



Administrative Office of the Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Free program helps self-represented litigants and jurors complete court-required forms

SANTA FE – People representing themselves in a court case and any juror can receive help filling out court forms under a program the Judiciary has expanded across New Mexico.

State courts in all 33 counties offer scribing services to any self-represented litigants and to people summoned to jury duty who need help in completing their juror questionnaire. Trained court employees read the form aloud, write down a person’s answers word-for-word, and read the answers back to the individual. A completed form is provided to the person, who can then submit it to the court. Legal advice cannot be provided by the scribes.

Different forms are required for various procedural steps in a court case, such as a petition to start a divorce proceeding or to seek a domestic violence restraining order. [Supreme Court approved forms](#) are available online.

“The free scribing services in our courts help people more easily navigate the legal system when they have no attorney,” said Chief Justice David K. Thomson. “This program has succeeded in expanding access to justice in New Mexico.”

Trained court scribes have assisted about 1,200 New Mexicans since March 2023.

People needing the help of a scribe should contact the clerk’s office in the court where their case was filed. People are encouraged to call in advance but scribing usually is available on demand for people during a courthouse visit. Interpreting is provided for people who speak Spanish and languages other than English. Phone numbers and addresses for courts can be found on the [New Mexico Courts website](#).

“People may have difficulty with court forms because of language, literacy or unfamiliar legal terms. Trained court scribes help people overcome barriers in the justice system,” said Karl Reifsteck, director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

In November 2022, the Supreme Court authorized courts to offer scribing services to people with difficulty reading or writing, including a limited proficiency in English or a disability that prevented someone from independently completing a form. Courts in three counties had earlier piloted scribing. The [Court expanded the program](#) in 2024 by requiring all state courts to offer

scribing and make it available to any self-represented litigant and to all New Mexicans summoned for jury duty.

The Office of the Statewide Title II ADA Coordinator in the AOC trains courts employees to serve as scribes.

“Scribes seek to bring a new level of access to the legal system in a state that struggles with literacy issues,” said Peggy Cadwell, the AOC’s statewide ADA Title II coordinator. About 29 percent of the state’s population has low literacy, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

More people are using New Mexico courts without the assistance of an attorney. Half of all newly filed civil lawsuits in district courts in the 2024 fiscal year had at least one self-represented litigant, up from 36 percent in fiscal year 2011.

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Jury Division Supervisor Isabell Walla provides scribing services to Heinrich Wiebe in December at the Ninth Judicial District courthouse in Clovis. (Photo courtesy of the Ninth Judicial District Court)