

Things to Think About Before You Try to Represent Yourself in Court

Try to Get a Lawyer

The court system can be confusing and it is a good idea to get a lawyer if you can. If you cannot afford a lawyer, you may contact the legal services program in your county to see if you qualify for free legal services. Their telephone number can be found in your local yellow pages under “Legal Aid” or “Legal Services.”

If you do not qualify for free legal services and need help in locating an attorney, you can contact the bar association in your county. Their telephone number can also be found in your local yellow pages. Most county bar associations have a Lawyer Referral Service. The County Bar Lawyer Referral Service can supply you with the names of attorneys in your area willing to handle your particular type of case and sometimes consult with you at a reduced fee.

There are also a variety of organizations of minority lawyers throughout New Jersey, as well as organizations of lawyers who handle specialized types of cases. Ask your county court staff for a list of lawyer referral services that include these organizations.

What You Should Expect If You Represent Yourself

While you have the right to represent yourself in court, you should not expect any special treatment, help, or attention from the court. You must still comply with the Rules of the Court, even if you are not familiar with them. The following is a list of some things the court staff can and cannot do for you. Please read it carefully before asking the court staff for help.

- We **can** explain and answer questions about how the court works.
- We **can** tell you what the requirements are to have your case considered by the court.
- We **can** give you some information from your case file.
- We **can** provide you with samples of court forms that are available.
- We **can** provide you with guidance on how to fill out forms.
- We **can** usually answer questions about court deadlines.

- We **cannot** give you legal advice. Only your lawyer can give you legal advice.
- We **cannot** tell you whether or not you should bring your case to court.
- We **cannot** give you an opinion about what will happen if you bring your case to court.
- We **cannot** recommend a lawyer, but we can provide you with the telephone number of a local lawyer referral service.
- We **cannot** talk to the judge for you about what will happen in your case.
- We **cannot** let you talk to the judge outside of court.
- We **cannot** change an order issued by a judge.