



# Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation

## *Pro Se Planning on the Plains* Post-Conference Report

March 31, 2007

Timothy S. Eckley  
Staff Attorney/Publications Associate  
American Judicature Society

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Seth S. Andersen, Executive Vice President  
The American Judicature Society  
The Opperman Center  
2700 University Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50311  
515.271.2281  
[www.ajs.org](http://www.ajs.org)

Founded in 1913, the American Judicature Society is an independent, nonprofit organization supported by a national membership of judges, lawyers, and other members of the public. Through research, educational programs and publications, AJS addresses concerns related to ethics in the courts, judicial selection, the jury, court administration, judicial independence, and public understanding of the justice system.

# The Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation

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### *Introduction*

From September 7-9, 2006, the American Judicature Society (AJS), with support from the State Justice Institute, Drake University, the Iowa Bar Foundation, and the Chicago Bar Foundation, conducted the Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation in Des Moines, Iowa, at the Drake University Law School.

The genesis of this conference was an AJS survey conducted for the March 2005 Summit on the Future of Pro Se Litigation held in Chicago, Illinois. Kathleen Sampson, AJS Senior Program Associate, delivered the paper “Progress to Date and Future Plans: Survey Results Updating Self-Represented Litigation Innovation Activities 1999-2004 and Beyond” (Survey) at the March 2005 Summit. The Survey built upon previous AJS efforts in the pro se litigation arena that primarily began with the 1998 publishing of *Meeting the Challenge of Pro Se Litigation: A Report and Guide Book for Judges and Court Managers*, a first compilation of national data and research on pro se litigation.

Close on the heels of *Meeting the Challenge* AJS convened the 1999 National Conference on Pro Se Litigation in Scottsdale, Arizona. This groundbreaking conference brought together 325 participants organized into teams from 49 states and the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico. The organized teams included participants from a

broad spectrum of court-system stakeholders, and about three-quarters of the teams prepared action plans designed for implementation in their home jurisdictions. The action plans catered to specific problem areas or needs in pro se litigation efforts particular to each state. Many of the action plans spurred development of needed pro se litigation services and innovations or refined established pro se efforts.

In 2004 AJS began canvassing team leaders and other knowledgeable stakeholders to gauge the pro se litigation progress in the various states and territories since the 1999 Scottsdale conference. By April 2005, 46 jurisdictions had responded to the survey with most reporting some progress in providing assistance to pro se litigants. The survey results categorized the progress of the various respondents as follows: (1) Comprehensive Program States; (2) Partially Integrated Program States; (3) Emerging States; and (4) Unknown Status or Inactive States.

AJS learned from the 2005 Survey that a number of states in the Midwest region were either (1) in the planning stages for pro se assistance efforts; (2) had a few court-based programs in larger cities; (3) had posted some forms and instructions—usually narrowly tailored to family law issues—on local or statewide court websites; or (4) in some instances simply had been unable to address the pro se litigation phenomenon.

Certain trends emerged from the Survey results, including the existence of a broad region of states that generally fell into the Emerging States category. Many Midwestern states reported very limited assistance to unrepresented litigants or assistance efforts in the planning stages. A few of the Midwestern states reported established or emerging pro se assistance programs. Most of the emerging states reported plans to further pro se litigation assistance efforts. The Survey revealed a desire and need for emerging states to collect and share information on effective protocols, service models, program descriptions, and training materials from successful jurisdictions and service providers. Survey respondents indicated that to plan and implement pro se assistance activities, they needed to interact with judges, court staff, attorneys, pro se assistance program staff, and community partners from other jurisdictions to discuss common concerns, share information, and learn about successful solutions to pro se challenges.

The Survey exposed a need to re-engage, or in some cases to initially engage, at some common level most of the Midwestern states.

The Survey results, in conjunction with the continued burgeoning pro se litigation demands and pressures on the courts, highlighted the need for a regional conference to bring together judges, private attorneys, court staff, legal aid attorneys, and other interested stakeholders from the Midwestern states to share information about the volume of pro se litigation, the types of cases in which self-represented litigants usually appear, the level of need for pro se assistance, ways to ease the burden of pro se litigation on the judicial system and engage attorneys in this effort, and to develop concrete action plans to be implemented after the conference.

## *Planning the Conference*

The 2005 Survey identified various reasons for lack of progress in assisting pro se litigants,\* including the following:

- Opposition from important stakeholders such as court clerks (particularly elected clerks), attorneys (with economic concerns and reservations about unauthorized practice of law on the part of self-help program staff), and judges (with concerns about compromising their role as neutral arbiter and “encouraging” pro se litigants);
- Funding and staffing concerns and constraints; and
- The absence of strong political sponsors to champion self-help programming.

AJS observed that these obstacles to implementing effective pro se litigant assistance programs were inhibiting progress in some Midwestern states. Therefore, in late summer 2005, AJS began a 12-month project to address these barriers in the Midwestern states. The following ten states were targeted for participation in the conference: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Some of these states, of course, had already taken significant and effective steps towards addressing pro se litigation needs and AJS anticipated that those states could share their experiences and expertise with the emerging states.

## *Advisory Committee*

In late summer 2005, AJS invited a representative from each of the ten Midwestern states to serve on a conference Advisory Committee. Committee members advised AJS on conference target audience and goals, the invitation process, relevant conference topics, and program format. In addition to Midwest regional Advisory Committee members, the committee included Richard Zorza, coordinator of the National Self-Represented Litigation Network, a working group of state courts and national organizations cooperating to share information about pro se assistance issues, and William T. Johnston, Chair of the AJS National Advisory Council, former President of the Delaware Bar Association, and a leader in designing Delaware’s programs for assisting pro se litigants in family court. (The Advisory Committee Roster is attached as Appendix A.)

The Advisory Committee met via conference call periodically during the planning stages of the conference to address planning issues and commented via email on various matters including draft agendas, correspondence, and invitations.

In consultation with the Advisory Committee, AJS determined to approach the Chief Justice of each target Midwestern state to designate team members to attend the conference. This approach was designed to achieve better buy-in from the highest level of court for developing pro se assistance programs and to facilitate follow-up on the state team action plans developed at the conference.

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\* In this Report the terms “pro se” and “self-represented” are used interchangeably.

## ***Conference Objectives***

AJS and the Advisory Committee identified the following conference objectives:

- To bring together teams of judges, attorneys, court staff, and other interested stakeholders from ten Midwestern states to share information about the volume of and challenges presented by pro se litigation in their states;
- To assemble a conference faculty of experienced presenters to convey information about successful pro se assistance programs in the Midwest and from across the nation to allow team members to adapt or adopt tested service-delivery models that fit their specific state circumstances;
- To identify effective tactics and programs that have eased the burden of pro se litigation on the judicial system in other jurisdictions;
- To inform conference participants about available pro se litigation resources for information, assistance, and expertise; and
- To provide a program agenda that facilitates team member processing of information and development of concrete action plans to pursue after the conference in their home states.

## ***Invitation Process***

After consultation with the Advisory Committee, AJS approached three state Chief Justices to sign a cover letter to the ten Midwest Chief Justices inviting them to designate teams to attend the conference. Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Louis A. Lavorato, as chief justice of the state in which the conference was to be held, and two nationally known justices, Montana Supreme Court Chief Justice Karla M. Gray, Co-Chair of CCJ-COSCA Committee on Public Trust and Confidence in the Judiciary, and Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Randall T. Shepard, President of the Conference of Chief Justices, each signed the letter encouraging the Midwest chiefs to participate in the conference. The letter enclosed another letter from AJS to each of the ten chief justices inviting them to designate team members from their states to attend the conference and develop action plans to establish or expand pro se litigant assistance efforts to improve access to justice and relieve the pro se burden on judges and court staff. (The invitation letters are attached as Appendix B.)

The AJS letter to the Midwestern chief justices suggested they consider the following categories of individuals as team members: state trial court judge, trial court clerk, trial court administrator, bar association leader, pro se task force or access to justice commission member, law librarian or public librarian, state legislator, and service provider from outside the court system.

During this time of the conference planning process, Mary Boudreau, from the Utah Administrative Office of the Courts, contacted AJS about the possibility of the State of Utah sending a team to the conference, a request which AJS readily granted. The response to the invitation process demonstrated a strong desire for and need for such a conference among the targeted states. A breakdown of the number of attendees from each participating state follows:

Illinois	8	Minnesota	11	South Dakota	6
Indiana	6	Missouri	7	Utah	5
Iowa	9	Nebraska	7	Wisconsin	8
Kansas	5	North Dakota	4		

(The Participant Roster is attached as Appendix C.)

## ***Conference Faculty***

The Advisory Committee and AJS project director Kathleen Sampson identified conference speakers and showcase presenters. Through AJS's long involvement at the forefront of pro se litigation assistance efforts, an impressive faculty, with national reputation, experience, and expertise in pro se litigation matters was assembled for the Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation. (The Faculty Roster for the conference is attached as Appendix D.)

Once the faculty was confirmed, AJS held conference calls with the speakers for each program plenary and breakout session to discuss presentation content, how best to engage the target audience, program materials and handouts, and technological needs. (The Contents of Conference Materials is attached as Appendix E.)

## ***Pre-Conference Survey***

In early July 2006 AJS circulated a Pre-Conference Survey to the members of the designated state teams. The purpose of the Pre-Conference Survey was to inform team members of the status of pro se litigation efforts in their states and to help identify gaps in such services to focus better the team efforts in developing action plans to address problem areas during the conference.

AJS tabulated the Pre-Conference Survey Results and circulated the results among the state teams. Thirty-seven team members, representing nine of the ten Midwestern States, plus the State of Utah, answered the Pre-Conference Survey. The Pre-Conference Survey asked respondents to describe the types of pro se litigation assistance services provided in their states, the areas of law for which services are provided, the most pressing needs to be filled, state rules and official bodies that address pro se issues, and training efforts available to address pro se litigation needs. (The Pre-Conference Survey Results are attached as Appendix F.)

