



# The Supreme Court of Montana Access to Justice Commission Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants

February 25, 2014

**Re: Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants (SCSRL) Report**

**Vision: To achieve the fair and efficient resolution of unmet legal needs**

## **1. Form Sub-Committee.**

The Forms Sub-Committee continues to work on the dissolution with children packet. The petition and parenting plan documents are almost complete. We continue to develop all supporting documents, including summons, request for waiver of fees, and a proposed property settlement. Additionally, we are creating a form numbering system to easily identify each form.

When the documents are complete, we will request individual judges, clerks of court, practitioners, and public service providers to review them. After this initial review, we will complete informational materials, including an introduction to family law and separate instructions for completing the forms. We expect to roll out the forms this summer.

Finally, we are looking at means to automate these forms, including both fillable .pdf and Hot Docs, the program used by Montana Legal Services. We will need to find a funding source to complete this part of the project.

## **2. Court Help Program**

"The Court Help Program is designed to better meet the legal needs of Montana citizens through assisting self represented litigants and enhancing pro bono opportunities."<sup>1</sup>

Here are a few highlights:

- Developed a Court Help Program Policies and Procedures Manual;
- In 2013, Self Help Law Centers served over Montanans on over 10,504 occasions;
- Senator John Tester visited the Yellowstone County Self Help Center;
- Pro Bono Spotlight shines some light on limited scope representation;
- Continued to collect information on the number of cases where at least one party is a SRL. The report contains a comparison graph for years 2009-2012.

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<sup>1</sup> *Court Help Program Update Winter 2014*

### **3. Information on Supreme Court website**

The SCSRL web page is regularly updated with agenda, minutes, and the date of our next scheduled meeting. You may find us here:

<http://courts.mt.gov/supreme/boards/self-represented-litigants/default.mcp>

### **4. Strategic Plan.**

In August 2013, the SCSRL established four emphasis areas: 1) self-help resources and tools, 2) education and training, 3) collaboration and communication, and 4) legislative and rule changes. In addition, the A2JC developed potential strategies for each committee. We were tasked by the A2JC:

1. To review each strategy and make an initial judgment and recommendation for the ATJC regarding whether it should be pursued.
2. To prioritize among the strategies.
3. To make a recommendation regarding what committee should be responsible for implementing each proposed strategy.
4. To estimate the resources required to carry out the strategy.
5. To consider a potential timetable for completing the strategy.

The SCSRL met in October, December and February to integrate our strategic planning with the A2JC proposed strategic plan.

The SCSRL recommends the A2JC pursue the following strategies:

- Study the value of the creation of a Division of Self-Represented Litigants Services within the Judicial Branch and take appropriate action. We recommend another committee be tasked with this strategy.
- Support the Court-Help Program. The SCSRL identifies this as a high priority for our Committee. We also identify this strategy that should be pursued collectively by the A2JC and the other Committees.

The SCSRL does not recommend that the A2JC pursue the following strategies:

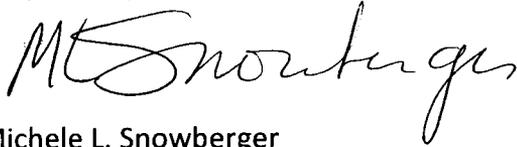
- Analysis of cost to court system of unsupported SRLs, in terms of lost time and other inefficiencies.
- Analysis of cost to the courts and the state when SRLs do not obtain the results to which they are entitled and orders they need, such as divorce and orders of protection.

Attached are the following:

- *Court Help Program Update, Winter 2014*
- SCSRL Strategic Plan and Priorities
- Graph of the SCSRL Strategic Plan and Priorities

If you have questions or concerns about the Committee or its work, please contact me or any committee member.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Snowberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "M" being particularly large and stylized.

Michele L. Snowberger  
Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigant Chair