

INFORMATION FOR PRO SE LITIGANTS

1. As a *pro se* litigant, you are acting as your own attorney. You will be expected to know and follow the law and court rules just as any attorney, including the Texas Rules of Evidence, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, Harris County Local Rules, and the Lawyer's Creed. If you fail to follow the rules, you may permanently lose important rights.
2. The judge, court staff (including the court coordinator, court clerk, court reporter, bailiff), and opposing counsel cannot give you legal advice.
3. Do not attempt to communicate privately with the judge. The term "communication" includes contact by means of phone calls, letters, voice mail messages, faxes, e-mail messages, and direct conversations. You may communicate with the judge if *all* parties and their attorneys (if they are represented) are present. Any such unilateral contact is called "*ex parte*" communication and the district judge will not consider it for any information or argument offered in such a manner for any purpose. The court will return an *ex parte* communication to you unread and notify the other side of the communication. Prohibited communications do not include formal pleadings, motions, and request for relief filed with the clerk.
4. It is your responsibility to provide the Court with a current and reliable mailing address, email address, and telephone number. Once you file your pleadings in the case, the clerk will notify you by mail of hearings and / or motions. If you move, you must provide your new address and telephone number to the clerk and the court. If you move and you do not get your mail, you may permanently lose important rights.
5. Your requests to the court should be made in a written motion.
6. You must send a copy of every pleading you file with the court to the opposing attorney, or party (if they do not have an attorney).
7. If you have received notice that a hearing has been scheduled, you must be prepared to present your evidence and witnesses.
8. **How to Get Ready for Court** – You can go to court yourself and watch other cases before yours is scheduled. If you do this, you will see how the court works, where everyone sits and what they do and say. Plan to do this a few days or weeks before you have to go to court.
9. **The Hearing** - At the hearing, a district judge will hear your case. Each party will have a chance to tell his or her side of the story. It is important to bring your paperwork and your evidence such as photos, witnesses, bills, receipts, contracts, or anything else that will prove your case.
10. **How to Dress** - Dress as though you were going to an important job interview. Be neat and clean. Do not wear shorts, flip-flops, tank tops, halter tops, sandals, hats, or other casual clothing. The court will order you removed from the courtroom if you are dressed inappropriately; this may result in a default of your case.

11. **Timeliness** - Always get to court on time. A good rule of thumb is to arrive at least thirty minutes early in order to allow for time to locate parking, clear the security check and locate the proper courtroom.

12. **Courtroom Demeanor** - You and your witnesses should be quiet in court.

- Do not smoke or chew gum.
- Turn your off cell phone, pagers or other audible nuisances when you are in the courtroom.
- Do not go in and out of the courtroom while waiting for your case to be called.
- Do not bring children to court unless they have been subpoenaed.
- During your case speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, and stay calm.
- Stand when speaking to the judge.
- Call the judge "*Your Honor*."
- Do not interrupt the judge, the attorneys or any other party in the courtroom.
- At all times you should retain a composed and attentive posture whether you are in the audience, appearing as a witness, appearing as a party.
- It is never proper to speak, even in a whisper, with friends or other audience members while court is in session.

13. Violations of any of the above guidelines may result in sanctions being granted against you.

The following associations may be able to assist you in obtaining an attorney:

- **Houston Bar Association Lawyer Referral Program** (713) 759-1133
1001 Fannin, Suite #1300
Houston, Texas 77002
- **The State Bar of Texas**
Lawyer Referral Information Service
(800) 252-9690 or 1-877-9TEXBAR
- **Lone Star Legal Aid**
(713) 652-0077 or (800) 733-8394