## ***State Team Action Plans***

With input from the Advisory Committee, AJS prepared a State Team Action Plan template to assist the state teams in preparing action plans to aid in implementation of pro se litigation assistance services in their home states after the conference. (The Action Plan Template is attached as Appendix G.)

## ***Oral reports at the conference***

The last session of the conference, "Action Plan Reports," allowed a representative of each team (1) to summarize the main focus of each team's plan to promote pro se litigant assistance, (2) to identify a major anticipated barrier and how it might be addressed, (3) to describe a first step the team planned to take within 30 days of the conference, (4) to highlight one innovative idea taken from the conference, and (5) to identify a major area in which the team needed assistance.

The oral Action Plan reports at the close of the conference provided the following information from the state teams:

- 1. Main Focus.** The teams’ descriptions of their anticipated main focus revealed common themes of relying on technology and standardized forms to expand pro se litigant services statewide and to promote educational programs for judges and lawyers. Specifically, the teams noted the following plans:

  - To develop a help desk with telephone/video conferencing capabilities;
  - To conduct a statewide survey of pro se needs;
  - To initiate an 800# hotline and online self-help program;
  - To augment an existing pro se assistance website and provide an “unbundling” workshop for attorneys;
  - To continue development of statewide family law forms and draft “unbundling” rules;
  - To develop a pilot video/online self-help program;
  - To upgrade existing pro se resources and develop an interactive video conferencing service;
  - To implement a strategic plan to develop baseline self-help services statewide and to develop a pro se litigant assistance call center;
  - To begin educating judges and other stakeholders about pro se needs and services;
  - To develop court self-help centers across the state and to publicize better existing resources; and
  - To develop a pilot self-help center, adopt unbundling rules, and improve existing forms and instructions.
  
- 2. Major Barriers.** The teams identified funding as a common and primary barrier to pro se litigant assistance efforts in their states. Barriers other than funding that were frequently noted, included the following:

  - Lack of buy-in from bar associations and judges;
  - Making forms accessible statewide;
  - Inadequate staffing;
  - Implementing technology;
  - Lack of unbundling rules; and
  - In-state politics.
  
- 3. Initial Steps.** The state team reports indicated an eagerness to begin implementation of pro se litigant assistance efforts, many of which involved identifying key constituents and informing them of the need for reform steps and effective ways to address self-representation needs. The following planned initial steps were identified at the close of the conference:

  - Explore funding options;
  - Establish legislative relationships;
  - Seek bar association and state supreme court buy-in;
  - Establish state committee on pro se litigation;
  - Propose access to justice commission;
  - Pilot forms in select judicial districts prior to statewide adoption;

- Report to supreme court and bar association on conference recommendations;
- Identify stakeholder partners to lobby for legislative funding;
- Conduct statewide survey of pro se needs;
- Report to conference of state judges; and
- Solicit assistance for forms development.

**4. Innovative Ideas.** A representative of each state team was asked to identify one innovative idea that the team would take away from the conference for possible implementation in the team's home state. The team representatives identified the following innovative ideas taken from the conference:

- Video conferencing capabilities;
- Mandatory educational program for pro se litigants;
- Involvement of law schools for programming and staffing assistance;
- Utilizing public libraries for information sources;
- Providing interactive forms on state judicial branch website;
- Establishing partnership with state tribal courts;
- Surveying judges to identify needs and existing services;
- Utilizing live help services;
- Statewide judicial education programs; and
- State team presentation to bar association.

**5. Need Help.** Finally, each team's oral report concluded with describing one area in which the team felt its state needed particular assistance. The teams expected to need help in the following areas:

- Taking pilot program statewide;
- Identifying and obtaining funding for new services;
- Educating the bench;
- Finding consultants;
- Working with libraries;
- Gaining technological assistance;
- Accessing grant funding;
- Finding effective approach to legislature for assistance; and
- Measuring cost-benefit of pro se services.

### ***Written action plans***

During the period 60-90 days after the conference AJS gathered formal state team action plans developed from the conference. While Midwestern states were generally characterized as "emerging" states, there is great variety in the level, organization, and extent of services provided in these states. Most of the state teams returned action plans structured according to the suggested Action Plan Template provided at the conference (Appendix G).

The Action Plan Template asked the state teams to identify their highest priority needs as well as other needs and to identify the methods or steps the teams intended to promote to meet programming goals designed to address these priority needs. The teams were also asked to consider with whom they could collaborate to achieve their goals and from where strategic help

could be gained. Consideration of potential opposition and barriers to pro se reform efforts is also a part of the Action Plan Template. The teams were asked to project costs, staffing needs, technological needs, and facilities requirements required to achieve their programming goals. Finally, the teams listed key initial steps that they intended to take after the conference to implement their programming goal or goals.

### **Highest Priority Needs**

The first task the state teams addressed in their action plans was identifying the highest priority need in their state. The highest priority need was dependent on the progress each state had already made in addressing pro se litigant concerns. A prevailing constant, however, was to make inroads on a *statewide* basis, for example, either by expanding a successful existing effort from a particular jurisdiction to reach all pro se litigants in the state or by launching a new innovation on a statewide basis such as standardized forms or supreme court promulgation of an unbundling or limited scope representation rule. The highest priority needs of the states in the Midwest region included the following:

- Making courts user-friendly and accessible for the growing number of self-represented litigants statewide;
- Restructuring and consolidating into a single unified body existing committees and commissions already focusing on pro se litigation matters;
- Gaining state supreme court buy-in to expand assistance to self-represented litigants;
- Developing, distributing, and maintaining statewide pro se forms;
- Expanding existing baseline self-help services throughout the state;
- Authorizing unbundled, or limited scope representation, legal services;
- Providing self-help services to all people in the state regardless of income or location;
- Creating more resources dedicated to educating and assisting pro se litigants in presenting their legal claims; and
- Providing live assistance to pro se litigants on a statewide basis.

### **Programming Goals**

With 11 states represented at the conference and each facing unique pro se challenges and working under circumstances specific to their state, it is not surprising that the programming goals reported in the action plans are myriad. Many of the states had common goals that included education efforts, expanding existing programs statewide, and building relationships with access to justice stakeholders. Specifically, the state teams noted the following programming goals:

- Develop a flexible self-help center blueprint for use in all state jurisdictions;
- Provide both judges and court staff training on self-help matters or distribute approved standardized guidelines for both judges and court staff;
- Build awareness of existing pro se litigation assistance resources;
- Create statewide standardized forms for common types of cases;
- Consolidate existing commissions or committees, or develop a single access to justice commission to address pro se matters;
- Provide continuing legal education opportunities for lawyers on unbundled or limited scope representation services;
- Foster a strong working relationship between the courts and the public libraries;

- Distribute a survey on pro se needs to judges, chief clerks, and judicial administrators;
- Integrate existing state legal services into all local courts;
- Develop instructional videos for pro se litigants;
- Provide self-representation assistance to any location with internet access;
- Achieve legislative buy-in;
- Modify lawyer ethics rules and supreme court rules to permit unbundled or limited scope legal services;
- Develop flowcharts of common court procedures in areas with heavy pro se involvement;
- Develop statewide self-representation web site;
- Build a pilot self-help support center; and
- Provide services to self-represented litigants through the public library system.

### **Collaborators and Strategic Support**

Nearly all of the 11 state teams identified several groups or entities within their states as necessary collaborators who can provide strategic support in efforts to further pro se litigant assistance efforts. The most commonly identified potential collaborators and sources of strategic support include the following:

- State and local bar associations, including young lawyers associations;
- Law schools;
- Legal aid organizations;
- State court administrators;
- Clerks of court;
- State Supreme Courts;
- Trial court judges;
- Law libraries and public libraries;
- Judges associations;
- Access to justice or equal justice coalitions and commissions;
- Pro bono groups; and
- Existing pro se committees or commissions.

One state identified “natural partners,” which includes “judges, librarians, bar associations, legal aid/legal services, workforce centers, human services, county social services, AARP, and the association of state counties.

### **Opposition**

In preparing their action plans, the state teams were asked to consider likely sources of opposition to or barriers to implementation of pro se litigant assistance efforts. The state teams identified a relatively small, but politically significant, number of potential opponents to reform efforts, including:

- Lack of a centralized and consistent funding source;
- Bar associations or private practice attorneys;
- Clerks of court and court staff;

- Trial court judges and staff; and
- State legislatures.

## **Costs**

The action plan template asked the state teams to estimate the cost of establishing their preferred pro se litigant assistance program or effort to facilitate self-representation in their courts. Most state teams were unable to provide specific dollar amounts and instead mentioned possible funding sources or barriers to funding. Listed below are paraphrased comments from state teams on funding; when possible those comments are paired with the project the team has in mind:

- Funding and support for statewide self-help centers “needs to be a part of future funding plans for the courts”;
- The team recommends exploring “possible methods for recouping some of the costs of providing services to self-represented litigants who have an ability to pay”;
- One state team identified a program goal of developing a relationship between the courts and public libraries and building self-help center assistance in the libraries. The team identified two sources of available funding: a Library Services Technology Assistance grant, which is federal money administered by the State Library; and Gates Grants that are available to develop curricula for librarian training;
- Several states identified state bar foundations and community foundations as possible funding sources;
- One state that has already made significant progress in developing statewide family law forms estimated that it would need “approximately \$65,000 (including benefits)” to provide for technology staff;
- The estimated cost of funding a highest need priority of “providing baseline self-help services throughout the state using the court website and a call center was approximately \$400,000 per year.” For approximately \$175,000 per year this team believed it could achieve set up of a call center with dedicated personnel;
- Another state would ideally have \$200,000 for a statewide coordinator of legal forms, a website, and a call center;
- Finally, one state observed that its planned library and videoconferencing programs “should be relatively inexpensive since we will rely on existing resources for program implementation.”

