

The right information can change everything

By Chief Justice Julie J. Vargas

As Chief Justice, one of my priorities is to ensure that access to justice is not just an abstract ideal, but a reality for the people of our state. Nearly half of all newly filed civil cases in district courts in the past three fiscal years involved at least one party who represented themselves without an attorney.

To assist people in navigating the state court system, the Judiciary has launched a critical new resource: the New Mexico Courts HelpLine at (855) 268-7804.

The HelpLine expands access to justice by connecting callers directly with trained court experts whose sole focus is providing direction to those who represent themselves in court and individuals with questions about a legal matter. It is important to clarify that the HelpLine's staff cannot provide legal advice, and they cannot act as your attorney. However, what these court experts do provide is accurate, reliable guidance on court case procedures. They guide callers directly to the correct state court forms, explaining the specific rules for filing or responding to lawsuits, and point folks to legal aid services across the state.

Providing this clear direction is essential. A single toll-free call to these court experts can help people make informed decisions. Anxiety about the unknown is often worse than the reality. By replacing uncertainty with clarity, we give self-represented litigants the solid footing they need to walk into a courthouse prepared.

Access to justice also means meeting New Mexicans where they are. The HelpLine is entirely free and open to all residents. Whether you live in Farmington, Las Cruces, Gallup, or Roswell, you no longer have to drive to a courthouse to find someone who can explain court procedures. Our staff is fully bilingual in Spanish, with interpreters available for Diné and other languages. Because working families cannot always call during regular business hours, our experts are available six days a week — Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

If your situation ultimately requires formal legal representation, our experts will also help connect you with low- and no-cost legal aid organizations or upcoming free legal fairs.

If you are staring at the ceiling tonight, worrying about a pending court case, you do not have to figure it out by yourself. Stop guessing and reach out to the New Mexico Courts HelpLine.

Help is available at (855) 268-7804. Let us help you take your first step in navigating the courts.