nearest office of the **Legal Aid Society** and the **Legal Services Corp.**)

IV. Domestic: Dissolutions, Modifications, and Support

A. FILING & MODIFICATION ISSUES

1. How do I file a divorce without an attorney?

The statutes pertaining to dissolution of marriage are found in Chapter 598 of the Iowa Code. Anyone who plans to file for divorce without assistance from an attorney should review that chapter. The person must file a written “petition for dissolution of marriage” at the clerk’s office and pay the **filing fee**. A copy of the petition together with an original notice must be served on the opposing party. The opposing party then has a reasonable time (usually **20 days**) to file an answer. If the issue is contested the case will eventually be set for trial before a judge. Also advise the party about any **special procedures** that he or she should expect as part of the divorce process in your district (e.g., mediation). However, a divorce is often complicated and the clerk should encourage the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel and that legal services might be available for those who cannot afford to hire a private attorney.

2. Can I have forms to file a divorce?

There are places where people may obtain a “do-it-yourself divorce kit,” but clerks’ offices in Iowa do not provide these kits to litigants. Clerks may point out that Iowa Code sections 598.5 and 598.6 identifies what information is required in a Petition for Dissolution of Marriage. Some clerks’ offices identify divorce files that have had a final decree entered available and suggest that a *pro se* litigant examine some of them to find an existing pleading to use as a guide. (Divorce cases have not had a final decree entered are not open to the public.) Clerks should not suggest specific pleadings or specific ways to phrase a pleading.

3. How do I modify my divorce decree.

The person must file a written “petition to modify decree of dissolution of marriage” at the clerk’s office and pay the filing fee. A copy of the petition together with an original notice must be served on the opposing party. The opposing party then has a reasonable time (usually **20 days**) to file an answer. If the issue is contested the case will eventually be set for trial before a judge. Modifications are often complicated. Encourage the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel and that legal services might be available for those who cannot afford an attorney.

4. How do I file for legal separation?

Legal separation is filed in the same manner as a petition for dissolution of marriage. (See Iowa Code section 598.28.) Advise the party to seek assistance from competent legal counsel and that legal services might be available for those who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

5 How do I file for an annulment?

An annulment is filed in the same manner as a petition for dissolution of marriage. (*See* Iowa Code section 598.28.) The litigant must provide an updated address and telephone number, and also provide the name, address, and telephone number of the litigant's employer. (*See* Iowa Code section 598.22B.) Advise the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel and that legal services are available for those that cannot afford to hire an attorney.

B. ANSWER

When are my 20 days up (for filing an answer)?

Generally the 20 day period to file an answer commences from the date of service (the date the defendant receives a copy of the petition), but this could vary according to circumstances of the case. (For information on calculating deadlines, *see* Iowa Code section 4.1(34).) The party should seek advice from competent legal counsel as to the party's particular situation.

C. CHILD SUPPORT

1. How do I get my ex-spouse to pay child support?

The answer to this party's question depends on whether the ex-spouse was previously ordered to pay child support. Also, the inquiry requires the clerk to give legal advice, which the clerk may not provide. The party should seek assistance from competent legal counsel or contact the Child Support Recovery Unit of the Department of Human Services.

2. My ex-spouse won't let me see the kids. Do I still have to pay child support?

Yes, the person must continue to make support payments. Denial of visitation is a separate issue from child support. Advise the party to follow the directions of the divorce decree and seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel regarding the visitation issue.

3. How do I get the court records to show I've satisfied my child support obligation?

The party receiving the child support payments is responsible for filing a document confirming your "satisfaction of judgment" in the Clerk's office when the judgment is paid in full. A judge might have to approve the "satisfaction of the judgment." Follow section 624.37 of the Iowa Code. Advise the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel if there is difficulty in acquiring a satisfaction to a fully paid judgment.

4. How far behind am I on my child support?

The clerk may provide the party with a copy of the child support payment record, but the clerk should not attempt to calculate the support arrearage. You may also refer the party to the Child Support Recovery Unit for further clarification.

5. I am moving to a different county. Do I still send my child support payment to the clerk's office in this county? Or do I send it to the clerk's office in my new county?

