

Ramsey County Housing Court Clinic

Volunteer Information Sheet

The Ramsey County Housing Court Clinic is a partnership between the Second Judicial District, Ramsey County Emergency Assistance (EA), the Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) and Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN). All parties will be on hand to provide services during Ramsey County's initial appearance hearings in eviction cases.

The legal clinics are staffed by SMRLS and VLN volunteers. All volunteers must be registered with one of these organizations before volunteering.

Where and when is the clinic?

Location: Ramsey County Courthouse, 15 Kellogg Blvd. W, St. Paul, MN 55102
Volunteers report to the lobby outside Courtroom 131 (first floor).

Date and Time: Clinic shifts are every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m.

What type of legal service will I be providing? Will I be expected to take cases full rep?

The Ramsey County Housing Court Clinic is an advice only clinic for people before their first appearance in eviction cases. There is no expectation that volunteers do anything more than provide legal advice at the clinic.

What resources will be provided for my use?

- Laptop with access to the internet and portable printer
- Eviction defense protocol
- Commonly used forms, such as settlement agreements
- Computer access to filed court documents (MPA-Courthouse)

I have gone through the eviction defense protocol, but still do not feel as though I can adequately advise my client. What should I do?

Don't guess! Cases that need more legal help can be referred to VLN or SMRLS for additional legal assistance. Also, check-in with the clinic assistant. SMRLS has an attorney of the day and VLN's Housing Resource Attorney is generally on-hand to field questions.

What if I think my client needs full representation?

See the clinic assistant. VLN has an online link for full rep referral (www.formstack/forms/VLN-HCPreferral); SMRLS prefers contact through the clinic assistant.

Please provide the most complete advice you can. Don't assume a full rep attorney will be found. Placing clients for full representation is very difficult.

If you are an experienced volunteer and would like to take cases beyond the initial appearance hearing, please contact Muria Kruger at VLN (muria@vlnmn.org/612-752-6647) or Andrea Palumbo at SMRLS (andrea.palumbo@smrls.org/651-222-5863).

What are the Clinic Data Sheets? What parts do I need to fill-out?

Clinic data sheets are used to determine client eligibility, track demographics and track the services that have been provided to each client.

Attorney volunteers are responsible for completing the back-side of the sheet. Be sure to include the amount of time you spent with the client and details on the advice given specific to the client's situation.

This is my first time giving legal advice in a clinic setting, how can I make the most effective use of my time?

- Set the expectation. Tell the client you have approx. 20 minutes to listen to their story and provide advice.
- Give the client a chance to tell his or her story. Even though your time is limited, your empathy and kindness are so important to the client.
- At some point, you may need to take control of the conversation. If the client is focusing on irrelevant facts, providing too much detail, or simply off track, interject with pointed questions that elicit the information you need.
- Write explicit instructions regarding next steps for the client to take, including a script as to what the client can say in front of the judge when appropriate.

What if my client does not speak English?

- Court interpreters may be available to assist.
- Alternatively, see the clinic assistant. Phone translation may be available.

What happens at the end of the shift?

You are free to leave once no more clients are waiting and the court is wrapping up its calendar.

Before you leave:

- Review data sheets one more time for completion.
- Check out with the clinic assistant; make sure no one else is waiting and hand in all datasheets.

The clinic assistant will take care of securing clinic materials.

What should I do if I cannot make my shift?

Contact your organization's volunteer coordinator as soon as possible. You know you cannot make your scheduled shift. Please provide as much notice as possible. Late cancellations are difficult to reschedule.

For SMRLS, please contact Andrea Palumbo at andrea.palumbo@smrls.org or 651-222-5863.

For VLN, please contact Maisa Al-Wahaibi at maisa@vlmn.org or 612-752-6650.

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