## **Staffing, Technology, and Facility Needs**

The state teams were asked to consider separately staffing needs, technological needs, and spacing needs for their pro se litigant assistance efforts. For purposes of the Post-Conference Report, these three elements of the action plan are discussed together. The following comments were provided:

- A few of the state teams suggested that self-represented access to the courts could be assisted with greater awareness among the public of the state’s available Legal Aid Online program;
- Those states focusing on increased use of technology acknowledged the need to hire additional support staff to oversee and maintain websites and monitor standardized forms and interactive forms available from the site;

- Most state teams noted the requirement of purchasing additional computer monitors, hardware, and software no matter which form of pro se litigant assistance they might pursue;
- Most state teams identified utilization of existing space and facilities as a way to keep costs down. Using existing resources in court houses and public libraries was emphasized.
- Those teams looking to establish or expand existing self-help centers acknowledged the need to hire staff attorneys, and one team noted a preference that its staff attorney also speak Spanish;
- Several states noted that dissemination of statewide forms and housing of telephone hotlines or statewide websites could be accomplished with the assistance of state court administration personnel and office space or state and county law libraries;
- A few of the state teams realized the need to purchase videoconferencing equipment.

### ***Conference Evaluations***

Each conference attendee was encouraged to fill out and return the conference evaluation form provided in the binder of materials. AJS tabulated and averaged the responses from 39 conference attendees. AJS carefully reviewed the evaluation results with an eye towards making useful adjustments in planning the South Central Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation held February 1-3, 2007, in Houston, Texas.

### ***Quantitative results***

The “Overall Evaluation,” based on a rating scale of 1-3 (1 = Not Really; 2 = Somewhat; 3 = Yes, definitely), included the following grades:

- The responsiveness of the Friday plenary and breakout sessions to attendees’ information and resource needs rated 2.78;
- The productivity of the teams’ action planning time rated 2.59;
- The opportunity for attendees to discuss issues of concern during the conference rated 2.69;
- The helpfulness of the conference binder of materials rated 2.94.

Each of the substantive conference sessions, beginning with the Thursday night dinner and keynote address, were rated on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = No Value, and 5 = Very Valuable. All but two of the sessions scored 4.0 or higher.

Conference attendees were asked to evaluate each of the 19 faculty presenters on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = Poor, and 5 = Excellent. Eleven presenters scored 4.2 or above. Only three presenters scored below 4 and the lowest rating was a respectable 3.8.

The evaluation form also invited attendees to offer suggestions for improvement, a number of which AJS utilized in planning the South Central Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation.

### ***Qualitative comments***

“The conference was tremendously helpful in both energizing and focusing our statewide efforts on (pro se) issues.”

“The Conference was a great opportunity to share best practices and to hear about the latest innovations in addressing (pro se) issues.”

“It was a great program that enabled our state to gauge where we are on pro se litigant initiatives.”

“Our team members reported that the (conference) content was excellent, and they were enthused about hearing national experts on the topic of self-representation.”

### ***Conclusion***

The Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation provided a unique opportunity for invested stakeholders in the access to justice arena to come together to share ideas and information, to learn from national experts, and to take home new and innovative ideas for addressing pro se litigation issues and concerns in their home states. The response by each of the state teams invited to the conference in supplying completed action plans is testament to the value and success of the conference.

During the conference and in the completed Action Plans the state teams acknowledged the importance of and a need for increased buy-in from vested stakeholders, the value of educational programs both to highlight the need for assistance efforts and to lessen resistance to such efforts, and continuing concerns about funding and staffing issues.

The conference, however, clearly energized key people in each state to either expand existing pro se litigation assistance efforts or to have the assurance that initial steps and program goals are attainable. Finally, relationships forged and contacts made at the conference provided each participant a degree of confidence to continue working in this area with the knowledge that help is available from national experts in the field and from similarly situated neighboring states.

**MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRO SE LITIGATION  
Advisory Committee Roster**

Hon. Gregory J. Donat  
Tippecanoe County Courthouse  
301 Main St., 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl.  
Lafayette, IN 47901  
765/423-9266  
765/423-9764 (fax)  
[greggdonat@aol.com](mailto:greggdonat@aol.com)

Bob Glaves, Executive Director  
Chicago Bar Foundation  
321 S. Plymouth Ct., Suite 3B  
Chicago, IL 60604  
312/554-1205  
312/554-1203 (fax)  
[bglaves@chicagobar.org](mailto:bglaves@chicagobar.org)

William D. Johnston, Chair  
AJS National Advisory Council  
Young, Conaway, Stargatt & Taylor, LLP  
The Brandywine Building  
1000 West Street, 17<sup>th</sup> Floor  
P. O. Box 391  
Wilmington, DE 19899-0391  
302/571-6679  
302/576-3304 (fax)  
[wjohnston@ycst.com](mailto:wjohnston@ycst.com)

Hon. John K. Konenkamp  
Supreme Court of South Dakota  
State Capitol Building  
500 E. Capitol Ave.  
Pierre, SD 57501-5070  
605/394-6945  
605/773-6128 (fax)  
[john.konenkamp@ujs.state.sd.us](mailto:john.konenkamp@ujs.state.sd.us)

Susan Ledray  
Pro Se Services Manager  
4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, Hennepin Cty.  
Government Center C-1251  
300 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55487-0423  
612/348-8468  
[Susan.Ledray@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:Susan.Ledray@courts.state.mn.us)

Hon. Theresa K. Luther  
9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
111 W. First St.  
Grand Island, NE 68801  
308/385-5666  
308/385-5669 (fax)  
[tluther@hallcountyne.gov](mailto:tluther@hallcountyne.gov)

Penny L. Miller, Clerk  
North Dakota Supreme Court  
600 E Blvd., Dept 180  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0530  
701/328-2221  
[pmiller@ndcourts.com](mailto:pmiller@ndcourts.com)

Gregg M. Moore  
10<sup>th</sup> District Court Administrator  
405 S. Barstow St., Suite C  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715/839-4826  
715/839-4891 (fax)  
[Gregg.Moore@wicourts.gov](mailto:Gregg.Moore@wicourts.gov)

Hon. Robert W. Pratt  
U. S. District Court, SD Iowa  
221 U. S. Courthouse  
123 E. Walnut Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
515/284-6254  
515/323-2907 (fax)  
[Robert\\_Pratt@iasd.uscourts.gov](mailto:Robert_Pratt@iasd.uscourts.gov)

J. C. Salvo  
President, Iowa State Bar Association  
Salvo, Deren, Schenk & Lauterbach, P.C.  
711 Court St.  
Harlan, IA 51537-0509  
712/755-3141  
712/755-3144 (fax)  
[jsalvo@sdsllaw.com](mailto:jsalvo@sdsllaw.com)

Art Thompson  
Dispute Resolution Coordinator  
Office of Judicial Administration  
301 W. 10<sup>th</sup>  
Topeka, KS 66612-1507  
785/291-3748  
[thompsona@kscourts.org](mailto:thompsona@kscourts.org)

## *Appendix A*

Cheryl Whitmarsh  
Boone County Circuit Clerk  
705 E. Walnut Street  
Columbia, MO 65201  
573/886-4000  
573/886-4044 (fax)  
[Cheryl.Whitmarsh@courts.mo.gov](mailto:Cheryl.Whitmarsh@courts.mo.gov)

Richard Zorza, Coordinator  
National Pro Se Network  
3097 Ordway St., NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
202/549-1128  
202/362-3786 (fax)  
[Richard@zorza.net](mailto:Richard@zorza.net)

**AJS Staff**  
Kate Sampson, Conference Coordinator  
9624 S. Cicero Ave., #221  
Oak Lawn, IL 60453  
708/636-1494  
708/636-1523 (fax)  
[ksampson@ajs.org](mailto:ksampson@ajs.org)

Timothy S. Eckley, Staff Attorney  
American Judicature Society  
Opperman Center  
2700 University Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50311  
515/271-2288  
515/279-3090 (fax)  
[teckley@ajs.org](mailto:teckley@ajs.org)



Allan D. Sobel, President  
Ph. 515/271-2281  
Fx: 515/279-3090

March 28, 2006

Honorable Gerald W. VandeWalle  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court of North Dakota  
State Capitol Building  
600 East Blvd. Ave., Dept 180  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0530

Dear Chief Justice VandeWalle:

We are pleased to invite you and members of a state team whom you designate to participate in the **Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation** on September 7-9, 2006, in Des Moines, Iowa. The enclosed agenda provides additional information about substantive sessions that will explore the challenges self-represented litigants pose to courts, discuss the benefits to judges and court employees of developing new methods for serving self-represented litigants, showcase model pro se assistance programs, and assist participants with developing action plans to design new assistance programs or enhance existing ones.

