

Court Help Program Quick Facts

Self Represented Litigants One of the most significant changes in the court systems of the nation in recent years is the growing number of self-represented litigants.¹ Self-represented litigants often have difficulty preparing complete pleadings, meeting procedural requirements, and articulating their cases clearly to judges, court staff, and opposing parties or counsel. These difficulties produce obvious challenges. Self represented litigants are most pervasive in family law matters. 2012 Montana state court data indicates more than 4,669 domestic relations cases each year have one or more litigants who are unrepresented which accounts for approximately 54% all domestic relations cases.²

Self Help Services The mission of the Court Help Program is to “[e]nhance court efficiency by assisting self represented litigants with access to Montana legal resources and information.” Self help law centers have served over 9,600 people statewide since January 2013. Approximately 200 customers a month visit our Yellowstone County Self Help Law Center. Court Help services are provided for free with no income eligibility. However, approximately 73% of self help customers indicate an annual income within 125% of the poverty guidelines. 84% percent report an income within 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.³

Center	Staff	Appointment Service Locations	Remote Service Locations
Billings	Facilitator AmeriCorps	None	Forsyth, Miles City, Glendive, Sidney, Round up, Red Lodge, Baker, Wibaux, Jordan, Broadus, and Columbus.
Great Falls	AmeriCorps (2)	Havre, Malta, Glasgow, Shelby, Cut Bank, Conrad, and Choteau.	Wolf Point
Missoula	Facilitator	None	Hamilton
Kalispell	Facilitator AmeriCorps	Libby, Eureka	Lake County
Helena	AmeriCorps	Dillon, Anaconda	Phillipsburg, Virginia City, Boulder, Deer Lodge
Bozeman	Part time Facilitator AmeriCorps	Livingston	Lewiston

Self help law centers utilize federal AmeriCorps grant funding. For the current grant cycle, September 2013-August 2014, the amount of federal funds that will support the Court Help AmeriCorps members is \$73,117.

Pro Bono Services One full time Pro Bono Coordinator actively supports local pro bono initiatives throughout the state.

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds support our pro bono coordination work. For fiscal year 2013, July 2013-June 2014 \$40, 557 dollars in federal VAWA funds will be utilized.

Program Challenges

- One-time only funding. The Court Help Program was funded on a one-time only basis for the 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013 legislative cycles. Managing a bi annual budget limits our institutional knowledge, program growth, and overall effectiveness of engaging local court staff.
- The Court Help Program biannual appropriation for 2014-2015 is \$649,000 dollars. This budget is insufficient to support full time and non transitional staff where needed. Even if funded permanently, our current budget is insufficient to provide a consistent service to the state of Montana.

¹ Self Represented Litigant’s Network. A National Bench Guide for Judges Judicial Bench Book. November 2007. Available on Court Help Website (<http://www.courts.mt.gov/selfhelp/default.mcp.x>)

² Based on 2012 Full Court Data. Available upon request.

³ Based on Court Help Intake Survey Data. Available upon request.