Iowa Code section 252B.14(3) requires child support payments to be made to the clerk's office in the **county where the child support order was filed**. The party should review the divorce decree or most recent support order, which should indicate where the support order is filed. (**Note:** In this example, the **inquirer** is currently sending payments to this clerk's office, so it is assumed that the support order does **not** involve the Child Support Recovery Unit. If the CSRU is involved or there is an income withholding order in the case, payments must be made to the Collection Services Center. *See* Iowa Code sections 252B.14(2) and 252B.14(4))

6. How do I get my child support payments reduced?

This depends on the circumstances. If the support was set in a dissolution decree, a petition to modify the decree is necessary. If the support was set pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 252A, then the party will have to deal with the Child Support Recovery Unit. In either instance pleadings must be filed and the issues could be legally complicated. Offering further advice on this question requires the clerk to provide legal advice, which the clerk may not do. Encourage the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel.

7. Can I pay my child support directly to my ex-spouse?

A person may **not** pay child support directly to an ex-spouse. Section 252B.14 of the Iowa Code provides rules on payment of child support. Child support payments **must** be made **to the clerk of court** where the support order is entered or, if income withholding or the Child Support Recovery Unit is involved, to the Collection Services Center. For further information, instruct the party to follow the directions of the divorce decree or to seek advice from competent legal counsel.

8. My child has graduated from high school. Do I still have to pay child support?

The law provides that unless otherwise emancipated, child support continues for a child until 18 years of age even if the child has graduated from high school before age 18. (*See* Iowa Code section 598.1(9).) A supporting parent might also be required to pay a post-secondary education subsidy through age 22 if ordered to do so by the court. Advise the party to **read the divorce decree** or seek advice from competent legal counsel for any special circumstance concerning his/her case.

9. Can I get my ex-spouse's wages garnished for not paying child support?

It depends upon the circumstances of the case. Does the ex-spouse have a court-ordered child support obligation that is in arrears? If the answer to this question is "Yes," then the person might be able to obtain garnishment of the ex-spouse's wages. However, the clerk should explain that garnishing wages can be a complicated process, and that further assistance from the clerk could be interpreted as providing legal advice -- which the clerk may not do. The party should seek assistance from a private attorney, from Legal Aid or Legal Services offices (if he or she cannot afford an attorney), or from the Child Support Recovery Unit.

D. CUSTODY & VISITATION

Where do I go for custody battles?

Assuming that the party wants to litigate a custody issue, the clerk should advise that all pleadings must be filed in the clerk's office. Encourage the party to consult an attorney.

E. DISMISSALS

I filed a petition for a divorce, but I changed my mind. How do I dismiss my divorce case?

The answer to the question depends on whether the spouse has filed an answer or other responsive pleading. If no answer or other responsive pleading has been filed, the petitioner may simply file a dismissal. If an answer or other responsive pleading has been filed, the spouse must join in the motion to dismiss the case. Advise the party to seek assistance from an attorney.

F. DIVORCE DECREE IN ANOTHER STATE

I got a divorce decree in another state. How do I transfer it to Iowa?

This question typically arises when a person wants to enforce a child or spousal support obligation in Iowa that was ordered in another state. This can be complicated. The party should seek assistance from a private attorney or see the Child Support Recovery Unit.

G. DIVORCE DECREE: WHEN IS IT FINAL?

1. Am I divorced?

Refer the party to the court file and divorce decree if available. If the party still has questions, advise the person to seek advice from competent legal counsel.

2. Can I get remarried tomorrow?

Parties with a valid, recorded divorce decree may remarry. Refer the party to the County Recorder to obtain a new marriage license, if appropriate.

H. MOTION TO QUASH

I want to file a motion to quash. How do I do it?

The answer depends on what the party desires to quash, but usually an injunction or an order for mandatory income withholding has been filed against the person. The clerk may advise the party to put the motion to quash in writing, serve a copy of the motion on the other party (*see FAQs* section II.A.2), and file it with the clerk's office. The matter will be set for hearing. If forms for the motion are available in the clerk's office, the clerk should offer the forms to the moving party. But the clerk **cannot** assist the party in the wording of the motion nor tell the party who should receive a copy of the motion.