**State teams.** A key to the success of the conference is the participation of planning teams from the ten target states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. We ask your assistance in designating a four-to-eight person team to represent your state and develop an action plan to help relieve the burden on courts and more effectively serve pro se litigants. We ask you to consider the following categories of individuals as team members:

- ❑ **State trial court judge** who is knowledgeable, widely respected, energetic, and has first-hand experience of self-represented litigants;
- ❑ **Trial court clerk** who also has experienced the challenges posed by pro se litigants and has a sense of their needs and perhaps ideas about reducing the burdens on line staff;
- ❑ **Trial court administrator** who has either documented the challenges, manages an existing assistance program, or would be willing to address the issues by developing an assistance program;

**AJS**

The Opperman Center at Drake University, 2700 University Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50311  
Telephone 515-271-2281 Fax 515-279-3090 [www.ajs.org](http://www.ajs.org)

Hon. Gerald W. VandeWalle  
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- **Bar leader** who can articulate attorneys' concerns and perspectives and, hopefully, help devise ways courts, the bar and other stakeholders can work together to help assist self-represented litigants
- **Pro se task force or access to justice commission member** who has some understanding of the issues surrounding pro se litigation and would be an effective team member;
- **Law librarian or public librarian** who may be responding to requests for assistance from self-represented litigants and would be willing to cooperate with the courts and the bar to provide services;
- **State legislator** who understands the courts and would be interested in supporting programming to improve access to justice for his or her self-represented constituents;
- **Service provider from outside the courts**, such as a legal aid program director or a domestic violence advocate, who might be a potential partner in a pro se assistance program.

**Because of the practical and symbolic leadership that is crucial to implementing an action plan, we hope you will join the team and attend the conference.**

**Funding participation of team members.** AJS has no grant funding to pay for team members' travel, hotel and meals not provided at the conference, but we have made every effort to keep costs manageable. For example, AJS has secured a room rate of \$89 per night (plus tax) at the Renaissance Savery Hotel in downtown Des Moines, and we will shuttle participants to free meeting facilities at Drake Law School. The Iowa State Bar Foundation has awarded AJS a grant to pay for conference meals, and we expect a grant of \$10,000 from the Chicago Bar Foundation. If we receive funding requested from the State Justice Institute for faculty travel, we probably will not have to charge a registration fee. We will know more after the SJI Board meeting on May 19.

You may wish to explore some options to pay for team members to attend the conference. For example, the State Justice Institute's scholarship program enables judges and court managers to attend out-of-state educational programs they could not otherwise attend because of state, local and personal budget constraints. For more information, go to <http://www.statejustice.org/pdf/2006%20Scholarship%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Scholarship applications must be submitted between March 30 and May 26, 2006, for programs held between July 1 and September 30, 2006 (again, the Midwest Regional will be held September 7-9, 2006).

State or local bar foundations may help fund the participation of bar members, as may legal-aid offices for their attorneys.

Hon. Gerald W. VandeWalle  
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**Nomination form.** On the enclosed form, please nominate four-to-eight team members, *designating one as the team leader*. The leader will be responsible for contacting team members before the conference to gather background information about the dimension of the pro se phenomenon in your state as a prelude to developing an action plan. Please also recommend two alternates in case one or more of the original designees cannot attend the conference.

We will be grateful if you will return the enclosed team nomination form by **May 24, 2006**. We will send your nominees invitations and hotel and conference registration forms.

**Advisory committee member from your state.** Finally, I am enclosing the roster of the Midwest Regional Advisory Committee. Please note that Penny Miller is a member of the committee, and will be a resource to you as you build your team.

We know you receive many requests to send judges and staff to conferences, and we thank you for your time and attention.

If you have any questions, please contact Kate Sampson at 708/636-1494, [ksampson@ajs.org](mailto:ksampson@ajs.org), or Dawn Buzynski at 515/271-2286, [dbuzynski@ajs.org](mailto:dbuzynski@ajs.org).

Yours truly,

Allan D. Sobel  
President

Enclosures

Draft agenda  
State team nomination form  
Advisory committee roster

cc: Penny L. Miller, Clerk  
North Dakota Supreme Court  
600 E. Blvd. Ave., Dept. 180  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0530



**Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation  
September 7-9, 2006  
Des Moines, Iowa**

March 28, 2006

Dear Chief Justice VandeWalle:

On September 7-9, 2006, the American Judicature Society (AJS) will present a Midwest Regional Conference on Pro Se Litigation in Des Moines, Iowa. It is being convened especially for participants from North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana. The Midwest Regional is one of a series of regional meetings being held this year, including the Western Regional in San Francisco in March 2006 and the Eastern Regional in White Plains, NY, in May 2006. We write to encourage you to send a team to the Midwest Regional.

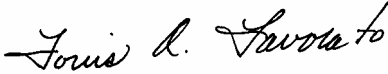
The impetus for regional conferences comes from a recommendation from the March 2005 Summit on the Future of Self-Represented Litigation in Chicago, funded by the State Justice Institute, and findings from a Summit-related survey by the American Judicature Society. A key finding of the survey and recommendation from the Summit was to provide cost-effective and convenient opportunities for judges, court personnel, attorneys and community partners working to meet the challenge of pro se litigation to share information and learn from one another. In the past several years, we have seen many new pro se assistance models emerge, both in the Midwest and nationally. The Midwest Regional will draw on this well of experience and expertise to inform participating team members.

Enclosed is a letter from AJS asking you to designate members of a team from your state who will attend the conference. Your team will develop a plan to establish or expand programming that will help pro se litigants better represent themselves in court and help relieve some of the burden on judges and court employees.


The conference is another piece in the mosaic of recent efforts to encourage court and community collaboration, improve service and provide access to justice to those who come to court, and enhance public trust and confidence in our justice system—initiatives that have been supported by the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators.

The conference will give your state team members the tools they need to plan how to better prepare self-represented litigants and reduce the drain on court resources. We encourage you to participate by designating team members who can best accomplish this.

Very truly yours,



Louis A. Lavorato  
Chief Justice of Iowa



Randall T. Shepard  
Chief Justice of Indiana  
President, Conference of Chief Justices



Karla M. Gray  
Chief Justice of Montana  
Co-Chair, CCJ-COSCA Committee on  
Public Trust and Confidence in the  
Judiciary



MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRO SE LITIGATION, DES MOINES, IA, SEPTEMBER 7-9, 2006

TEAM MEMBERS FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO BE INVITED TO THE CONFERENCE  
(State)

**Please return this form to AJS in the enclosed reply envelope  
or fax to Krista Maeder at 515/279-3090 by May 24, 2006**

**1. Team Leader Name**

**Title**

**Address**

**City/State/Zip**

**Phone**

**Fax**

**Email**

**2. Member Name**

**Title**

**Address**

**City/State/Zip**

**Phone**

**Fax**

**Email**

**3. Member Name**

**Title**

**Address**

**City/State/Zip**

**Phone**

**Fax**

**Email**

**4. Member Name**

**Title**

**Address**

**City/State/Zip**

**Phone**

**Fax**

**Email**

State of \_\_\_\_\_  
Team List  
Page 2

**5. Member Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**

**6. Member Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**

**7. Member Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**

**8. Member Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**

**State of \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Alternates' Names**  
**Page 3**

**1. Alternate's Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**

**2. Alternate's Name**  
**Title**  
**Address**  
**City/State/Zip**  
**Phone**  
**Fax**  
**Email**



# MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRO SE LITIGATION

September 7-9, 2006  
Des Moines, Iowa



## Participant Roster (alpha order)

Kim Allison\*

Fred Anderson\*

LaRoy Baird III  
Attorney at Law  
PO Box 913  
Bismarck, ND 58502  
Ph: 701.223.6400  
FAX: 701.222.3586  
[laroybaird@midco.net](mailto:laroybaird@midco.net)

Janet Bancroft  
Public Information Officer  
PO Box 98910  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
Ph: 402.471.3205  
FAX: 402.471.2197  
[JBancroft@nsc.state.ne.us](mailto:JBancroft@nsc.state.ne.us)

Pat Bartholomew  
Clerk of Court  
Utah Supreme Court  
PO Box 140241  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114  
Ph: 801.238.7974  
FAX: 801.578.3999  
[pathb@email.utcourts.gov](mailto:pathb@email.utcourts.gov)

John L. Baxter\*

Stefanie Benson\*

Edward Bouker  
Ellis County Courthouse  
1204 Fort Street  
PO Box 8010  
Hays, KS 67601  
Ph: 785.628.9415  
FAX: 785.628.8415  
[edbouker@hotmail.com](mailto:edbouker@hotmail.com)

Jeffery L. Brown  
Pro Bono Coordinator  
State Bar of Wisconsin  
PO Box 7158  
Madison, WI 53737  
Ph: 608.250.6177  
FAX: 608.257.5502  
[jbrown@wisbar.org](mailto:jbrown@wisbar.org)

Kathleen Caldwell  
Circuit Court Judge  
425 North Dakota Avenue  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104  
Ph: 605.367.5920  
FAX: 605.367.5979  
[kathleen.caldwell@ujs.state.sd.us](mailto:kathleen.caldwell@ujs.state.sd.us)

Robert L. Carter  
Chief Judge  
Circuit Court for the 13th  
Judicial Circuit  
LaSalle County Courthouse  
119 West Madison Street  
2nd Floor  
Ottawa, IL 61350  
Ph: 815.433.0779  
[judge-carter@lasallemounty.com](mailto:judge-carter@lasallemounty.com)

Dawn Catuara\*

Jane Colwin  
State Law Librarian  
PO Box 7881  
Madison, WI 53737  
Ph: 608.261.2340  
FAX: 608.267.2319  
[jane.colwin@wicourts.gov](mailto:jane.colwin@wicourts.gov)

Cindy Cook  
Court Administrator  
16th Judicial Circuit  
11911 E. 58th St.  
Kansas City, MO 64133  
Ph: 816.881.3652  
FAX: 816.881.3164  
[cindy.cook@courts.mo.gov](mailto:cindy.cook@courts.mo.gov)

Joseph A. Dailing  
Executive Director  
Illinois Coalition  
for Equal Justice  
321 South Plymouth Court  
Chicago, IL 60604  
Ph: 312.554.2011  
FAX: 815.962.9984  
[jdailing@icfej.org](mailto:jdailing@icfej.org)

