

Libraries and the Law: Local Resources for Self-Represented Litigants



- **Key Players:**
 - University of Nebraska Schmid Law Library
 - Creighton University Klutznick Law Library
 - Nebraska State Law Library
 - Douglas County Law Library

- **Location and Contact Information:**
 - **UNL – Schmid Law Library**
1875 N. 42nd St.
Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone: (402) 472-3548
Email: lawref@unl.edu

 - **Creighton University – Klutznick Law Library**
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178
Phone: (402) 280-2242
Email: lawref@lists.creighton.edu

 - **Lincoln – NE State Law Library**
325 State Capitol
1445 K Street
Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: (402) 471-3189
Email: nsc.lawlibrary@nebraska.gov

 - **Omaha – Douglas County Law Library**
1701 Farnam St.
Omaha, NE 68183
Phone: (402) 444-7174

- **When:** Typically normal business hours, vary by location.

- **Goal:** To assist self-represented litigants by providing access to books, computers, and internet while additionally providing limited directional information on how to use these resources.

Libraries offer a valuable resource for self-represented litigants looking to gather basic information about the law. Pro se litigants may have many questions when starting out and may want to do some research before deciding to proceed with their case. Access to both public and local law libraries can be a great resource. Public libraries in the area offer self-represented litigants access to computers, the internet, printers, and other valuable information. While local public librarians cannot offer or provide any legal advice, they can help direct litigants to places where they can receive legal advice from an attorney such as a lawyer referral service or a local self-help desk. Law libraries in courthouses, at the Capitol building, and on university campuses allow litigants the opportunity to gather information with the assistance of professional librarian-researchers. Reference librarians at Nebraska and Creighton law libraries are trained in the art of appropriately answering legal questions without crossing the line into actual legal advice. Below are some examples of the type of information librarians are and are not able to share with self-represented litigants.

They can:

- Direct litigants to resources that explain how the court works.
- Provide litigants with the telephone number for lawyer referral service, legal aid program, and other services providing legal information.
- Direct litigants to court rules and other resources that can help them research their case(s).
- Direct litigants to resources that can help them create forms. Since many forms are not court-approved or Nebraska-specific, litigants should plan to spend time in the library to customize forms.

They cannot:

- Tell litigants whether or not they should bring their case to court.
- Tell individuals what words to use in court papers.
- Tell litigants what to say in court.
- Give an opinion about what will happen in a given case.

Libraries can be a great resource for self-represented litigants who understand the extent of the librarians' capabilities in answering questions. While librarians are limited on the information they can provide, they are very happy to help in any way they can and are often a great resource for self-represented litigants.

As part of a 2012-2013 library-outreach program, Professor of Law Library & Reference Librarian, Stefanie Pearlman, volunteered to provide direct assistance to clerks who find themselves in uncomfortable positions with a self-represented litigant. Clerks should feel free to call Pearlman if they are unsure of how much 'assistance' they can or should give. Pearlman will be happy to discuss ways to deal with repeat visitors and individuals who simply can't be helped with the resources currently available. She can be reached at 402-472-3548 or spearlman2@unl.edu.

Court clerks are encouraged to refer clients with high level needs (those that require more research than a simple divorce or name change) to any of the above listed law libraries.

For more information or questions, please contact one of the libraries listed.