**For Immediate Release**

**New Clinic Will Help Low-Income People**

**Navigate Hamilton County Domestic Relations Court**

*June 14, 2016*

Finding your way through the family court system can be especially scary if you have no money and are on your own. But soon, a new program will provide help to low-income people who must represent themselves in family law matters in Hamilton County Domestic Relations Court. The “Family Law Clinic” is a joint effort by the Court, the Volunteer Lawyers Project, the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati and the Hamilton County Law Library. The clinic, staffed by volunteer lawyers, law students and court staff members, will open on Thursday, June 16, 2016.

The Judges of the Domestic Relations Court report that an increasing number of people are coming to the Court for help to resolve their serious family issues, but are too poor to afford a lawyer. While the Legal Aid Society and the Volunteer Lawyers Project help over 1400 clients with family issues each year, there are hundreds more people in Hamilton County who have no alternative but to go to court on their own. Often the indigent and the working poor are the most vulnerable when facing an unfamiliar legal system during a time of emotional upheaval in their lives. Judge Jon H. Sieve reports that 538 people who filed their own cases for divorce or post-divorce matters in 2015 were poor enough to qualify for waiver of the filing fee.

The Clinic volunteers will provide help to fill out court forms and explain how court processes work. Lawyers will provide brief consultations where legal advice is needed. In cases where the parties are able to come to an agreement, the volunteers can help them put their agreement into writing. Those who need more extensive legal help will be guided to other resources. In addition, the Hamilton County Law Library will provide self-help information on its website and is developing a series of videos for those who are in court on their own.

The Family Law Clinic will be open Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 1p.m. and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is located in Room 2-68 of the Hamilton County Domestic Relations Court, 800 Broadway, in Cincinnati. Those seeking help can fill out an application during Clinic hours, or in Room 3-46, Monday – Friday (8 AM to 4 PM).

The Family Law Clinic is the latest addition to an array of services provided by the Domestic Relations Court to help families resolve their cases efficiently and reduce the effects of on-going conflict on children. The Court’s “Self-Help Center” has been up and running since last year. The Center is a comfortable suite of work stations that self-represented parties can use to prepare and print court forms. Written instructions are available at each workstation. In addition, the Court’s “Dispute Resolution Department” helps families achieve less acrimonious and quicker resolution of their disputes through the use of mediation and other processes outside the courtroom.

Funding to support the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati and the Volunteer Lawyers Project in developing the Family Law Clinic has been provided by the Cincinnati Bar Foundation and the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation.

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