Hon. Gregory Donat  
Judge  
Tippecanoe Superior Court #4  
301 Main Street  
Lafayette, IN 47901  
Ph: 765.423.9266  
FAX: 765.423.9764  
[gdonat@tippecanoe.in.gov](mailto:gdonat@tippecanoe.in.gov)

Carroll Edmondson\*

Monica Fennell  
Executive Director for Indiana  
Pro Bono Commission  
One Indiana Square, Suite 530  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
Ph: 317.639.5465  
FAX: 317.266.2588  
[probono@inbar.org](mailto:probono@inbar.org)

Sara Galligan  
Librarian  
Dakota County Law Library  
1560 Hwy 55 West  
Hastings, MN 55033  
Ph: 651.438.8080  
[sara.galligan@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:sara.galligan@co.dakota.mn.us)

Bridget C Gernander  
Project Specialist  
Court Projects Unit  
Minnesota Supreme Court  
State Administrator's Office  
Court Services Division  
25 Rev. Dr. MLK Blvd., #105  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Ph: 651.284.0248  
FAX: 651.296.6609  
[bridget.gernander@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:bridget.gernander@courts.state.mn.us)

Ann Ginda  
Attorney at Indiana Legal  
Services Inc.  
639 Columbia Street  
PO Box 1455  
Lafayette, IN 47901  
Ph: 765.423.2703  
FAX: 765.423.2252  
[ann.ginda@ilsa.net](mailto:ann.ginda@ilsa.net)

Barbara Golden  
State Law Librarian  
Minnesota State Judicial Library  
Judicial Center, Room G25  
25 Rev. Dr. MLK Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Ph: 651.297.2089  
FAX: 651.296.6740  
[barb.golden@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:barb.golden@courts.state.mn.us)

Patrick Grady  
PO Box 5488  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52406  
Ph: 319.398.3920  
FAX: 319.398.4054  
[patrick.grady@jb.state.ia.us](mailto:patrick.grady@jb.state.ia.us)

Joyce Grover\*

Janine Gully  
725 Courthouse Square  
Room 134  
St. Cloud, MN 56303  
Ph: 320.656.3639  
FAX: 320.656.3626  
[janine.gully@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:janine.gully@courts.state.mn.us)

Robert Hagness  
Coord. for WI Judicare, Inc.  
District 10  
Access to Justice Project  
PO Box 214  
Mondovi, WI 54755  
Ph: 715.926.3854  
FAX: 715.926.4329  
[accesstojustice@frontiernet.net](mailto:accesstojustice@frontiernet.net)

Steven Hirsh  
Minnesota State Bar Association  
600 Nicollet Mall #380  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
Ph: 612.333.1183  
FAX: 612.333.4927  
[shirsh@statebar.gen.mn.us](mailto:shirsh@statebar.gen.mn.us)

Sally Holewa  
State Court Administrator  
600 East Boulevard Avenue,  
Dept 180  
Bismarck, ND 58505  
Ph: 701.328.4216  
FAX: 701.328.2092  
[sholewa@ndcourts.com](mailto:sholewa@ndcourts.com)

J. David Holt  
Greene Superior Court  
PO Box 445  
Bloomfield, IN 47424  
Ph: 812.384.3492  
FAX: 812.384.8458  
[david.holt@co.greene.in.us](mailto:david.holt@co.greene.in.us)

Marie Kenyon  
Catholic Legal Assistance  
Ministry  
321 N. Spring  
St. Louis, MO 63108  
Ph: 314.977.3993  
FAX: 314.977.3334  
[kenyonm@slu.edu](mailto:kenyonm@slu.edu)

Patrick Kiner  
Magistrate Judge  
200 East 4th Avenue  
Mitchell, SD 57301  
Ph: 605.995.8207  
FAX: 605.996.0023  
[patrick.kiner@ujc.state.sd.us](mailto:patrick.kiner@ujc.state.sd.us)

Dorothy Kinnaird  
Presiding Judge  
Chancery Division  
Circuit Court of Cook County  
2403 Richard J. Daley Center  
Chicago, IL 60602  
Ph: 312.603.4181  
FAX: 312.603.6787

Judy Kuhlman  
Clerk of Court  
314 6th Avenue  
Brookings, SD 57006  
Ph: 605.688.4200  
FAX: 605.688.4952  
[judy.kuhlman@ujc.state.sd.us](mailto:judy.kuhlman@ujc.state.sd.us)

Susan Larson Christensen  
Attorney  
620 Market Street, Suite B  
PO Box 620  
Harlan, IA 51537  
Ph: 712.755.2000  
FAX: 712.755.3604  
[suzy@larsonchristensenlaw.com](mailto:suzy@larsonchristensenlaw.com)

Paulette G Lassig  
Litigant Services Coordinator  
Ramsey County Courthouse  
Room 600 Civil Division  
15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55102  
Ph: 651.266.8256  
FAX: 651.266.8263  
[paulette.lassigbanks@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:paulette.lassigbanks@courts.state.mn.us)

Jean Lastine\*

Lori Levine  
Co-Chair  
Missouri Pro Se Commission  
Carson & Coil  
515 E. High Street, PO Box 28  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
Ph: 573.636.2177  
FAX: 573.636.7119  
[Lori.L@carsoncoil.com](mailto:Lori.L@carsoncoil.com)

Hon. Jeffrey Lipman\*

Teresa K Luther  
District Court Judge  
111 West First  
Grand Island, NE 68801  
Ph: 308.385.5666  
FAX: 308.385.5669  
[Tluther@hallcountyne.gov](mailto:Tluther@hallcountyne.gov)

Christine Luzzie  
Attorney  
Iowa Legal Aid  
430 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, IA 52240  
Ph: 319.351.6570  
FAX: 319.351.0079  
[cluzzie@iowalaw.org](mailto:cluzzie@iowalaw.org)

Marsha Mansfield  
Clinical Assistant Professor  
University of WI Law School  
975 Bascom Mall  
Madison, WI 53706  
Ph: 608.262.9142  
FAX: 608.263.3380  
[mmmansfield@wisc.edu](mailto:mmmansfield@wisc.edu)

Karen Mareck  
Administration  
Ramsey County Courthouse  
15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55102  
Ph: 651.266.2841  
[karen.mareck@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:karen.mareck@courts.state.mn.us)

Amie Martinez\*

Patrick McGann  
Presiding Judge, County Division  
Circuit Court of Cook County  
1701 Richard J. Daley Center  
Chicago, IL 60602  
Ph: 312.603.6194  
[cjal3@cookcountygov.com](mailto:cjal3@cookcountygov.com)

Penny Miller  
Clerk of the Supreme Court  
600 E Boulevard Ave., Dept 180  
Bismarck, ND 58505  
Ph: 701.328.2221  
FAX: 701.328.4480  
[pmiller@ndcourts.com](mailto:pmiller@ndcourts.com)

Katherine Moen  
725 Courthouse Square,  
Room 134  
St. Cloud, MN 56303  
Ph: 320.656.3640  
[katherine.moen@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:katherine.moen@courts.state.mn.us)

Gregg Moore  
Tenth Judicial District Court  
Administrator  
Wisconsin Supreme Court  
405 S Barstow Street, Suite C  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
Ph: 715.839.4826  
FAX: 715.839.4891  
[gregg.moore@wicourts.gov](mailto:gregg.moore@wicourts.gov)

Tara I Muir  
825 "M" Street, Suite 404  
Lincoln, NE 68508  
Ph: 402.476.6256  
FAX: 402.476.6806  
[Tmuir@ndvsac.org](mailto:Tmuir@ndvsac.org)

Milo Mumgaard  
941 "O" Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508  
Ph: 402.438.8853  
FAX: 402.438.5125  
[Mmumgaard@neappleseed.org](mailto:Mmumgaard@neappleseed.org)

Joseph Neiles  
Circuit Court Judge  
425 North Dakota Avenue  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104  
Ph: 605.367.5920  
FAX: 605.367.5979  
[joseph.neiles@ujs.state.sd.us](mailto:joseph.neiles@ujs.state.sd.us)

Terri Norris  
Office of State Courts  
Administrator  
2112 Industrial  
PO Box 104480  
Jefferson City, MO 65110  
Ph: 573.751.4377  
[terri.norris@courts.mo.gov](mailto:terri.norris@courts.mo.gov)

Michelle Palmer-Percy\*

Dan Rieken  
Dir. of Content Development  
Illinois Legal Aid Online  
17 N State Street, Suite 1590  
Chicago, IL 60602  
Ph: 312.977.9047  
[drieken@illinoislegalaid.org](mailto:drieken@illinoislegalaid.org)

Linda Robertson\*

Hon. Karen Romano\*

Terri Ross  
Supreme Court Librarian  
State House 316  
200 West Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
Ph: 317.233.8692  
FAX: 317.232.8372  
[tross@courts.state.in.us](mailto:tross@courts.state.in.us)

Trudy Schmidt  
Clerk of Circuit Court  
Burnett County  
7410 County Road K  
PO Box 115  
Siren, WI 54872  
Ph: 715.349.2147  
[trudy.schmidt@wicourts.gov](mailto:trudy.schmidt@wicourts.gov)

Sarah J Shella-Stevens  
Managing Attorney  
Central MN Legal Services  
830 West St. Germain, #309  
PO Box 158  
St. Cloud, MN 56302  
Ph: 320.253.0138  
FAX: 320.253.9208  
[sshella-stevens@centralmnlegalstc.org](mailto:sshella-stevens@centralmnlegalstc.org)

Richard Sievers  
Judge  
Nebraska Court of Appeals  
PO Box 98910  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
Ph: 402.471.9035  
FAX: 402.471.4148  
[Rsievers@nsc.state.ne.us](mailto:Rsievers@nsc.state.ne.us)

