

MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP

Helping Michigan residents solve their legal problems.

**For Immediate Release:
November 18, 2015**

**Contact: Angela Tripp
734-998-6100 x152**

MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP LEGAL SELF-HELP CENTER OF SOUTHWEST DETROIT NOW OPEN

(Detroit, MI.) People in Wayne County who need information about how to handle simple civil legal matters but cannot afford an attorney have a new place to go for help– the **Michigan Legal Help (MLH) Legal Self-Help Center of Southwest Detroit**. This new center is located at the Family Alliance for Change, a community center at 3627 W. Vernor in Southwest Detroit that offers support, advocacy, referrals, resources and education to all Wayne County families. With the addition of the **MLH Legal Self-Help Center**, now families can also find support when dealing with some legal issues.

Visitors to the Center can get assistance using the Michigan Legal Help website in English (www.MichiganLegalHelp.org) and Spanish (www.ayudalegaldemichigan.org), and can use the Center to access computers and printers. The Center is open to the public on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. All services are provided free of charge.

The **MLH Legal Self-Help Center of Southwest Detroit** complements the well-established service delivery model of the Family Alliance for Change (F AFC), a parent driven, peer-to-peer service dedicated to supporting, educating, and empowering parents with special needs children. In the Legal Self-Help Center, F AFC Parent Support Partners serve as trained Navigators who help visitors find information they need on the Michigan Legal Help website. While Navigators cannot give legal advice, they can answer questions about court practices and processes, help visitors locate and complete the SCAO-approved forms available on the website, and find referrals to a lawyer or community service providers.

The Spanish-language version of the website, www.ayudalegaldemichigan.org, was launched in September 2014 in an effort to reduce language barriers in access to justice. Toolkits from all ten content areas are now available in Spanish. The LiveHelp chat service, which allows visitors to the website to ask questions via chat, is staffed by bilingual Navigators through Michigan Legal Help. Six informational videos covering topics from “Going to Court” to “How to Serve Divorce & Custody Papers” to “How to File a Personal Protection Order” are available in both English and Spanish. Automated form interviews that enable litigants to request a foreign-language interpreter, personal protection order, or a fee waiver are other examples of how Michigan Legal Help works to make the court system accessible regardless of language proficiency, national origin, or income level.

The **MLH Legal Self-Help Center of Southwest Detroit** is the second self-help center to open in Wayne County, the tenth in the state-wide MLH network, and the first bilingual MLH Self-Help Center in Michigan. This newest center represents the joint efforts of the Michigan Legal Help Program and its local partners, including Development Centers, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides a continuum of prevention, treatment and training services to meet the behavioral health, social and vocational needs of individuals, families, and the community.

The Michigan Legal Help Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering people to participate in the justice system through a website and individual self-help centers that provide tools to

help people navigate the legal system effectively. Visitors can access free articles, court-approved forms, and toolkits designed to enable them to resolve their legal problems independently. Many court forms can be filled out online using a simple question and answer interview format. The website can help visitors look for a lawyer in their area if they need more assistance; it also includes information about local community services and details about the court(s) where a visitor's legal issue may be handled.

“We are so pleased to be a part of the second Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center in Wayne County,” said Hon. Kathleen McCarthy, Presiding Judge of the 3rd Circuit Court's Family Division. “Many of our litigants do not have access to legal representation or to legal aid clinics, especially those who do not have readily-available transportation or who speak Spanish as their primary language. The new bilingual Self-Help Center in southwest Detroit will enable residents to access free legal information and forms easily without having to come downtown to the courthouse. The center, along with the Michigan Legal Self-Help website that is available in English and Spanish, will serve as a great resource for our community and the court system.”

By clarifying county-specific procedures for filing paperwork properly and providing clear answers to common questions, the MLH Self-Help Centers around the state are essential to ensuring access to justice for self-represented litigants. The standardized forms and automated interview process benefit the courts by educating the general public and improving accuracy and efficiency in court proceedings.

Currently, the MLH website has legal information about family law matters, protection from abuse, housing issues, consumer law, expungement, public benefits, income tax issues, estates & guardianships, and individual rights. In addition to the four metro Detroit Self-Help Centers, Michigan Legal Help collaborates with lawyers, court personnel, librarians, community organizations, and volunteers from around the state in building a strong network of public legal support.

“We are delighted to be working with so many community partners in Wayne County and throughout metro Detroit,” said Michigan Legal Help Program Director Angela Tripp. “The integration of the Self-Help Center of Southwest Detroit into an established network of community services gives us the chance to reach even more people who need legal help. We are so excited about the growth in the Self-Help Center network state-wide, and about this very first bilingual center in southwest Detroit.”

The original **Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center of Wayne County** is located in Smart Detroit, Suite 1300 of the Penobscot Building, at 645 Griswold in downtown Detroit. Six computer stations are now available to the public at this site, and trained staff is also available to assist visitors in navigating the justice system. The **Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center of Oakland County** is located in the Adams-Pratt Law Library in the Oakland County Courthouse in Pontiac. The **Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center of Macomb County** is located in the James C. Daner Law Library in the Circuit Courthouse in Mt. Clemens.

The Michigan Legal Help Program is funded by the Michigan State Bar Foundation, the Michigan Supreme Court, and through grants from the Legal Services Corporation.

####