

July 1, 2011

**Texas Access to Justice Commission
Self-Represented Litigants Committee**

The Self-Represented Litigants Committee (herein “SRL Committee”) was formed in the wake of “The Texas Forum of Self-Represented Litigants and the Courts” held in April 2010. The Forum was hosted by the ATJ Special Projects Committee and co-sponsored by the Office of Court Administration, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation, the Legal Services Corporation, and the Texas Legal Services Center. Additional support was provided by the Texas Bar Foundation and the Dallas Bar Foundation.

The SRL Committee is charged with addressing the challenges presented by the increasing number of self-represented litigants interacting with Texas courts by providing tools to help pro se litigants navigate the court system.

The SRL Committee has formed six subcommittees to improve services to pro se litigants. The subcommittees are: Uniform Rules and Guidelines, Education, Self-Help Centers, Assisted Pro Se, Limited Scope Representation and Communication & Information Dissemination.

Uniform Rules and Guidelines Subcommittee: The Uniform Rules and Guidelines Subcommittee will be recommending model court rules, legislation, and other policies to assist self-represented litigants or to clarify how various stakeholders in the court system properly interact with self-represented litigants. The Subcommittee is currently investigating which states have rules requiring their local courts to accept pleadings and orders approved by their Supreme Court. It is also researching which states have adopted a standardized policy and form on how to evaluate an Affidavit of Inability to Pay Costs filed by a self-represented litigant.

Education Subcommittee: The Education Subcommittee will inform and educate the judiciary, private bar, and the public about self-represented litigant issues, and how to more effectively serve self-represented litigants. The Subcommittee is currently devising a workshop for members of the judiciary and court personnel. This training will eventually be conducted in all nine administrative judicial regions. Clerks and court staff will be trained on how to provide legal information while remaining impartial, maintaining confidential information, and avoiding *ex parte* communications. Further, participants will be taught the critical difference between legal advice and legal information. The Subcommittee is also working on a series of workshops to be given to new local bar leaders at the annual Local Bar Leaders Conference held by the State Bar of Texas in Houston this July.

Self-Help Center Subcommittee: The Self-Help Center and Services Subcommittee is working towards expanding the quantity and quality of self-help centers across the state. The Subcommittee is currently assembling a comprehensive list of self-help centers and assessing what kind of technical assistance these centers need to more effectively serve litigants attempting to represent themselves.

Assisted Pro Se Subcommittee: The Assisted Pro Se Subcommittee is working towards expanding the availability of legal services for pro se litigants. Specifically, how legal service or pro bono attorneys can help pro se litigants represent themselves in court, including preparing pleadings and other court forms, advising which course of action to take, and preparing for hearings.

Limited Scope Representation: In conjunction with the Rules Subcommittee, the Limited Scope Representation Subcommittee will draft rules to allow attorneys to more easily assist people on a limited scope basis. The subcommittee will work with the private bar to help attorneys understand what limited scope representation is and how to go about developing it as a new business model of practice.

Communications and Information Dissemination Subcommittee: The Communications and Information Dissemination Subcommittee is developing a plan of how to effectively communicate with the judiciary, private bar, and the public about the self-represented litigant issues. The subcommittee will also create a clearinghouse of information regarding SRL initiatives and resources.

Supreme Court Uniform Forms Task Force: The Task Force is charged with developing proposed pleading and order forms, to be evaluated and approved by the Court, with the express purpose of enabling the courts to help pro se litigants navigate the legal system and improve court efficiencies. The Task Force meets on a monthly basis and is working on basic family law forms for a divorce without children. The Task Force is set to complete these pleadings and forms by September 2011.