I. NAME CHANGE (as part of a dissolution of marriage)

I want to take my maiden name back. How do I do that?

This is accomplished most often through a divorce decree or annulment. (*See* Iowa Code section 598.37.) The clerk may advise the party to discuss this with the party's attorney. If the person is unrepresented, advise the party that she or he must file a written motion for change of name at the clerk's office, and deliver a copy of the motion to the opposing party. The request will then be considered by the judge.

Note: For information on name changes other than those arising from a dissolution of marriage, *see FAQs* section II.F.1 above.

J. PATERNITY

1. How do I establish / disestablish paternity?

Iowa Code chapters 252F and 600B discuss these issues. Reviewing those statutes might be beneficial. Establishing or disestablishing paternity is a very important matter and can be very complicated. Encourage the party to seek assistance from competent legal counsel. The clerk might also suggest that the party contact Child Support Recovery Unit for further information.

2. How do I get a blood test?

In a case to establish paternity a party may request the judge to order blood testing. (*See* Iowa Code section 600B.41.) The request should be in writing in the form of a motion, filed with the clerk, with

copies provided to opposing parties. The judge will then consider the request.

K. RESTRAINING ORDERS

I want a restraining order. Will you do this for me?

If this is a request for a **domestic abuse** protection order under Iowa Code chapter 236, the clerk shall offer forms and some assistance with filing and presenting the petition to a judge. For **other types** of restraining orders advise the party to seek assistance from competent legal counsel and that legal services might be available for those who cannot afford an attorney.

V. Criminal and Traffic Cases

A. APPEALS

How do I file a notice of appeal?

In simple misdemeanor cases, a party may give notice orally to the magistrate at the time judgment is rendered that the party appeals or by delivering to the magistrate not later than ten days thereafter a written notice of appeal. (See Iowa Rule of Criminal Procedure 54(1); see also Iowa Rule of Appellate Procedure 5 for deadline for filing notice of appeal.) In indictable cases a party files written notice with the clerk of court where the judgment was entered; the notice must be signed personally or by the party's attorney. It shall specify the party taking the appeal and the judgment appealed from. The appellant shall serve a copy of the notice on the prosecutor and file proof of service with the clerk. Promptly after filing the notice of appeal with the clerk of the trial court, appellant shall mail or deliver to the Clerk of the Supreme Court and to the Attorney General an information copy. (See Iowa Rules of Appellate Procedure 6 and 101.)

B. ATTORNEYS

1. How do I get an attorney?

Parties have the right to hire their own attorney. If financially unable to do so, a party may apply for a court-appointed attorney, and the clerk should provide the appropriate forms. The judge will then consider the request and, based on criteria established by the state legislature, determine whether the party is eligible for court-appointed counsel.

2. Why do I have to reimburse the state for court-appointed attorney fees?

The legislature passed a law that requires the courts to order such reimbursement.

3. Why can't I have a court-appointed attorney?

The state legislature established the financial criteria for determining when a person qualifies for a court-appointed attorney in criminal cases. (See Iowa Code section 815.9.) A judge makes the decision on whether a defendant qualifies for a court-appointed attorney based on the defendant's financial resources. Clerks do not play a role in determining who gets a court-appointed attorney.

C. BOND

1. How do I get a friend out of jail (out on bond)?

If bond has been set, advise the party how that bond may be posted.

2. When will I get my bond money back?

Bonds are only released upon order by a judge or dismissal of the charges. Furthermore, the bond is returned only to the party posting it, and the bond is subject to the clerk's set-off toward any amount owed by that party to the clerk.

D. CHARGES & CHARGING ISSUES

1. What have I been charged with?

The clerk may show the defendant the file assuming it is not confidential or sealed. If the defendant has further questions, the clerk should suggest that the party consult with an attorney or with the prosecutor's office.

2. It wasn't my car so why did I get a ticket for no insurance?

Clerks are not authorized to speak for law enforcement officers or to speculate as to why an officer did or did not issue a ticket. Encourage the party to seek advice from competent legal counsel or ask the prosecuting attorney.

E. COMPLAINTS (REGARDING POLICE OFFICERS)

How do I file a complaint about a police officer?

The clerk may refer the party to the police department or to the prosecutor's office.

