

M.C. Sungaila for OC Lawyer: A New Resource For Self-Represented Litigants - A Civil Appellate Self-Help Clinic At The Orange County Court Of Appeal

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The number of self-reported litigants in courtrooms across the country has skyrocketed in the past two decades. According to the October 2014 Final Report of the Judicial Council's Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants, chaired by Fourth District, Division Three Presiding Justice Kathleen O'Leary, there has been an increase in the number of self-represented litigants across a wide range of civil cases.

As noted in the Task force's Final Report, sixty percent to ninety percent of family law cases nationwide involve at least one self-represented litigant. In California, during the 1980's, the percentage of family law cases in which at least one party was unrepresented grew from thirty percent to sixty-seven percent and continued to grow throughout the 1990's. In a 2003 survey of self-represented litigant assistance plans submitted by California trial courts to the Judicial Council, estimates of the self-represented litigant rate in family law from the larger counties reached seventy-two percent...

At the clinic, which is housed in the former settlement conference offices in the Court of Appeal, attorneys present a short ten-minute primer on appellate court procedures and practice to all litigants, and then break out into individual meetings with litigants about technical issues in their cases. Some litigants have questions about how to designate the record; some have received a dismissal notice and need to understand methods of responding to it; others are preparing briefs or preparing for oral argument. Attorney volunteers may provide sample motions, appellate procedure checklists, or recommendations of appellate books to read at the Orange County Law Library, but they do not serve as counsel for any of the litigants, who remain self-represented. The OCBA Board of Directors has approved, and the Court of Appeal has discussed, potentially expanding the clinic in the future to include direct pro bono representation of appellate litigants.

Excerpted from *OC Lawyer*, January 2016. To read the full article, click [here](#).