



# Meeting the Legal Needs of West Virginians

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The Role of Librarians and Legal  
Professionals



# Pro Se or Pro Se Litigants

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- Pro Se [Latin] “For oneself; on one’s own behalf, without a lawyer”  
Black’s Law Dictionary, 7<sup>th</sup> ed (2004)
- Self-represented litigants



# Characteristics of Pro Se Litigants

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- “There is no particular type of pro se litigant; people from different incomes and educational levels represent themselves and each, due to the particular needs of their case, may have differing needs for assistance.”

National Center for State Courts “Pro Se: Self-Represented Litigants FAQ”



# Pro Se Litigation Trends

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- Maricopa County (Phoenix)- in 1980, 24% of domestic relations cases involved at least one pro se party. By 1991, 88% of the cases involved at least one pro se party and in 55% of the cases both sides were pro se.
- Los Angeles County- 80% of 120,000 family law cases involve at least one pro se party.



# Impact on Libraries

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- Anne Arundel County Circuit Court Law Library (Annapolis, MD)- use by the public doubled from 1983-1994 and doubled again from 1994-2001.
- El Paso County Law Library (Colorado Springs)- 70% of users are pro se litigants.
- King County Law Library (Seattle)- 50% of reference questions from the public.



## Impact on Libraries (cont.)

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- Legal information vs. legal advice
- Unauthorized practice of law
- Healy, Paul. "In search of the delicate balance: legal and ethical questions in assisting the *Pro Se* patron" 90 Law Library Journal 129 (1998)
- Condon, Charles. "How to avoid the unauthorized practice of law at the reference desk" 19 Legal Reference Services Quarterly 165 (2001)



## Impact on Libraries (cont.)

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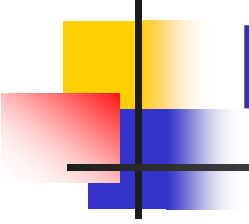
- The role of the WWW
  - Access to primary legal materials
    - WVSCA opinions, WV Code, Findlaw.com
  - Referrals to legal assistance and government agencies
    - Findhelp.org, www.lawhelp.org, www.selfhelpsupport.org
  - Legal Guidance
    - www.lawguru.com, findlaw.com



# Impact on the Legal Profession

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- Self-Help Centers
  - Family Law Courts
    - Forms with instructions
    - Volunteer lawyers
    - Referrals
    - Handouts on the court system



# Impact on the Legal Profession (cont.)

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- Lawyers
  - Free consultations
  - “Unbundling”