F. COURT COSTS

1. Why are my court costs so high?

Court costs are established by the legislature; the clerk's duty is merely to assess and collect those costs.

2. Why do I have to pay court costs when I didn't go to court?

Court costs are established by the legislature and they are fees for the filing and processing of the case rather than a fee for personal appearances.

3. What is the 30% surcharge for?

Section 911.1 of the Iowa Code provides that the surcharge: "...shall be used for the maintenance and improvement of criminal justice programs, law enforcement efforts, victim compensation, crime prevention, and the improvement of the professional training of personnel, and the planning and support services of the criminal justice system."

G. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

1. What is the DOT telephone number?

General information: (515) 237-3053
License reinstatement: (800) 532-1121

2. Will you call the DOT and tell them that I paid my ticket?

Due to the large volume of traffic tickets, clerks do not make individual calls for this purpose. If the ticket has been paid, the clerk should provide the party with written receipt that can be presented to the DOT as proof of payment. Tell the person the phone number to call or DOT location where he or she can go to take care of this matter.

H. FINES

1. How do I get my fines taken directly out of my check?

The clerk may refer the party to a voluntary wage withholding form if available and assist the party with completing the form.

2. I want to pay a fine, but I don't know what it is for.

The clerk may assist the party in reviewing her or his case record to determine if a fine has been imposed, the reason for the fine, and the amount.

3. When do I have to pay my fine?

Fines are usually due at sentencing unless additional time to pay is granted by the court.

4. Why won't you take my check?

Checks are not acceptable for cash bonds. However, most clerk's offices will accept checks as payment for fines and costs unless the party has had check problems in the past.

5. I paid this ticket a while ago. Why don't you show it paid?

If the party can produce some proof of payment, the clerk will investigate why credit does not appear on the docket.

6. Will you give me an extension to pay my fine?

Only a judge may grant an extension. The defendant should file a request in writing with the clerk who will then give the request to the judge for consideration.

7. What do the police do with all the money I pay?

Fine payments do not go to officers or law enforcement agencies directly, but are paid to the general fund of the State of Iowa or to the general funds of the cities or counties of the jurisdiction.

I. GUILTY PLEA

How do I plead guilty?

Some clerks' offices provide forms for guilty pleas in simple misdemeanors. For more serious offenses suggest the party consult competent legal counsel or speak to the prosecutor.

J. LICENSE SUSPENSION

Why is my license suspended when I paid my ticket?

It is likely that either the DOT has not recorded the payment and lifted the suspension, or the party's license is suspended for other reasons. Advise the party to contact the DOT and be prepared to provide proof of payment of the ticket.

K. NOTICES

1. How can I get a second notice when I didn't get a first notice?

The court views the traffic citation or the order of judgment as the first notice and the reminder as the second notice. (Note: this question pertains to Central Collections Unit notices mailed by clerks. A committee is reviewing the optimum number of notices as well as the wording on the notices to eliminate this confusion.)

2. I have received several notices regarding my unpaid fines. Each indicates a different date to pay. When is my fine really due?

Under Iowa law, fines and fees (if any) are due at sentencing unless a court order indicates otherwise. The Court, upon a showing of good cause, may issue an order granting additional time to pay. Before adding a late payment surcharge or other penalty authorized by the Iowa legislature (see next question), the clerk of court or other state agency will send a notice to a person who has not paid a fine. Some notices are mandated by law. Others are sent as a courtesy. In either situation, each notice may establish a new deadline date to pay the fine. If the person pays the fine before the new deadline, the new sanction will not be imposed.

➡ **NOTE: Read the notices carefully. If a person has already received multiple notices the person's driver's license might be suspended.**

3. What will happen if I don't pay my fine by the due date?

The Iowa legislature has established sanctions and several collection methods to induce parties to pay amounts due. These methods include, but are not limited to:

- **suspending the person's drivers license;**
- adding a 10 percent surcharge to the balance due the Central Collections Unit;
- deducting the unpaid fine and costs from income tax refunds; or
- garnishing the person's wages.

L. RECORDS & WARRANTS

1. Why won't you do a record check for me?

The clerk's office is required to keep the records open and accurate. Due to staffing and liability considerations, however, the clerk does not conduct record searches.

