Administrative Office of the Courts

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FREE ONLINE SERVICE FOR SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS TO PREPARE COURT DOCUMENTS

SANTA FE – Individuals representing themselves in a legal matter can use a free online service to prepare court documents in divorce and domestic violence cases under a new service offered by the New Mexico Judiciary.

Known as Guide & File, the web-based application works much like software for preparation of tax returns. Users are guided through a series of questions to fill out and automatically complete court forms online. The documents must be printed and filed in person with a district court.

The software application can be used to prepare documents to start a divorce proceeding, to respond to a divorce petition, to finalize a divorce case and to file for an order of protection in a domestic violence case. It can also be used to prepare a "free process" application to ask that the court filing fee be waived in any type of case.

"We are excited about being able to use technology to give citizens easier access to the courts," said Nan Nash, Chief Judge of the Second Judicial District Court in Bernalillo County. "Being able to fill out the forms at home should alleviate some of the stress that an extra trip to the courthouse adds to situations that are inherently emotional, such as filing for divorce. We hope to offer more services like this going forward."

Most divorce cases involve people who are representing themselves in the proceeding.

The time to complete a self-guided interview for preparing a court document varies from about 45 minutes to more than an hour. Users must have an email account to register for a Guide & File account.

Individuals can access the Guide & File application on the Judiciary's website https://www.nmcourts.gov/guide-file.aspx. The website also contains a self-help guide for understanding the divorce process as well as lists of information and paperwork that individuals will need to prepare court documents.

Using a home computer to prepare the court forms will best allow individuals to keep their information private and it permits users to take their time in completing a court document. Someone using a public computer, such as at a library, will need all required information with them to fill out a form and there could be a charge for printing completed documents.

Use of the Guide & File application is free. However, there remains a fee to file a divorce petition in district court. Courts can waive the filing fee for people whose income is below a certain level.

There was at least one self-represented litigant in about four-fifths of the nearly 8,200 divorce cases filed in district courts in the 2018 fiscal year.

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