



Court Assistance Offices

Promoting Equal Access to Justice

Within each county, a Court Assistance Office (CAO) promotes equal and meaningful access to the courts. Court Assistance Offices accomplish this by providing referrals to resources, court forms, review of court forms, and legal information to help self-represented litigants better understand their rights and responsibilities.

To illustrate the impact of how some of these services ensure access to the courts, we can follow one parent's story as she moved through the court process unrepresented by an attorney.

THE FORMS WORKSHOP

A Canyon County mom, Jane, (not her real name) sought help at the local forms workshop in obtaining a custody and child support decree.

During the workshop, Jane was able to complete the necessary court forms while CAO staff answered her questions, and calculated child support. Jane also received assistance from family court services staff in creating a workable parenting time schedule. CAO staff reviewed the court forms for completeness and instructed her on filing court forms, serving the other party, and obtaining the final custody decree. When Jane later sought modification of the parenting time schedule and custody arrangement, the workshop was also available for that process. There was no cost to attend the local workshop and she was able to download all necessary court forms from the CAO Website.

About those served last year

- Over 51,000 people were served by phone, mail, email, video conference, and in person
- 66% of those surveyed were at or below 125% of the poverty level
- 56% of those surveyed had an income less than \$20,000 per year

More About Forms Workshops

- Pre-filing forms workshops are now being offered in 6 judicial districts
- The rural counties of Cassia and Minidoka are now offering workshops regularly
- The Seventh Judicial District will soon begin offering their forms workshop by video-conference to all 10 counties in the district

Expansion of Attorney Workshops

- Efforts were made to expand these workshops to rural counties and they are now being offered in Cassia, Minidoka, and Clearwater counties.
- The Bannock and Canyon County CAOs collaborated with the Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program, local District Bar Associations, Idaho Military Legal Alliance, and additional local partners to create the Idaho Service Members and Veterans Legal Clinics in those counties.

ATTORNEY WORKSHOP

Following the initial case, Jane again sought assistance to collect daycare costs owed by the other parent and wanted to pursue contempt. Contempt forms have not been developed through the Court Assistance Office due to the complexity of the process. However, she opted to use the available forms for obtaining a judgment for the unpaid costs.

When her questions about the collection process moved into an area that would require legal advice, the CAO staff referred her to the monthly attorney workshop. Jane attended the attorney workshop for legal advice and with that advice was successful in using CAO forms to file her request with the court. Although Jane

was unable to afford an attorney to represent her, she represented herself at the court hearing and prevailed by obtaining a judgment for the daycare costs.

Report to the Governor
C.L. "Butch" Otter
and the
2nd Regular Session of the
63rd Idaho Legislature



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Following her experience, Jane had this to say about working with the CAO office: *"I am extremely thankful for the Court Assistance Office and honestly don't know what I would have done without them. No matter how many questions I ask and how often I ask them, [they] have always been more than happy to assist me... [the CAO] has always explained the forms and processes thoroughly and in a way I can understand. Without their help in preparing for hearings, I would have been lost."*

This is only one of many examples of how self-represented individuals utilize available CAO services to access the courts, and the same services are always available to both parties involved in a case. Although Court Assistance Offices may have limitations because officers cannot provide legal advice or representation, this example demonstrates how the bank of information, court forms, and services that have been developed work to ensure meaningful access to the courts for self-represented individuals.

NEW COURT ASSISTANCE OFFICE FOR ELMORE, VALLEY AND BOISE COUNTIES

A new full-time court assistance officer position was created to serve the counties of Elmore, Valley, and Boise Counties. Due to the distance and weather-related challenges of reaching these counties, the new office received the equipment necessary for video conferencing and remote review of court forms.

This officer will also work on statewide projects, which include technology projects to improve accessibility and delivery of CAO services. Adding this position moves us forward towards the goal of providing an increased level of services to the self-represented statewide.

COURT ASSISTANCE OFFICES COLLABORATE WITH LAW STUDENTS

People in the Treasure Valley have benefitted from a collaboration between universities and the CAOs. This summer, the Canyon County Court Assistance Office coordinated with University of Idaho College of Law in recruiting an extern to work in the office for the summer. The opportunity was a great learning experience for the student and the CAO staff.

The first-year law student had this to say about the experience: *"This office is an invaluable resource that benefits the litigants as well as the court system by taking the time to sit down with many pro-se's and assisting them to the best of their ability. Over the course of my externship, I was able to witness first-hand the benefits that this office provides to a community that is desperately in need. This externship provided me with much practical experience that I will be able to apply going forward in my legal career and I very much look forward to my continuous work with the Court Assistance Office."*

The statewide Court Assistance Offices also participated in the Concordia University School of Law Mentorship Project Class and received valuable assistance from law students on two very important projects. The students helped develop and draft content for an informational webpage for the CAOs website, and also helped create informational how-to videos that will be made available on the CAOs website. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of the collaborative efforts that can be expected from partnering with the local law schools.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY WILL ALLOW E-FILING OF CAO COURT FORMS

The project for developing interactive interviews to complete CAO forms continues to progress. Once e-filing becomes available, the completed forms will be directly linked to the court e-filing system. This will allow people to complete and file CAO court forms anywhere that Internet access is available. Early versions of the interviews will be available for use with a printing option until e-filing becomes available.

The Court Assistance Offices had a great year and looks forward to increasing and improving the available services and ensuring equal and meaningful access to Idaho courts.

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