2. This isn't supposed to be on my record. Why is it showing up?

The clerk should first determine if the matter was recorded properly and, if so, advise the party to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel.

3. Is there a warrant out for my arrest?

The party should check with local law enforcement; clerks are not authorized to provide this information.

M. RESTRAINING ORDERS

How do I lift a no contact order?

Since this involves rescinding a court order the clerk should advise the party to file a written request with the clerk and provide a copy to the county attorney. A judge will then consider the request. If there are forms available for this purpose, the clerk should provide the appropriate form to the party.

N. SENTENCES: OUTCOMES & OPTIONS

1. What will be my sentence?

The judge imposes the sentences and it would be inappropriate for the clerk to speculate.

2. Am I going to jail?

Sentencing depends on a variety of factors and it would be inappropriate for the clerk to speculate on what the judge might do.

3. Where can I go for traffic class?

The party should check with the prosecutor's office.

4. How do I get unsupervised probation?

Because this is such an important issue, the clerk should emphasize that the best option would be to consult with competent legal counsel. However, if the defendant is not going to contact an attorney, the clerk may suggest that the defendant could contact the county prosecutor to discuss the issue, or the defendant could make the request to the judge at sentencing. But the clerk may not tell the defendant which option the party *should* choose.

VI. Probate

1. Can I file my own guardianship and conservatorship?

It is possible to file your own guardianship and conservatorship, but due to legal complexities and potential liability the party should be advised to first consult an attorney.

2. As a guardian (or conservator), do I have to file an annual report?

It is assumed that this question pertains to reporting requirements for guardians and conservators. The requirements are found at sections 633.669 and 663.670 of the Iowa Code. Guardians and conservators must file annual reports unless the court otherwise orders.

➔ **NOTE:** For more information on handling **guardianships** and **conservatorships**, see: *Guardianship and Conservatorship Handbook*, by the Young Lawyers Division of the Iowa State Bar Association. (To obtain a copy call: (515) 243-3179)

3. Do you have my will?

The clerk may tell the party whether his or her will is being stored in the clerk's office.

4. How do I file a claim in probate?

Iowa Code sections 633.410 through 633.449 regulate the filing of claims in probate cases. The clerk should offer any forms that might be available for that purpose. Some clerks' offices also offer basic information on the steps required in filing a claim. (Check with your clerk of court.) However, there are many questions which require legal analysis, such as statute of limitations, separate actions in lieu of claims in probate, secured and unsecured claims, contingent claims, classification of debts and charges, order of payment, and procedure when disallowed. The clerk should advise the party to seek advice and assistance from an attorney.

5. Do I have to open an estate for a dead relative?

This question requires a legal opinion, which the clerk may not offer. An estate is not required for every deceased person, but it may be necessary to transfer property, pay just claims, and obtain tax clearances. The clerk should advise the party to seek assistance from competent legal counsel.

6. Can I have the form to file a claim in probate court?

The Iowa Rules of Civil Procedure do not provide forms for probate cases.

VII. Small Claims

➡ **NOTE:** The **Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (800-532-1503)** provides a helpful guide on **landlord/tenant cases**. In addition, the Iowa State Bar Association's handbook -- "How to Use Small Claims Court" -- is very helpful. It should be available at the clerk's counter. Otherwise, call the ISBA in Des Moines at: **(515-243-3179)**.

A. FILING A SMALL CLAIM CASE

1. How do I file a small claim?

The clerk may provide any pamphlets that are available (e.g., from the Young Lawyers Division of the state bar association) as well as forms for filing small claims. You may also point out where information should be placed on the forms. You should **not** offer recommendations as to the phraseology of the information that goes on the form, whom the party should sue, or whether a small claim should be filed.

2. Whom do I file against?

This question requires the clerk to offer legal advice, which a clerk may not provide. Advise the plaintiff to consult with competent legal counsel.

3. Do I have a case against this guy?

This question requires a clerk to interpret how the law will apply in a particular litigant's case, which would constitute legal advice. Clerks cannot provide legal advice. The party should ask an attorney on this question.

4. I live in Iowa and the defendant lives in ANOTHER STATE. Where do I file?

The answer to this question depends on the particular circumstances of the case. The clerk should advise the plaintiff to consult with competent legal counsel.

