LawHelpNY / Pro Bono Net
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MEDIA ADVISORY

New Yorkers in Family Court can now get help via live chat on the CourtHelp website.

New York, New York – May 3, 2017

LawHelpNY and the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program are excited to announce an important new service to New Yorkers navigating the Family Court system. The organizations have partnered to provide help via LiveHelp, a live chat program run by LawHelpNY, to visitors on the Families and Children pages of CourtHelp (www.nycourthelp.gov), the New York State Unified Court System's website for unrepresented litigants.

LawHelpNY (www.LawHelpNY.org), a collection of online legal information and referral Internet portals for low and moderate income New Yorkers, and the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program first partnered in 2015 to offer the LiveHelp service on the foreclosure pages of the CourtHelp website. Since 2010, LiveHelp operators have assisted individuals visiting the LawHelpNY website. LawHelpNY is proud to now announce the expansion of the LiveHelp service to assist visitors on the Family and Children pages of the CourtHelp website (www.nycourthelp.gov/family).

The LiveHelp service assists CourtHelp visitors by connecting them to volunteers who chat with them in real-time. LiveHelp volunteers, primarily law students and law graduates, are trained to help visitors clarify their legal issue and provide legal education materials, links to self-help tools and referrals to free legal services.

This expansion also capitalizes on a long-term partnership between LiveHelp and the nonprofit Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT). LIFT, an organization dedicated to enhancing access to justice for children and families by providing legal information, community education and compassionate guidance, has supplemented the LawHelpNY LiveHelp service by offering assistance via live chat several hours each week. This collaboration allows for an even deeper level of assistance to those with Family Court concerns who access LiveHelp during LIFT hours.

Overwhelmingly, individuals in Family Court proceedings in New York State appear in court without counsel. Given the high stakes involved, and the anxiety and stress that accompany such proceedings, services that connect individuals to volunteers trained to help them find resources and legal assistance are invaluable. Covering the topics of child support, custody, visitation, adoption, and paternity, the pages now offering LiveHelp represent some of the most heavily trafficked areas of the CourtHelp website, with over a million and a quarter page views in 2016. Importantly, these pages also include the landing sites for several DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Forms programs created by the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program and hosted on LawHelp Interactive. DIY Forms allow people without attorneys to create court-approved petitions that can be printed and filed with a judge. In the first four weeks of the expanded service, LiveHelp volunteers and LIFT staff have helped over 300 individuals accessing LiveHelp through the CourtHelp website.

This project is funded by the New York State Bar Foundation, and an LSC (Legal Services Corporation) Technology Initiative Grant awarded to Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc.

Service hours:

LiveHelp service is available Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm. Visitors can receive additional assistance from LIFT operators Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 12pm to 3pm.

LawHelpNY
LawHelpNY is a project of Pro Bono Net in collaboration with leading legal aid organizations in New York State. The LawHelpNY website offers hundreds of multilingual self-help resources spanning a range of civil legal issues, which are geared towards vulnerable New Yorkers who cannot afford an attorney. From demanding repairs from landlords to instructing collection agencies to stop harassment, low-income New Yorkers can find Do-It-Yourself forms, informational guides, and live chat assistance on the LawHelpNY website. LawHelpNY also maintains a directory of more than 600 legal aid organizations around the state that New Yorkers can search according to particular legal issue and zip code. To learn more visit www.lawhelpny.org.

Pro Bono Net
Pro Bono Net is a national non-profit organization 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. Comprehensive 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 additional information visit: www.probono.net.

New York State Courts Access to Justice Program
New York State Courts Access to Justice Program is a statewide program in the New York State Unified Court System dedicated to ensuring equal access to justice for everyone. The NYS Courts Access to Justice Program develops and maintains resources and initiatives, including the CourtHelp website, to help litigants navigate the courts when they do not have a lawyer. To learn more, visit www.nycourts.gov/nya2j.

CourtHelp is the New York State Unified Court System's website designed specifically to help unrepresented litigants get easy-to-understand legal and procedural information, and instructions regarding their court case. To learn more visit www.nycourthelp.gov.

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