Dennis Smith  
Co-Chair  
Missouri Pro Se Commission  
Courts Building, Second Floor  
7900 Carondelet  
Clayton, MO 63105  
Ph: 314.615.1540  
FAX: 314.615.2689  
[dennis.smith@courts.mo.gov](mailto:dennis.smith@courts.mo.gov)

Ron Spears  
Judge  
4th Judicial Circuit  
Christian County Courthouse  
Taylorville, IL 62568  
Ph: 217.824.4810  
[uifan@msn.com](mailto:uifan@msn.com)

Allan Stewart  
Attorney  
Stewart, Mittleman, Heggie  
& Henry, LLC  
222 S. Central Ave. Ste 501  
Clayton, MO 63105  
Ph: 314.863.8484  
FAX: 314.863.5312  
[vadm22825@sbcglobal.net](mailto:vadm22825@sbcglobal.net)

Michael G. Sturdevant  
Judge of the District Court  
314 West 5th Street  
Bottineau, ND 58318  
Ph: 701.228.3618  
FAX: 701.228.2336  
[kparrill@ndcourts.com](mailto:kparrill@ndcourts.com)

Art Thompson  
Dispute Resolution Coordinator  
Office of Judicial Administration  
301 West 10th  
Topeka, KS 66612  
Ph: 785.291.3748  
[thompsona@kscourts.org](mailto:thompsona@kscourts.org)

Brenda L. Tieg  
Director of Pro Bono Programs  
Utah Legal Services, Inc.  
205 North 400 West  
Salt Lake City, UT 84103  
Ph: 801.924.3376  
FAX: 801.328.8898  
[BTeig@AndJusticeForAll.org](mailto:BTeig@AndJusticeForAll.org)

Jeff Tollenaer  
Clerk of Court  
Muscatine Court  
401 East 3rd  
PO Box 8010  
Muscatine, IA 52761  
Ph: 563.263.6511  
FAX: 563.264.3622  
[jeff.tollenaer@jb.state.ia.us](mailto:jeff.tollenaer@jb.state.ia.us)

Jessica Van Buren  
State Law Librarian  
Utah State Library  
450 S. State Street, W-13  
PO Box 140220  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114  
Ph: 801.238.7991  
FAX: 801.238.7993  
[jessicavb@email.utcourts.gov](mailto:jessicavb@email.utcourts.gov)

Edward Vlack  
Judge  
St. Croix County Circuit Court  
Government Center, 1101  
Carmichael Road  
Hudson, WI 54016  
Ph: 715.386.4612  
FAX: 715.381.4401  
[edward.vlack@wicourts.gov](mailto:edward.vlack@wicourts.gov)

Reggie Wagner  
Staff Attorney  
Family Court Self Help Center  
Family Justice Center  
110 South 4th Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
Ph: 612.596.7966  
[regina.wagner@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:regina.wagner@courts.state.mn.us)

Pat Ward  
Senator  
PO Box 27026  
West Des Moines, IA 50265  
Ph: 515.240.5825  
FAX: 515.267.8568

Marie Weichman  
Deputy State Librarian  
PO Box 98910  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
Ph: 402.471.3189  
FAX: 402.471.1011  
[Mwiechman@nsc.state.ne.us](mailto:Mwiechman@nsc.state.ne.us)

Maryann Williams  
Attorney  
PO Box 46  
Spencer, IN 47460  
Ph: 812.829.2221  
FAX: 812.829.0365  
[lawmom11@yahoo.com](mailto:lawmom11@yahoo.com)

J.D. Williamson\*

Lisa Wilson  
District Court Clerk Specialist  
Office of Judicial Administration  
301 West 10th  
Topeka, KS 66612  
Ph: 785.296.0252  
[wilsonl@kscourts.org](mailto:wilsonl@kscourts.org)

Jan Zekich\*

Kathryn E. Zenoff\*

Ann Zimmerman  
Statewide Pro Se Coordinator  
Wisconsin Supreme Court  
PO Box 1688  
Madison, WI 53701  
Ph: 608.261.8297  
FAX: 608.261.8299  
[ann.zimmerman@wicourts.gov](mailto:ann.zimmerman@wicourts.gov)



**MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON PRO SE LITIGATION**  
September 7-9, 2006, Des Moines, Iowa



**FACULTY ROSTER**

Hon. Kevin S. Burke  
4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
12-C Government Center  
300 S. Sixth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55487  
[kevin.burke@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:kevin.burke@courts.state.mn.us)  
*Keynote Address*

Deborah J. Chase, J.D., Ph.D.  
Senior Attorney  
Center for Families, Children  
& the Courts  
Judicial Council of California  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688  
415-865-7598  
FX 415-865-4399  
[deborah.chase@jud.ca.gov](mailto:deborah.chase@jud.ca.gov)  
*Breakouts IB & IID*

Lisa A. Colpoys, Executive Director  
Illinois Legal Aid Online  
17 North State Street, Suite 1590  
Chicago, IL 60602  
312/977-9047  
[lcolpoys@illinoislegalaid.org](mailto:lcolpoys@illinoislegalaid.org)  
*Breakout IIB & Showcase*

Hon. Gregory Donat  
Tippecanoe Superior Court No. 4  
301 Main Street  
Lafayette, IN 47901  
765/423-9266  
FX: 765/423-9764  
[gdonat@tippecanoe.in.gov](mailto:gdonat@tippecanoe.in.gov)  
*Showcase*

Bob Glaves, Executive Director  
Chicago Bar Foundation  
321 S. Plymouth Ct., Ste. 1505  
Chicago, IL 60604-3997  
312/554-1205  
FX 312/554-1203  
[bglaves@chicagobar.org](mailto:bglaves@chicagobar.org)  
*Breakouts IB and IID*

Cynthia Gray, Director  
AJS Center for Judicial Ethics  
Box 190  
3304 N. Broadway  
Chicago, IL 60657  
773/248-6005  
FX 773/248-6015  
[cgray@ajs.org](mailto:cgray@ajs.org)  
*Plenary I*

John Goerd  
Judicial Branch Planner  
1111 E. Court Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
*Showcase*

John Greacen, Principal  
Greacen Associates, LLC  
HCR 78, Box 23  
Regina, NM 87046  
505/289-2164  
FX 505/289-2163  
[john@greacen.net](mailto:john@greacen.net)  
*Plenary I & Breakout IC*

Will Hornsby, Staff Counsel  
ABA Standing Committee on  
Delay of Legal Services  
321 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL 60610  
312/988-5000  
[whornsby@staff.abanet.org](mailto:whornsby@staff.abanet.org)  
*Breakouts IA & IIA*

## Appendix D

Bonnie Rose Hough  
Supervising Attorney  
California Administrative Office  
of the Courts  
455 Golden Gate Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> Fl.  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415/865-7669  
FX: 414/865-7217  
[bonnie.hough@jud.ca.gov](mailto:bonnie.hough@jud.ca.gov)  
*Breakouts IC & IIC*

William "Bill" D. Johnston  
Young, Conaway, Stargatt & Taylor  
PO Box 391  
Wilmington, DE 19899  
302/571-6679  
FX: 302/576-3304  
[wjohnston@ycst.com](mailto:wjohnston@ycst.com)  
*Showcase*

Susan Ledray  
Pro Se Services Manager  
4th Judicial Dist. Court, Hennepin Cty  
Government Center C-1251  
300 South 6th Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55487-0423  
Phone: 612-348-8468  
[Susan.Ledray@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:Susan.Ledray@courts.state.mn.us)  
*Plenary II, Breakout IIC, Showcase*

Tina Rasnow, Coordinator  
Self-Help Legal Access Center  
Superior Court, County of Ventura  
Hall of Justice  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 96009  
805/654-3879  
FX 805/654-3560  
[Tina.Rasnow@ventura.courts.ca.gov](mailto:Tina.Rasnow@ventura.courts.ca.gov)  
*Breakout ID*

Glenn Rawdon  
Program Counsel for Technology  
Legal Services Corporation  
3333 K Street NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
202/295-1552  
FX 202/318-4508  
[grawdon@lsc.gov](mailto:grawdon@lsc.gov)  
*Breakout IIB*

Eve Ricaurte, Pro Se Coordinator  
Iowa Legal Aid  
430 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, IA 52240  
[ericaurte@iowalaw.org](mailto:ericaurte@iowalaw.org)  
319/351-6570, x 1512  
*Breakout IIB and Showcase*

Elizabeth Scheffee  
Givertz, Hambley, Scheffee and  
Lovoie  
P. O. Box 4801  
Portland, ME 04112  
207/772-8373  
FX 207/773-4976  
[scheffee@mainefamilylawyer.com](mailto:scheffee@mainefamilylawyer.com)  
*Breakouts IA & IIA*

Art Thompson  
Dispute Resolution Coordinator  
Office of Judicial Administration  
301 West 10<sup>th</sup>  
Topeka, KS 66612  
785/291-3748  
[thompsona@kscourts.org](mailto:thompsona@kscourts.org)  
*Breakout ID*

Hon. Edward F. Vlack, III  
St. Croix County Circuit Court  
Government Center  
1101 Carmichael Road  
Hudson, WI 54016  
715/386-4612  
FX 715/381-4401  
[edward.vlack@wicourts.gov](mailto:edward.vlack@wicourts.gov)  
*Plenary II & Showcase*

Richard Zorza  
Zorza Associates  
3097 Ordway St., NMW  
Washington, DC 20008  
[richard@zorza.net](mailto:richard@zorza.net)  
*Team Process, Action Plan Reports*

## **Contents of Conference Materials**

### **Inside front pocket:**

- Short agenda
- Certificate of Attendance
- Downtown Dining and Event Options for 9/8/06
- Conference Evaluation

iii **Acknowledgments**

iii **Conference Goals**

iv **Conference Advisory Committee**

**Tab 1 Participant Information**

- AJS Annual Meeting Agenda
- Annotated Conference Agenda
- Participant Roster
- State Team Roster
- Faculty Roster
- Faculty Biographies

