



CUYAHOGA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
DIVISION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
HON. LESLIE ANN CELEBREZZE

COURT ADMINISTRATOR
JAMES S. ZAK

JUDGES
HON. DIANE M. PALOS
HON. FRANCINE B. GOLDBERG
HON. TONYA R. JONES
HON. COLLEEN ANN REALI

For Immediate Release
June 23, 2022

**Administrative Judge Leslie Ann Celebrezze Announces
Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court
Receives Ohio Supreme Court Technology Grant**

Cuyahoga County, Ohio: Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court Administrative Judge Leslie Ann Celebrezze is pleased to announce the Ohio Supreme Court has awarded a \$121,225 grant to the Domestic Relations Court to partner with Ohio Legal Help to develop a Virtual Help Center for litigants who don't have access to an attorney. This online platform will help everyone, regardless of income, better navigate the legal system.

Dealing with family law matters like divorce, child custody and child support is difficult for anyone. But it's especially hard for individuals who don't have access to an attorney and must navigate the legal system on their own. Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court, working in partnership with Ohio Legal Help, is hoping to make going to court a little easier and a lot less daunting for people who don't have legal help.

Domestic Relations Court and Ohio Legal Help, [a free civil legal assistance web portal](#), plan to develop a virtual help center for people who must deal with family law matters without the aid of an attorney. Funded with a Supreme Court of Ohio Technology Grant, the virtual help center will enable self-represented litigants to find information pertaining to the Domestic Relations Court, fill out and save court forms, and get support via a chat function. The secure, mobile-first platform will seamlessly integrate with the court's existing online resources.

"In over 80% of the legal issues faced by low-income individuals, they receive little or no legal help, and many people are forced to navigate complex legal issues, including family law, on their own," said Leslie Ann Celebrezze, the Administrative Judge for the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court. "The virtual help center reflects our commitment to increasing court access for all citizens of Cuyahoga County, regardless of their means or ability to access an attorney."

“The Domestic Relations Court already has a website, but this virtual help center will leverage technology to integrate, augment and amplify our existing resources,” Celebrezze added. “It will remove many of the barriers to justice that people face when they’re dealing with the legal system.”

The court, which has jurisdiction over divorce, dissolution, domestic violence, child custody, child support and other family law matters, has been working to improve access to justice for all of its constituents. For example, the Court has an onsite Help Center for self-represented litigants, providing assistance and basic education about court processes. The Court also provides valuable information and a forms bank on their website, <https://domestic.cuyahogacounty.us>.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing need for remote, online services, the Domestic Relations Court and Ohio Legal Help began exploring a partnership to create and pilot a virtual help center. Ohio Legal Help has [a proven track record](#) of developing and launching online services that focus on usability, simplicity, and scalability. Its website, OhioLegalHelp.org, provides easy-to-understand and action-oriented information to help Ohioans resolve common legal issues. In 2021, Ohio Legal Help served over 632,000 users and more than a million Ohio families since the onset of the pandemic.

“We are looking forward to working with the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court on this project,” said Susan Choe, executive director of Ohio Legal Help. “Empowering people to resolve their legal issues through equitable tools and accessible information is critical to closing the justice gap.”

Cuyahoga County has about 1,260,000 residents, and more than 15% of them live below the federal poverty level. Those in the lower income brackets who cannot afford legal representation will be the primary beneficiaries of the virtual help center, but it will be available for all self-represented litigants going through a matter in the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court, which handles between 7,000 and 8,000 cases a year.

The project will take about one year to complete. Ohio Legal Help will work with the Court to design and build the platform; complete the technical and content build of the virtual help center; engage in user testing; launch the platform; and evaluate and refine the platform based on data and user feedback.

The Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court plans to share the project evaluation with local, statewide, and national stakeholders with the hope that other county and state courts can replicate the virtual help center.

“We’re grateful for the generosity of the Ohio Supreme Court and excited about this project because it’s going to make a significant difference for thousands of people in our community who are dealing with difficult family law matters,” said Judge Celebrezze. “It’s going to provide people with the information they need to navigate the court process and connect to resources in Cuyahoga County.”

Technology funding to local courts across the state has been a priority of Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor since 2015. A total of \$35 million in technology grants has been provided to local courts. In 2022, technology grant funding totals more than \$3 million for projects by 48 courts in 36 counties. The annual grants are available to any court of appeals, common pleas, municipal or county court. Applications open each spring and are reviewed on a competitive basis.

“Technology, with all its fast-developing capabilities, can never replace the fair and impartial minds in the legal system,” said Chief Justice O'Connor. “But it can provide the capacity to improve the operation of the courts, thereby improving service to the public.”

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