

The Law and You

Online Legal Help in Utah Courts

The law and the courts are often complex and overwhelming to a lay person. And hiring an attorney to help navigate the maze of forms and procedures is expensive.

Technology has partly come to the rescue. Online legal help is now available.

Utah Courts now provide many forms and information on their Web Site. You can reach their site at www.utcourts.gov/. This lands on their Home Page. From there, you can access a wealth of information and forms.

I could end my column here, but that would not provide you with a strong sense of the richness of the Courts' Site.

For example, from the Home Page you will quickly see the "How to" heading that represents a link to various subjects. These include, "Divorce," "Landlord-Tenant Disputes," "Wills & Probate," "Small Claims Cases," "Protective Orders," and "Traffic Matters."

One of the common legal matters that can be pursued without an attorney is divorce. Although it may be difficult for some, it can be done if the parties are reasonably agreeable. One of my nieces recently decided to handle her own divorce by using the instructions and legal forms available on the Court's Web Site. With some minor coaching from me, she was able to complete her divorce without hiring an attorney.

Let me now illustrate the kind of information that is available for those seeking a divorce. There are four main sections under the "How to" heading:

How to get a divorce

How to obtain a certified divorce decree

How to enforce your divorce decree

How to make a claim of paternity

In addition, answers to many frequently

asked questions ("FAQS") are available. Here is a short list of such questions:

- *What is an Annulment?*
- *What is Legal Separation?*
- *What is the Difference Between Legal Separation and Divorce?*
- *Does Utah Allow Alimony and Who Can Get it?*
- *How is Property Divided?*
- *Who Pays the Debts Incurred During the Marriage?*
- *How Long Does it Take to Get a Divorce in Utah?*
- *How is Child Support Decided?*
- *Can Child Support Ever be Changed?*

There are more FAQS and many answers.

After clicking on the "How to" link, you will also see a link to the "Online Court Assistance Program" ("OCAP"). Clicking on the OCAP, you will be able to obtain complete court forms and instructions for handling three kinds of cases: (1) Divorce; (2) Landlord-Tenant; and (3) Court Ordered Protection. The first two require a fee of \$20 each; the third kind of case is free.

For Divorce and Landlord-Tenant cases, you will need Microsoft Word 6.0 or newer. For Protective Orders, you only need Acrobat Reader, which is free over the Internet.

The OCAP is a valuable tool for those who can follow directions and who can withstand the general intimidation of the courts. You can complete the forms for Divorce or Landlord-Tenant online.

You will be given a password so that you can leave your online session and return at a later time, as long as you complete the forms within 14 days. That way if you have insufficient information when you begin your

online session, you can return at a later date when you have the required data.

The Court's Web Site can be very useful, even if you have an attorney. It can also provide directory information and profiles of judges. But if you want to be *pro se* for these three kinds of cases, the Site is a gold mine.

Before deciding what to do, you might want to have a brief consultation with an attorney. Such consultation could provide you with some useful tips. It may also give you the need confidence to do it yourself, or, it may scare you away from doing it.