**Tab 2 General Information**

- Missouri Supreme Court Joint Commission to Review Pro Se Litigation, *Report to the Supreme Court of Missouri & the Missouri Bar* (Executive Summary)
- Resources on Self-Represented Litigation
- Minnesota Self-Help Rule
- "Judicial Education on Self-Represented Litigation...",  
Draft, Self-Represented Litigation Network

**Tab 3 Plenary I - Judges and Court Staff**

**Facilitating Access while Maintaining Neutrality**

- *Guidelines for Missouri Court Clerks & Court Staff*
- *Guidelines and Instructions for Clerks Who Assist Pro Se Litigants in Iowa's Courts*
- North Dakota Policy 125, *Assisting Self-Represented Parties*
- "Legal information vs. legal advice—Developments during the last five years," John Greacen, 84 *Judicature* 198 (Jan-Feb '01)
- "Reaching Out or Overreaching - Judicial Ethics and the Self-Represented Litigant," Cynthia Gray (PPT)
- "Distinguishing Legal Information from Legal Advice," John Greacen (PPT)

- Tab 4      Plenary II  
Creating Forms & Instructions  
to Make Life Easier for Everyone**
- Proof of Service Forms © Transcend Translations
  - “Court-Based Form and Instruction Programs: Cost-Effective Enhancements to Access to Justice and Court Efficiency,” Draft, Self-Represented Litigation Network
  - “Is Plain Language Better? Comparative Readability Study of Plain Language Court Forms,” Maria Mindlin, © Transcend Translations
  - Divorce Petition, Wisconsin
  - “Plain Language Works for Pro Per Litigants,” Maria Mindlin, © Transcend Translations
  - “Pro Se Forms—One Key to the Courthouse”, Susan Ledray and Edward Vlack (presentation outline)
  - “Pro Se Forms—One Key to the Courthouse,” Susan Ledray and Edward Vlack (PPT)
- Tab 5      Breakout - The Role of Attorneys in Pro Se Litigation**
- “The Discrete Task Legal Assistance Program: A Low Cost Attorney Assistance Solution for the Access to Justice Problems,” Draft, Self-Represented Litigation Network
  - *An Analysis of Rules that Enable Lawyers to Serve Pro Se Litigants*, A White Paper by the ABA Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services (April 2005)
  - “Enabling Lawyers to Serve Pro Se Litigants,” Liz Scheffee and Will Hornsby (PPT)
- Tab 6      Breakout - Key Steps in Planning a Self-Help Assistance Program and Building Stakeholder Support**
- “The Self Help Program: A Court-Based Solution for the Problems of the Self- Represented,” Draft, The Self-Represented Litigation Network
  - “Key Steps in Planning and Building a Self-Help Assistance Program,” Bob Glaves and Deborah Chase (PPT)
- Tab 7      Breakout - Collecting and Using Data**
- *Committee on Resources for Self-Represented Parties, Strategic Planning Initiative—Report to the [Utah] Judicial Council* (July 25, 2006)
  - Summit on the Future of Self-Represented Litigation, Paper Nine: *Evaluation of Innovations Designed to Increase Access to Justice for Self-Represented Litigants*, Bonnie Rose Hough
  - Collecting and Using Data, John Greacen and Bonnie Hough (PPT)



**Tab 11 Showcase Program Profiles**

- SHARP - Self-Help and Regional Assistance Program  
Superior Courts of Butte, Glenn & Tehama Cty, CA, Bonnie Hough
- Delaware's Family Court Self-Help Center, William D. Johnston
- Illinois [www.LegalAidOnline.org](http://www.LegalAidOnline.org) Website, Lisa Colpoys
- Tippecanoe County, IN, Court Staff Training Programs  
Hon. Gregory J. Donat
- Iowa Court Clerks' Protocol, John Goerdts
- Iowa Legal Aid Self-Help Website ("LiveHelp") and Online Chat Room, Eve Ricourte
- Hennepin County, MN, Self-Help Center, Susan Ledray
- Utah's Strategic Planning Process, Utah Team Members
- Wisconsin's Online Document Assembly Program  
Hon. Edward F. Vlack, III

**Tab 12 Team Materials**

- Memorandum - Developing Your State Team Action Plan
- Action Plan Template
- Pre-conference Survey Results ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))



## MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRO SE LITIGATION

September 7-9, 2006, Des Moines, Iowa



### Pre-Conference Survey Results\*

#### From what state are you answering?

Indiana	Iowa
Kansas	Minnesota
Missouri	Nebraska
North Dakota	South Dakota
Utah	Wisconsin

#### What kind of pro se assistance services does your state/local jurisdiction currently provide? The following services were reported:

Limited Legal Assistance  
Courthouse-based self-help center  
Hotline  
Statewide forms/instructions on court website  
Statewide forms/instructions on LawHelp or legal aid website  
Access to computers in courthouse to access statewide forms/instructions  
Library-based forms and instructions  
Clinics staffed by volunteer attorneys  
Clinics staffed by court staff attorneys  
Brochures with pro se information  
Videos or CDs with pro se information  
Workshops to prepare self-represented litigants for courtroom proceedings  
Referrals to legal assistance

#### Please describe any additional services in your state/jurisdiction not listed above.

- Clerks of Court have limited ability to give some assistance. Advocates are provided by private shelters for areas involving domestic violence.
- Extensive written resources are provided to domestic violence victims seeking protection, whether or not they are granted protections orders.
- There are some forms for limited matters, such as Protection from Abuse, Protection from Stalking, Enforcement of Visitation proceedings.
- Staff training.
- As State Law Librarian I am a unit of the State Library so other than providing legal information to pro se litigants (among others, of course), we have a line which we will not cross to provide additional services.
- Court-based self-help website; signs in court offices indicating what type of assistance court staff can and cannot provide; classes in law libraries in basic

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\* Edited for clarity, to maintain anonymity, and to omit redundancies. 37 team members responded to the survey; not every respondent answered every question.

legal research for the general public; State Law Library website; the State Bar provides a full-time pro bono coordinator, free professional liability insurance, reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs, free LexisNexis legal research (through a grant from LexisNexis), free CLE/books and public recognition to support volunteer lawyers and encourage them to increase their participation in pro bono. One county bar association has a small claims assistance project.

- The Judicial Branch is in the process of developing forms for pro se litigants in divorce cases not involving children. Clerk's staff will assist domestic abuse petitioners in filling out domestic abuse petition but will not provide legal advice.
- The Hotline noted above is run by [State] Legal Aid. We are currently developing statewide forms and instructions that will be placed on the court website. Additional information is currently available on [State] Legal Aid's website. Information is also available on the court's website.
- "How to" Manual for court clerks and staff on working with pro se litigants. Web Site has "Citizens Guide to [State] Appellate Courts," which contains considerable material on filing, perfecting, briefing, and arguing appeals, with links to court rules and applicable statutes. The Guide is also available in hard copy format from the Clerk of the Supreme Court/Court of Appeals. State Law Library located in State Capitol has legal research computer terminals and printers available for citizens.
- Currently, we have pro se forms and instructions for small claims, civil domestic abuse and change of name cases. We are in the process of developing forms and instructions for dissolutions of marriage.
- As a state, we are still in the planning stages for implementation.
- State Bar Association has brochures on several topics that can be purchased by individuals either through the bar association or through law firms.
- Child Support referees, Visitation Administrator, Protection Order help at the individual clerk of courts' offices.
- We are in the process of developing pro se divorce forms with and without children, and a general guide to the courts.
- New partnership in one county to provide self-help services through a partnership with the county law library and the local legal services office. Court self help services have partnered in the past with legal services and volunteer attorney programs in other counties.
- Setting up computer assisted document assembly through vendors such as TurboCourt.
- Limited assistance is provided by clerk's staff in our circuit for pro se litigants in protection order cases.
- University Pro Bono Initiative and [State] Legal Services Pro Bono Program.
- "Some" domestic mediation (income based).
- Limited Legal Assistance at Hearing: There is a successful Protective Order Clinic in the county coordinated by a volunteer attorney. Volunteer attorneys represent individuals at their Protective Order hearings. [State] Legal Services also recruits volunteers to represent individuals at their PO hearings in some jurisdictions. Litigants file their own paperwork and meet with the attorney minutes before the hearing.
- Self-rep clinics are regularly offered throughout the state, staffed by a [State] Legal Services attorney and paralegal who travel to courthouses on a regular schedule.

**In which areas of law are self-help services provided?**

Divorce  
Child custody  
Child support  
Visitation  
Domestic abuse  
Guardianship  
Name change  
Debt collection  
Landlord/tenant

**Please describe any additional areas of law in which self-help services are provided.**

- Informal probate.
- Protection Orders.
- Small Claims.
- Prison inmate citations.
- The State Bar provides assistance in the following additional areas: agriculture, AIDS/HIV, alternative dispute resolution, arrest, attorneys/fees, bankruptcy, business, buying/selling real estate, client's bill of rights, drunk driving, education, elder law, employment, environmental law, group & prepaid legal plans, health care, jury duty, landlord/tenant, personal injury, powers of attorney, revocable living trusts, traffic accidents, victims/witnesses, wills/estate planning.
- Probate.
- Appeals to Supreme Court and Court of Appeals.
- Immigration self-petitions for victims of domestic abuse married to US Citizen or LPR.
- Criminal Expungement, Forfeiture / Impoundment.
- Mental and substance abuse commitment.
- Adoption.
- Emancipation of a Minor.
- Bankruptcy.
- Public Benefits.

