

Ways Self-Represented Litigants Can Help Improve the Justice System

Justice system reform is slow and difficult work and opportunities for change vary tremendously between jurisdictions. The following offers some ideas for your consideration if you are interested in helping to make courts better in your community.

While you have an active case.

If you currently have an active case, focus on the case and seek out resources from your local court or legal aid office so that you can put your best foot forward. Having a court case is one of the most stressful things people can encounter and it is important to find an appropriate outlet to express that frustration and to remain calm and respectful to all court staff and judges. You will not be an effective advocate for change while your case is active before the court.

When your case is over.

How to give a court direct feedback.

Once your case is over, you will have become a local expert on your court and can think more objectively about the strengths and weaknesses of how things run and how customer service can be improved. Keep in mind that courts are a place where all points of view need to be considered from a neutral and impartial standpoint. So while something may not make sense for you or your situation, it likely makes sense for someone in a different situation.

If you want to give the court administration, clerk's office, the self-help center, or the law library feedback, you can write a letter that lists out the strengths and weakness of the services of the court. The complement sandwich works wonders: complement-

criticism-complement + suggestion for improvement. You will sound thoughtful and have better credibility.

It is NEVER appropriate to write about the actual legal decisions made by the judge. You will not be an effective advocate for change if you do this and because of the rules that govern judicial behavior, you will not get any response. None. The appellate process is how legal issues are handled. Contact a lawyer or visit your local law library if you want to learn more about appeals.

However, it is appropriate to comment about customer service and whether and how the courts provide the following which are nationally recognized best practices in access to justice:

- Clear Guidance on How to Get Legal Help
- 24-7 Help Centers & Customer Service (combing online and in-person help)
- Court Based Navigators
- Courtroom Support
- Plain Language Forms, Instructions, and FAQs
- Streamlined & Convenient Procedures
- Easy-to-Use, Secure & Supported Technology for forms & instructions, FAQs, access to records, appearances, and online dispute resolution
- Language Access
- Disability Access
- Intentional Policies to Improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

REMEMBER: Write a respectful letter. Do not call. The person answering the phone is not your audience.

Engaging other access to justice leaders in your community.

- Share your impressions through a letter with your state's [Access to Justice Commission](#).
- If judges are elected in your community, attend forums and ask candidates questions about whether they support the access to justice best practices listed above and what their philosophy is about pro se/self-represented litigants.
- If clerks are elected in your community, attend forums and ask candidates questions about whether they support the access to justice best practices listed

above and what their philosophy is about serving pro se/self-represented litigants.

- If your court is funded at the county level, attend county government meetings and ask how they invest and advance the best practices listed above.
- If your court is funded at the state level, contact your local representatives and ask how they invest and advance the best practices listed above.
- Write letters to the editor or opinion pieces in your local papers about the best practices listed above.
- Connect with community groups that are working on justice reform or specific areas like housing or family law.

REMEMBER: Successful advocacy for change in the judicial branch requires advocates to be respectful, open to balancing different perspectives, and taking the time to build relationships. Only constructive comments will be effective.

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Table of Contents

