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Judiciary Announces Advisory Group on Self-Representation

The Judiciary has formed an advisory group to address the needs of the growing number of people who are representing themselves in legal matters, Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts, announced today.

“The Judiciary has shown a long-standing commitment to self-represented litigants through our vicinage ombudsmen, our pro se kits, our educational workshops and the appointment of a statewide manager of litigant services,” said Judge Grant. “The Advisory Group on Self-Representation will further enhance our efforts to provide the services and support self-represented litigants need to bring their cases to court.”

Chaired by the statewide manager of litigant services, the Advisory Group will explore the fundamental challenges facing the courts and offer guidance on how best to improve services for litigants who do not have representation. Their work will build on the efforts of the earlier Pro Se Materials Working Group and ongoing efforts by every vicinage to assist self-represented litigants.

Each vicinage currently has a number of resources to help self-represented litigants, such as an ombudsman who can help them locate forms, offices and outside agencies that may offer relevant services. Most vicinages also have law librarians to provide assistance with legal research. In addition, the Judiciary Web site at njcourts.com houses complete packets of information for self-represented litigants in certain types of court actions, such as name changes, judgments, expungements, and requests for changes in child support.

“We always recommend that people get an attorney if they can,” said Judge Grant. “But when that is not a possibility, or if litigants choose, for other reasons, to represent themselves in court, we need to ensure that they are able to understand and comply with court rules and procedures so that they may successfully bring their cases to court themselves.”

The Advisory Group will continue the Judiciary’s efforts to develop new self-help kits, publications, and online resources for self-represented litigants. In addition, the committee will address areas that are particularly problematic for litigants who are involved in the court system without legal representation. Those areas include proceedings such as divorce, custody and child support, domestic violence, municipal appeals, small claims, landlord/tenant, and other civil matters. The group also will look at national trends and best practices and determine which innovative programs and services should be adapted for New Jersey.

Although the Judiciary recognizes the need to assist litigants who represent themselves, judges and staff must remain impartial and may not give legal advice or legal assistance.

The Advisory Group comprises managers from around the state representing the various trial court divisions, including criminal, family, civil, probation and municipal. The membership also includes the Judiciary’s statewide manager of volunteer services, law librarians, the Tax Court and the Appellate and Superior Court Clerks’ offices.

This diverse group will incorporate a broad range of experience, expertise, and perspectives in order to encompass all

areas impacted by the increasing needs of self-represented litigants.

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