5. I live in this county and the person I want to sue lives in ANOTHER COUNTY in Iowa. Where do I file?

The answer to this question depends on the particular circumstances of the case. The clerk should advise the plaintiff to consult with competent legal counsel.

6. What kind of notice do I have to give?

The type of notice may vary with the circumstances, such as the type of claim the party wishes to file and whether the defendant lives in Iowa. The clerk may point out the various types of service available pursuant to section 631.4 of the Iowa Code. For further information on this issue, the party should consult with an attorney.

7. Once I file my claim, how long before I go to court?

This is an administrative question, which may be answered by the clerk. Once a petition is filed it must be served upon the opposing party who is then given a reasonable time to respond, usually 20 days from date of service. If an answer is filed denying the claim the magistrate clerk will set the case for hearing according to the magistrate's (or district associate judge's) schedule and notice will be mailed to all parties. In some counties, unless waived by court order, *mediation* is required prior to setting the case for hearing. In those counties the clerk should inform the party about that requirement and that notice for the mediation will be sent to all parties the same as the notice for the hearing.

8. My case was dismissed a year ago. Can I refile?

The answer depends upon how the case was dismissed (i.e., with or without prejudice) and whether the statute of limitations has expired, which can be a complicated issue. The party should seek advice from competent legal counsel.

9. Will you mail me thirty small claims forms?

Most clerks' offices will not do this. Clerks will mail one copy free of charge. The recipient is allowed to make copies from the original.

B. ANSWERING A SMALL CLAIM PETITION

1. I received a small claim notice in the mail. What do I do now?

The defendant should follow the instructions on the notice and perhaps seek advice from an attorney. The clerk cannot tell the defendant whether to admit or deny the claim or how to respond to the notice; this would be legal advice, which clerks cannot provide.

2. How do I file a counterclaim?

The clerk may provide the appropriate forms and indicate where the information should be placed on the form, but cannot suggest phraseology or whether a counterclaim should be filed.

C. BANKRUPTCY & ITS IMPACT

I filed a debt collection case against a person. After that, the person filed for bankruptcy. How will the bankruptcy case affect my case against that person?

The answer to this question can be complicated. It requires legal advice, which clerks cannot provide. From a procedural standpoint the clerk may advise that the filing of bankruptcy generally suspends (“stays”) the state court proceedings. The party should seek advice from competent legal counsel as to how the bankruptcy might affect the plaintiff’s claim.

D. COLLECTING ON A JUDGMENT

1. How long is my judgment good for?

The statute of limitations for small claims judgments for execution purposes is twenty years, and liens on those judgments exist for ten years. (*See* Iowa Code sections 614.1(6), 626.2 and 631.12.)

2. Once a judgment is obtained, how long before I get my money?

This question requires *caution* by the clerk. A judgment gives the judgment creditor a **lien** against the defendant, but the judgment and lien do not guarantee voluntary payment. The judgment creditor may pursue collection through various legal forms of **execution**, but these can be complicated. The party should seek advice from an attorney.

3. How do I obtain garnishment?

The clerk may provide appropriate forms that are available for this process and point out where information should be placed on the forms, but the clerk should not give any advice as to how the garnishment should be pursued.

4. How many garnishments can be on a person at one time?

Only one **execution** shall be in existence at the same time. (*See* Iowa Code section 626.3.) The party should consult an attorney for options.

5. How do I find out where the defendant works?

This information could be obtained through a **debtor examination** after a judgment has been obtained and the judgment creditor has unsuccessfully attempted an execution on that judgment. (*See FAQs I.C.3* above.) There are certain legal requirements that must be met before you get to that point so the clerk should advise the judgment creditor to seek advice and assistance from competent legal counsel.

6. I tried an execution, but it didn't work. What do I do now?

The clerk cannot tell the person what he or she should do in this circumstance. One option, however, is a **debtor examination**. (See previous question.)

7. How do I stop a garnishment?

The clerk may provide the defendant with appropriate forms for requesting a hearing, if such forms are available. Otherwise, the clerk should advise the defendant that a motion to contest the garnishment, needs to be filed with the clerk's office with notice to the garnishing party. A hearing will then be scheduled before a judge.

