Administrative Office of the Courts

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New helpline offers civil legal assistance to New Mexicans of modest means

SANTA FE – A newly launched telephone service offers free legal assistance on civil matters to moderate income New Mexicans.

The Modest Means Helpline is the collaborative effort of the New Mexico Access to Justice Commission, the Administrative Office of the Courts and the State Bar of New Mexico and the State Bar Foundation. It operates from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Helpline can be reached at 505-797-6013 or 888-857-9935.

Two staff attorneys provide legal advice over the telephone and when more extensive legal assistance is required the Helpline can refer people to private attorneys across the state who have volunteered to provide free legal services to individuals in need.

“This program fills a critical justice gap, offering help to people ineligible for other services such as those through New Mexico Legal Aid,” said Second Judicial District Court Judge Erin O’Connell, co-chair of the Access to Justice Commission.

New Mexicans with incomes from 200 percent to 500 percent of the federal poverty level may qualify for legal assistance through the Helpline. The program also serves individuals who cannot be assisted by the New Mexico Legal Aid Volunteer Attorney Program because of a conflict of interest. The legal aid program, for example, cannot represent both parties involved in a lawsuit.

“This Helpline provides a convenient way for many New Mexicans to access legal services when they are unable to afford an attorney,” said Supreme Court Chief Justice C. Shannon Bacon. “Help is literally a phone call away for an array of civil legal issues, whether it involves a kinship guardianship for grandparents needing to raise grandchildren or someone facing foreclosure or debt collection.”

People who are ages 55 and older needing legal assistance should call the State Bar Foundation’s Legal Resources for the Elderly Program (505-707-6005 or 800-876-6657) rather than the

Modest Means Helpline. The decades-old program has no income restrictions, and is a joint project of the Bar Foundation and the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department.

“Expanding access to free and low-cost legal resources is critical for New Mexicans to meet essential civil legal needs, including assistance with family issues such as child support and child custody as well as safe housing and protections against financial exploitation,” said Richard Spinello, executive director of the State Bar.

Click here for a list of legal resources available online.

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