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For immediate release: Jan. 10, 2007

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### **New Jersey Judiciary Expands Products for Self-Represented Litigants**

The New Jersey Judiciary has developed three new kits to help self-represented litigants. All three kits pertain to cases heard in the Special Civil Part within the Law Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey.

"These kits are mutually beneficial: not only are they a great resource for litigants who are unfamiliar with court procedures, when completed, the kits provide our judges and court staff with the information required to make a full and fair resolution of the case," said Judge Philip S. Carchman, acting administrative director of the courts.

The new packets are as follows:

**(1) How to Request a Default Judgment:** A litigant may seek a default judgment if a defendant in a case filed in court either does not answer the complaint or fails to appear at a required court hearing. Before the person who filed the complaint can attempt to collect any money after the defendant defaults, proof of the amount the defendant owes must be provided to the court. This process is called "entering a default judgment."

**(2) How to File a Motion to Dismiss a Complaint or Strike an Answer for Failure to Answer Interrogatories:** A litigant may only use this kit in cases where the other party has failed to provide the litigant with complete answers to interrogatories, which are a set of questions about the facts in the case that must be answered. Before the motion can be filed, the litigant must have made an attempt to confer with the other party regarding the interrogatories or must send the other party a letter stating that continued failure to answer the interrogatories will result in a motion being made to dismiss the complaint or to strike the answer.

**(3) How to Apply for the Return of Your Personal Property or to Return to Your Rental Premises:** This packet is for tenants who have had their personal property taken and/or have been locked out of or denied use of their rental premises without a court order. This packet cannot be used by tenants who are involved in a pending landlord/tenant matter.

The Judiciary offers more than 30 kits and instruction packets to help litigants file cases in court. All of the kits advise litigants that they should consider hiring an attorney to represent them. For those who do not have an attorney, the kits describe processes, terms and deadlines that will let them proceed with their case. All of the forms are available on the Judiciary Web site at [njcourtsonline.com](http://njcourtsonline.com) under "Represent Yourself in Court."

An ombudsman is available in each vicinage to help litigants obtain forms and instructions for representing themselves in court. Although ombudsmen cannot offer legal advice, they can answer questions regarding court policies and procedures and can direct litigants to the appropriate office. In addition, they can help litigants find lawyer referral services and other resources to help them obtain representation.

The Special Civil Part of the Law Division hears small claims, landlord/tenant disputes, and civil cases and penalty

enforcement actions involving \$15,000 or less. These matters include torts, contracts, actions seeking returns of security deposits, actions for possession of real property, and actions to enforce civil penalties for violating state laws or local ordinances. There were 502,199 such cases filed in Superior Court during court year 2006, meaning that nearly half of all of the cases filed in the Superior Court of New Jersey were filed in the Special Civil Part.

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