8. Why can't the judge just put the defendant in jail?

The clerk may advise that jail is not a legal remedy available in civil proceedings. The plaintiff may wish to consult competent legal counsel to explore other available options.

9. Can the defendant make installment payments on the judgment?

The judgment entry **may** provide for installment payments, or the defendant may petition the court for installment payments. (*See Iowa Code section 631.12.*) The judgment creditor may also accept partial payments even if they are not explicitly authorized in the judgment, but the defendant should seek advice from an attorney as to whether the judgment creditor who has accepted partial payments will be prevented from seeking accelerated collection of the judgment through other legal means.

10. The other party paid me just the judgment and not court costs. How do I collect the court costs?

If the judgment required the defendant to pay court costs, the judgment lien does not have to be released until those costs are paid. The plaintiff may pursue payment through **execution** and the clerk should provide forms for doing so, if available.

E. INTEREST CALCULATION

How do I figure interest?

[➡ Note: Strongly recommend to your judges that they must include the interest rate in the judgment.]

Few clerk's offices calculate the interest due for litigants. The clerk may at least provide to the party the appropriate information to calculate the interest if not provided in the judgment entry. The clerk may also provide a calculator at the front counter and **instructions on how to calculate interest**. The following are some simple steps for calculating interest. Not every case allows for a simple answer, however. The amount of interest due could be influenced by whether the litigant has already received partial payment of the judgment or interest. Nevertheless, the following steps should be helpful to many *pro se* litigants:

Yes -- a minor may be sued, but no judgment may be taken against a minor unless the minor is defended by a *guardian ad litem*. (See Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 13.) Suing a minor involves numerous legal issues, so the party should seek the advice and assistance of competent legal counsel.

H. SATISFYING & RELEASING THE JUDGMENT

1. I paid my judgment in full and the plaintiff has not released it. How do I get the judgment released?

There is a procedure for this contingency found in Iowa Code section 624.37, but the party should seek advice from competent legal counsel on this issue.

2. I paid my judgment so why don't you satisfy it?

The judgment creditor (the person who was owed the money) is responsible for satisfying the judgment, not the clerk. (See Iowa Code section 624.37.)

I. TIME LIMIT FOR FILING A SMALL CLAIM

What is the time limit to file a small claim? [Statute of limitations question]

Iowa Code chapter 614 addresses this question, but other Code chapters could apply depending on the type of claim and the facts involved in the case. The party should consult with an attorney.

Helpful Phone Numbers for People Who Need Legal Assistance or Information

Department of Transportation (Iowa) -- for information regarding drivers licenses	General information: (515) 237-3053 License reinstatement: (800) 532-1121
Lawyer Referral Service (Iowa / Statewide)	Toll free: (800) 532-1108

FREE or LOW COST Legal Assistance for Civil or Domestic Actions

	Local Phone #	Toll Free Phone #
Legal Services Corporation of Iowa (Des Moines)	(515) 243 2151	(800) 532-1503
Cedar Rapids Regional Office	(319) 364-6108	(800) 322-0419
Iowa City Regional Office	(319) 351-6570	(800) 272-0008
Waterloo Regional Office	(319) 235-7008	(800) 772-0039
North Central Region: Mason City	(515) 423-4651	(800) 392-0021
Northeast Region: Dubuque	(319) 588-4653	(800) 942-4619
Northwest Region: Sioux City	(712) 277-8686	(800) 352-0017
South Central Region: Des Moines	(515) 280-3636	(800) 772-0039
Southeast Region: Ottumwa	(515) 683-3166	(800) 452-0007
Southwest Region: Council Bluffs	(712) 328-3982	(800) 432-9229
HELP Legal Aid – Scott County (Davenport)	(319) 322-6216	(800) 627-1596
Legal Aid Society – Polk County (Des Moines)	(515) 243-1193	
Legal Aid Society – Muscatine County (Muscatine)	(319) 263-8663	
Legal Aid Society – Story County (Ames)	(515) 382-2471	
Drake Law Clinic – Des Moines	(515) 271-3851	
Volunteer Lawyers Project (Des Moines)	(515) 243-3904	

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