**What is the most pressing gap in pro-se assistance services that needs to be filled?**

- More forms, more legal assistance, and other aids to help people in family law matters (multiple similar comments made).
- There is no mechanism to "help" the pro se litigant with what to expect in the court room or to prepare for the procedural and substantive rules that will apply when they present or defend their case (multiple similar comments made).
- Instructions on how to complete forms.
- Domestic Abuse continues to be the main area where local staff and Judges feel inadequate services are being provided.
- Hands-on assistance centers in every county.
- Communication with courthouse personnel.
- For law library staff, the biggest problem is a tremendous downsizing to our collection due to lack of funds.

- Landlord-Tenant.
- Providing understandable information to self-represented parties and providing them with ready access to someone who can answer their legal questions or provide them with some guidance on legal issues.
- Training for judges.
- We need to implement our plan, which is now aimed at serving family law litigants.
- Lack of information about how cases are processed and lack of forms for most cases.
- Estates.
- Teaching attorneys how to use the idea of limited scope legal assistance to make the attorneys fees more accessible and reasonable. Some of the issues that are available in the self-help centers are still too difficult for the average person to understand and communicate to the court.
- Standardization across the state.
- All areas.
- Assistance in completing the forms.
- The gap may be in assessment and referral to the appropriate level of assistance. If a multi-tiered service delivery system is to work well for the litigant and the court system, it should assess whether the litigant is receiving the appropriate level of service.
- Self-help centers throughout the state, particularly in rural areas.
- Affordable and effective legal assistance and/or mediation services.
- It is very difficult for pro se litigants to understand the legal process as it relates to court procedures and responsibilities.
- Getting the person to an affordable method of resolution. This may mean an attorney, anger management classes, mediation, or it may mean going pro se to court. Getting the person to eliminate emotions, recognize options, and proceed logically. Helping the person understand legal reasoning.
- State Bar assistance with pro se litigants. The state court system can begin to provide forms and additional brochures to educate the public to assist those that choose to appear without a lawyer.
- Debt Collection and Employment Law have increasingly larger demand for pro se assistance but very little help available.
- Individuals who do not qualify for Legal Services because their income is too high but cannot afford to hire counsel have very few options or services available (multiple similar comments). This is also true for individuals who are not citizens or legal residents.

**State rules, protocols, and official bodies that address pro se litigation issues.**

A supreme court rule on limited legal assistance (unbundling).

A written protocol for judges on handling pro se litigation.

A written protocol for court clerks on handling pro se litigation.

An attorney ethics rule based on Model Rules of Professional Responsibility Rule 6.5.

Mandatory pro bono rule.

Mandatory reporting of pro bono hours.

An Access to Justice Commission.

Other statewide commission or task force focusing on self-represented litigation.

**Please describe any additional rules protocols policy statements or official bodies addressing pro se litigation issues.**

- The Supreme Court has rules on pro se appearing before it.
- The [State] Supreme Court's Planning and Policy Advisory Committee's Planning Subcommittee Report identified assistance to self-represented litigants as 1 of 4 issues that should be given top priority in the upcoming biennium. The [State] Pro Se Working Group's 2000 report identified a number of recommendations to address the challenges of self-represented litigants. As part of its strategic plan the State Bar is undertaking a comprehensive legal needs study focusing on the unmet legal needs of low income residents and how those needs might be met. In 2007, the State Bar's Legal Assistance Committee will be sponsoring the first [State] Equal Justice Conference, which will include pro se services. The State Bar regularly devotes substantial staff resources towards supporting the adequate funding of the justice system in the State Legislature and increased Congressional funding for the Legal Services Corporation.
- The State Court Administrator has provided customer service guidelines to clerks of court, including guidelines on dealing with self-represented litigants.
- [State] Supreme Court established a Pro Se Family Law Committee to develop forms and instructions.
- [State] Supreme Court Committee on Assistance to Pro Se Litigants.
- [State] Supreme Court has a Legal Services Planning committee that considers pro se litigation needs as part of its responsibilities.
- The State Bar has a Pro Se committee. The Bar's Legal Assistance to the Disadvantaged also deals with pro se issues.
- A supreme court rule regarding district court self-help programs.
- Court rule on Self-Help Programs. Our strategic plan includes access to justice.
- Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct allows voluntary pro bono service by lawyers.
- Non-mandatory (strongly suggested) pro bono requirements for attorneys set by State Bar
- State court's Standing Committee on Resources for Self-Represented Parties.

**Groups for whom training on pro se litigation is given.**

Judges  
Court staff  
Volunteer attorneys  
Volunteer paralegals  
Volunteer law students  
Volunteers from community/service organizations

**Describe who provides the training listed above and how it is provided.**

- The Office of Judicial Administration provides limited training for judges and court staff. Clerks are instructed in the unauthorized practice of law. There is also some training in domestic violence filings.
- The Supreme Court/State Court Administrators Office periodically provides training at its annual conferences.
- Usually court staff/judges train other court staff/judges.
- The Judicial Education Committee schedules periodic seminar sessions for Judges with regard to dealing with pro se litigants. However, in the absence of some leadership from the Supreme Court, the Legislature or other central authority, these seminar sessions deal primarily with war stories and how to get through pro se cases as painlessly as possible.
- Judges, court administrators and other court staff provide training in seminars; Legal aid organizations provide free training annually for volunteers who agree to provide pro bono services. The State Bar also provides grants to support training and reward pro bono volunteers. Law schools offer substantial clinical experience and training to law students so that they can help unrepresented litigants through their clinical programs. Members of local bar associations and other non-profit organizations also provide training to volunteers.
- The training is very sporadic. In the past the State Court Administrator and the trial lawyers' association have sponsored an annual workshop for judges, attorneys, and court staff, and on occasion address dealing with pro se litigants.
- Court administration thru a publication (there also might be a training session)
- Court Staff via manual described above; Judges via education programs.
- The Trial Court Operations Committee provides court staff a manual for assisting self-represented litigants. In addition, a session on working with self-represented litigants was included in the last clerk's conference.
- We do not have any training other than when pro se people come in to the self help center; we kinda train as we go.
- [State] Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition provides training for advocates in crisis programs to assist pro-se litigants in protection order cases.
- Judges-through the judicial center; attorneys through CLE programs. The law schools provide clinics for Guardian ad litem, protective orders and family issues.
- Provided in written and oral format by direct supervisors.
- [State] Supreme Court/other judges.
- General training is provided during annual conferences and through CLE courses.
- [State] Legal Services provides training to volunteers interested in representing individuals at PO hearings. [State] Domestic Violence Council offers online trainings for regarding domestic violence. Local community centers also provide training on domestic violence.
- Law School, [State] Legal Services, and Legal Aid Society support training for volunteer attorneys interested in volunteering at the family law clinic or who need training in assisting pro se litigants with family law questions. Free CLE is available.
- Court staff can take an optional class on self-represented parties, taught by a court commissioner.

- Law students enrolled in law school community justice classes get classroom instruction on the topic, and those staffing clinics are trained before they offer services.

**Please describe below any additional categories of stakeholders for whom training is offered.**

- The domestic violence organizations provide some training in assistance to victims filing pro se.
- Clerks of Court are given training on assisting pro se litigants.
- To deal with Protection from Abuse and Stalking cases, corroboration and training occurs for Judges, law enforcement, court staff, prosecutors and domestic violence agencies.
- Domestic Violence Task Force.
- State Law Library teaches classes in legal materials to public librarians around the state.
- Training has been provided to clerks of court at their conferences. For the clerks most of the training has focused on dealing with parties to domestic abuse disputes.
- This is a topic of interest for Law Librarians and is discussed at conferences.

**Who are interested parties who will support efforts to fill the service gap identified in Question 9 above?**

Chief justice/supreme court  
Staff at state court administrative office  
State bar leadership  
Local bar leadership  
Current assistance program staff  
Trial court judge(s)  
Trial court clerk(s)  
Trial court administrator(s)  
Legal aid grantee  
State/local law librarian  
Members of access to justice commission task force  
Court-based ADR provider(s)  
Community service provider(s)  
State Legislature



## MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRO SE LITIGATION

September 7-9, 2006, Des Moines, Iowa



### Action Plan Template to Assist Self-Represented Litigants

**State:**

**Team Leader:**

1. What are the pro-se assistance programming needs you have identified and which are the highest priority?
2. What are you going to do to address your priority need(s) (i.e., what is your programming goal)?
  - A. What target group(s) will ultimately be served?
  - B. What kinds of services will be offered?
  - C. Are you going to start with a pilot program? If yes, give details.
  - D. If you plan to proceed without a pilot program, give details.
3. With whom will you collaborate to develop your program (e.g., individuals, organizations)?
4. Where will the key strategic support come from, and how can it best be mobilized?
5. Which individuals or groups might be resistant to your plan?
  - A. What is your strategy for dealing with this reluctance?
6. What will it cost to establish your program?
  - A. What funds would you ideally like to have?
  - B. To what extent can you accomplish your goal with minimal funding, by, for example, shifting resources or collaborating with attorney volunteers, paralegals, law students, social service providers and others? Explain.

- 7. What staff will you need for your planned program?**
  - A. What skills and training will staff require?**
  
- 8. What kinds of technology will you utilize to implement your program?**
  - A. How will you obtain and deploy it?**
  
- 9. Will the program require physical space? If so, where will it be housed?**
  - A. What will be required to make space available?**
  
- 10. Who will have primary responsibility for moving this action plan toward implementation? Who will they report to?**
  
- 11. What assistance or advice does the team need or want from other jurisdictions or national organizations?**
  
- 12. What key initial step will the team take in the next 30 days to begin implementing this action plan?**

**Please fax this action plan to Tim Eckley of AJS at 515/279-3090.**