



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 12, 2018



For more information contact:
Leah Gurowitz (202) 879-1700

DC Courts Announce New Programs to Assist the Public and Expand Access to Justice

WASHINGTON – DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby and DC Superior Court Chief Judge Robert Morin today announced that the DC Courts have launched two new initiatives to enhance access to justice for DC residents.

- **Court Navigator program** – Starting in Landlord-Tenant and Small Claims Branches in the Superior Court’s Civil Division, and soon to expand throughout the courts, this program will assist those individuals who are unrepresented by attorneys with navigating the court system, not just geographically, but also in terms of figuring out which office or division can best assist them, and which forms to fill out.
- **Forms Help Online (FHO)** – This program will start in the Family Court, Domestic Violence Division and DC Court of Appeals. The Courts plan to expand from there to other Superior Court Divisions. FHO is an online program that asks users questions and uses the answers to fill out all the forms necessary for whatever they want to request the court to do, akin to programs that assist people with filing their taxes.

These two new programs come after several improvements made just last year, such as

- a **completely restructured and user-friendly website** that is service-oriented site, allows users to search for and find information more easily and includes a section for self-represented litigants.
- a **new electronic court schedule information board** in the lobby of the Moultrie Courthouse that lists all cases to be heard that day, by party name, indicating the judge, courtroom and time of hearing;
- a **new online case information system for DC Superior Court** that allows online access to criminal, probate, and civil case dockets, as well as images of documents in civil cases and lower level criminal cases. The Court anticipates adding more cases and case documents over the next few years; and
- **no-cost Mediation/ Dispute Resolution in both appellate and trial court cases.**

“The DC Courts are ensuring access to justice for all who use our court system. To that end, we have launched two new initiatives for those without attorneys to help them navigate the court campus and the legal system more easily,” said DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby. “This is in addition to new technologies we launched last year, legal service resource centers, interpretation services, appellate mediation and working with the DC Bar and the DC Access to Justice Commission to encourage more attorneys in DC to volunteer their services for those with cases before the courts who lack legal representation,” she added.

“These two new initiatives will make the court campus and process easier to navigate and help those without attorneys to fill out forms more easily. Our foremost goal is a system in which self-represented parties can easily find where they need to be and what they need to do,” said Chief Judge Morin. “More information and

services are now available online, and we have navigators to assist in ensuring that people can fill out forms, understand the legal process and get the assistance they need,” he concluded.

Forms Help Online can be found at www.dccourts.gov/FHO. The Court Navigator Office is currently located on the first floor of Court Building B, but soon will expand to other buildings on the court campus. The DC Courts website is www.dccourts.gov and the new online docket system can be found at www.dccourts.gov/eAccess. The DC Courts’ 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is here: <https://www.dccourts.gov/about/organizational-performance>. Goal 1 reads: “The Courts have a responsibility to eliminate barriers to meaningful participation in the judicial process and to accessing court services. Such barriers may include a lack of legal representation, limited literacy or limited English language skills, limited financial resources, and physical or mental disability. In collaboration with justice and community partners, the Courts will work to ensure full access to the justice system and court services.”

###