



For Immediate Release

July 25, 2023

New online self-help tool will aid people who represent themselves in Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court

*Free, secure tool will make it easier to understand and
navigate the civil court system*

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Many of Montgomery County’s residents represent themselves in civil legal cases such as divorce, domestic violence and child custody because they cannot afford legal representation. Going to court without the help of an attorney can be a difficult process that can overwhelm litigants.

A new service from the Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court will give these self-represented litigants — often some of Montgomery County’s most vulnerable residents — the help they need to understand and navigate the civil court system. The [Virtual Self-Help Center](#) is a free, online tool created by [Ohio Legal Help](#), a technology nonprofit that gives Ohioans access to civil legal information and empowers them to resolve their civil legal issues.

“More than 90% of low-income people facing legal issues receive no or inadequate legal help,” said Susan Choe, executive director of Ohio Legal Help. “These people often have no choice but to navigate complex legal issues on their own. The Virtual Self-Help Center will be a tremendous help for so many of them.”

Using a \$250,000 grant from the Dayton Legal Heritage Foundation, a component fund of The Dayton Foundation, Ohio Legal Help spent the past couple of years designing, building, testing and evaluating the self-help tool. The final product, launched July 24, is available 24/7 and provides critical court information and allows users to fill out, edit, save and complete court forms on their mobile phones when it’s most convenient for them, whether it’s in the middle of the day or the middle of the night.

In addition, the virtual self-help tool offers support through an automated chatbot, which can provide navigation help and answer commonly asked questions.

“The Virtual Self-Help Center reflects our commitment to increasing court access for all citizens of Montgomery County, regardless of their means or ability to access an attorney,” said Denise Cross, the administrative judge for the Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court. “The Virtual Self-Help Center will leverage technology to integrate, augment and amplify our existing resources,” Cross added. “This technological option, coupled with our Volunteer Lawyers Project Legal Clinic for Self Represented Parties, will provide the help necessary for citizens to better navigate the Domestic Relations Court. It will remove many of the barriers to justice that people face when they’re dealing with the legal system on their own.”

Montgomery County has about 530,000 residents, and more than 17% 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 self-help center, but it will be available for all self-represented litigants going through a matter in the Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court, which handles between 5,000 and 6,000 cases a year.

“We’re 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 Gordon Arnold, president of the Dayton Legal Heritage Foundation. “It’s going to provide people with the information they need to navigate the court process and connect to resources in the greater Dayton area.”

Ohio Legal Help plans to launch similar virtual self-help tools this fall in Cuyahoga County and in the first half of 2024 in Lorain County.

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[Dayton Legal Heritage Foundation](#) serves to benefit Greater Dayton citizens by awarding grants to nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies that run programs to improve the practice of law and elevate awareness of the legal and justice systems.

[Ohio Legal Help](#) is a nonprofit organization launched in 2019 to help all Ohioans access the civil justice system. We provide plain language legal help information, interactive self-help tools and connections to local legal and community resources that can help people resolve their legal issues. In 2023, Ohio Legal Help is projected to help over 800,000 users access free legal information, court forms and other resources.

Most of the content on OhioLegalHelp.org, including information on housing, family law, consumer matters, public benefits, domestic violence and the sealing of criminal records, has been [translated into Spanish](#), ensuring the state’s Spanish-speaking population has equitable access to information about the civil justice system.