

How to Find a Lawyer If You Can't Afford One?

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2021-2022

Law at the Library

A free, virtual, legal information series offering practical insight into today's top legal issues.



The Chicago Bar Association, the Chicago Public Library and the Evanston Public Library are offering a free, legal information series to answer your legal questions and provide practical resources and insights into today's most prevalent legal issues.

Tuesday, September 28 at 6:00 p.m.

Employment Issues And COVID-19: What You Need To Know

Tuesday, October 26 at 6:00 p.m.

How To Find A Lawyer When You Can't Afford One

Tuesday, November 30 at 6:00 p.m.

Changes to Tax Law: Know Before You File!

Tuesday, January 25 at 6:00 p.m.

Raise your score: Steps for cleaning up your credit

Tuesday, February 22 at 6:00 p.m.

Tips on Buying and Selling a House

Tuesday, March 29 at 6:00 p.m.

Planning Ahead: Wills, Trusts, and Estate Planning

Tuesday, April 26 at 6:00 p.m.

How to Start a Business

Tuesday, May 31 at 6:00 p.m.

Landlord and Tenant Issues

Tuesday, June 28 at 6:00 p.m.

LGBTQIA+ the Law

Each Law at the Library program features a presentation by an experienced attorney, followed by a brief question and answer session. All events are free, open to the public and conducted via Zoom. Registration is required. To register or for additional information, visit <https://bit.ly/3hnBG9l> or <https://evanston.libnet.info/events>.

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Goals of today's program:

1. Discover free civil legal resources available in Cook County.
2. Understand what “pro bono” legal aid means.
3. Find out tips for getting the most out of legal aid.
4. Learn about alternatives to free legal aid.

Our Background

Tony Abou Ezzi (he/his) is an Illinois and Massachusetts licensed attorney helping families in the area of Probate (decedent estates), Adult Guardianship, Estate Planning, and Personal Injury. He volunteers with Chicago Volunteer Legal Services and Illinois Legal Aid Online.

Terra Gross (she/her) is an Illinois-licensed attorney serving microbusinesses and property owners in the areas of Business, Landlord-Tenant, and Real Estate. She volunteers with Chicago Volunteer Legal Services and Illinois Free Legal Answers Online.

Finding Free Civil Legal Resources in Cook County

Unlike in criminal court, most people do not have a right to a lawyer in civil court. More than 40 legal aid programs help meet this need in Chicagoland.

- Finding the right fit depends on:
 - Your legal issue,
 - Qualification criteria for the organization, and
 - The organization's availability.
- You can contact multiple organizations to find out whether they can help you.
- The intake process can take some time, so get started right away (more on that later).

General Legal Aid Resources in Cook County

- Illinois Legal Aid Online (“ILAO”) - <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/get-legal-help>
 - ILAO also offers some information in Spanish and Polish
 - Many useful articles about legal issues
- CARPLS Legal Advice Hotline - <https://www.carpls.org/>
 - Great for time-sensitive questions
 - Live operators provide information and referrals
- List of legal aid organizations - [Free and Affordable Legal Help in the Chicago Area](#)
 - Comprehensive list (2019) from the Circuit Court of Cook County
 - Check with individual organizations for more information

Additional Options for Finding Legal Help in Cook County

- Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt - <https://www.cookcountylegalaid.org/>
- Illinois JusticeCorps Court Information Helpline - (872) 529-1093
 - Provides information about going to court (not legal advice)
 - Can help you find court forms and understand procedures
- Center for Conflict Resolution - <https://www.ccrchicago.org/>
- Illinois Free Legal Answers Online - <https://il.freelegalanswers.org/>
 - Good option for questions that are not time-sensitive
 - Question and answer format (asynchronous)
- Also contact your local elected officials or 311

Pro Bono Legal Help...

Pro bono legal help is **free**, meaning that you do not pay the lawyer or legal aid organization for their legal services. You may still have to pay other costs, like filing fees or probate bonds.

- Pro bono services range from one-time advice to representation, and may be provided by staff or volunteers, including non-attorneys who are trained to help.
- Free services are usually, but not always, restricted to people below a certain income level.
- You may have to provide financial and personal info for an organization to decide eligibility, and cooperating with intake procedures can be an important step.
- Qualifying for free or reduced court costs can be separate from getting legal aid.

... vs. Paid Services

Services you are expected to pay for are not pro bono. Ask if you are not sure whether a legal provider is offering you free help.

- Paid services also range from advice to full representation.
- Flat-fee: attorney provides a certain service for a set price.
- Billable: attorney charges for how much time it takes to complete tasks, often in 6-minute increments (“tenths”).
- Contingency: attorney is paid a certain percentage of a settlement or award.
- Hybrid: all kinds of possibilities!

Tips for getting the most out of legal aid

Legal aid staff and volunteers are here to help, and stay quite busy!

- It all starts with completing an intake, which may be with a non-attorney.
 - Reach out as soon as you think you have a legal issue.
 - Ask before you stop by (many organizations don't take walk-ins).
 - Be ready to provide as much information as possible during your intake.
 - Let the organization know right away of any changes to your contact information.
 - Remember that your intake person and attorney may not be the same.
 - Ask your attorney about communication preferences and timelines for responses.
- Understand the qualification criteria and contact multiple organizations if appropriate.

Alternatives to free legal aid

Self-representation (pro se)

Caution: Judges, court staff, and court clerks are unable to provide legal advice.

Justice Entrepreneurs Project (JEP)

- Cost-effective, quality legal services via alternative fee structures.
- Visit jepchicago.org or call 312.546.3282.

Chicago Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service

- Connects people to lawyers who charge fees for services.
- Some fees may be contingency based (examples: personal injury, consumer fraud).
- Visit chicagobar.org or call 312.554.2001.



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