

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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Groundbreaking Collaboration Helps New Yorkers Facing Foreclosure Get Live Chat Assistance

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LawHelpNY (www.LawHelpNY.org), a family of online legal information and referral Internet portals for low and moderate income New Yorkers, announces the launch of its LiveHelp chatting service for visitors to the New York State Unified Court Systems website, CourtHelp (www.nycourthelp.gov). The LiveHelp service will allow visitors to the site to chat with operators who can guide them to legal resources and organizations that may be able to assist them in their case. The initiative is a collaborative effort of multiple organizations working to create a more seamless and integrated help system for vulnerable New Yorkers seeking assistance with legal problems.

Since 2010, LiveHelp operators, primarily trained law student volunteers, have assisted individuals visiting the LawHelpNY website who are often facing serious legal problems, but can't afford a lawyer. LiveHelp will now be available to visitors on the foreclosure pages of the CourtHelp website, primarily homeowners facing foreclosure, as well as tenants of buildings in foreclosure.

Overwhelmingly, homeowners in foreclosure cases in New York State appear in court without counsel, while 100% of the plaintiffs are represented. It is this disparity, as well as the potential devastating impact on families of losing their home in foreclosure, that led to the selection of this particular topic for which to offer LiveHelp assistance on the CourtHelp website. Visitors to the website can click the button (shown below) to access the service. The button is available on 10 foreclosure-related webpages on CourtHelp. An example can be found at the following link: <http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/Homes/foreclosures.shtml>.



The project is funded by an LSC (Legal Services Corporation) Technology Initiative Grant awarded to Legal Assistance of Western New York. The initiative serves as a pilot to explore the effectiveness of providing real-time assistance to unrepresented litigants visiting the CourtHelp website to further close the justice gap in New York State Courts.

This project is a groundbreaking collaboration in the provision of assistance to unrepresented litigants, bringing together LawHelpNY, the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program, and Pro Bono Net. These organizations collaborated closely to launch the initiative – installing coding, developing operator scripts, and training LiveHelp operators.

“We believe that for individuals going to court on their own who face the very real prospect of losing their home, having the ability to make a connection with an individual who can help, even if it’s in some small way, pointing them to resources or information, can have a significant impact,” said Rochelle Klempner, Chief Counsel, New York State Courts Access to Justice Program

In making LiveHelp available to visitors on the foreclosure pages of the CourtHelp website, LawHelpNY hopes to expand its reach to serve even more low and moderate-income New Yorkers, in particular those who are facing the dreaded prospect of losing their home.

LawHelpNY

LawHelpNY is a collaborative project of ten legal aid advocacy organizations and the New York City and State Bar Associations. The LawHelpNY website has hundreds of multilingual resources for self-help, and a mirror website in Spanish. LawHelpNY online resources receive more than 425,000 visitors each year. LiveHelp, which is provided in English and Spanish, is largely staffed by law students under the supervision of an attorney, and is available from mobile phones as well as PC’s. Other LawHelpNY projects include the bilingual blog, www.RealNY.org, and extensive community level outreach through public libraries, non-profits and government offices.

CourtHelp

CourtHelp is the New York State Court’s website designed specifically to help unrepresented litigants get easy-to-understand legal and procedural information, and instructions regarding their court case.

Pro Bono Net

Pro Bono Net is a national non-profit organization, founded 15 years ago, dedicated to increasing access to justice for the disadvantaged. Through innovative technology solutions and expertise in building and mobilizing justice networks, Pro Bono Net transforms the way legal help reaches the underserved. Today, Pro Bono Net work with a broad network of access-to-justice partners to close the justice gap. Pro Bono Net’s programs, including www.probono.net, www.lawhelp.org and www.lawhelpinteractive.org, enable legal advocates to make a stronger impact, increase volunteer participation, and empower the public with resources and self-help tools to improve their lives. For more information, visit www.probono.net.

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