



Superior Court of California County of Fresno



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FRESNO SUPERIOR COURT STARTS FREE SMALL CLAIMS AND CIVIL SELF-HELP SERVICES

On March 2, the Better Business Bureau will begin running the Fresno County Superior Court's Small Claims and Civil Advisory Program. Through a contractual agreement with the Fresno Superior Court, the BBB will initially provide free, drop-in assistance for small claims matters then add services within 90 days for landlord-tenant, consumer credit and protection, personal injury, property damage, civil harassment restraining order, name change, and emancipation cases. Services will be available 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, at the BBB office at 4201 W. Shaw, Suite 107 in Fresno or by visiting fresnosmallclaimsadvisor.org. Residents in other areas of the county and anyone wishing to make an appointment may call (559) 256-6303. Appointments are encouraged for those seeking assistance in Spanish or Hmong. The BBB will help either the plaintiff or defendant on a first-come, first-served basis, referring opposing parties to another contracting attorney for assistance.

The court's new small claims and civil self-help program will advise small claims litigants on how to prepare or respond to court filings. Trained BBB staff and law school students will work under the supervision of a contract attorney to help small claims litigants prepare their claim or defense as well as enforce judgment; this assistance does not include representation in court. The new program services will also help self-represented litigants in the other case types by reviewing their documents for completeness and clarity; explaining filing and service of petitions pertinent to their case types; educating them on what to expect and how to conduct themselves in court proceedings; and, helping them understand how to perform service of orders after hearings.

California law requires each county to use a portion of civil case filing fees to provide a Small Claims Advisor Program, which has traditionally been administered by the Fresno County Counsel's Office. A community needs assessment, conducted by the Fresno Superior Court in 2008, indicated that litigants in other types of civil cases also need guidance and information, particularly those managing their own cases without attorneys. Because of this additional need and the fact that the Fresno Superior Court is experienced in providing self-help services in other case types, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors transferred responsibility for the Small Claims Advisor Program to the court late last year. For efficiency and cost-savings during the current state budget challenges, the court opted to partner with the BBB to provide the services.

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