



WISCONSIN SUPREME COURT
P.O. BOX 1688
MADISON, WISCONSIN 53701-1688

John Voelker
Director of State Courts

16 East State Capitol
Telephone 608-264-6256
Fax 608-267-0980

Amanda K. Todd
Court Information Officer

CONTACT:
Amanda K. Todd
Court Information Officer
608/264-6256

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New self-help family Web site helps people without attorneys

Madison, Wis. (March 8, 2006) – The Wisconsin court system is unveiling a new self-help family Web site designed for use by people representing themselves in court. The Web site takes users through an online interview, completing necessary forms and also provides blank versions of the new plain-English forms. All of the forms are for actions related to separation and divorce, proceedings in which about 70 percent of litigants statewide act without attorneys.

The site takes the user through a series of questions and fills in required forms based on the answers, much like software used to complete a tax return. Blank versions of the statewide-standardized forms –35 in all - are offered for people that would prefer to fill them in by hand. The site also provides a basic guide to legal separation and divorce in Wisconsin. This is the latest in a series of steps the court system has taken to improve access to the courts for people who are representing themselves.

“This is a key step toward ensuring access to justice for people who do not have lawyers,” said Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, who noted that the Supreme Court’s Planning and Policy Advisory Committee last month released a report entitled “Critical Issues: Planning Priorities for the Wisconsin Court System” that identified providing assistance to self-represented litigants as the number one issue facing the courts in the next two years.

The forms project began in 2004, when the Office of the Chief Justice developed a task force to establish a statewide assistance program for family court litigants. Plain-English forms were unveiled in hard copy last year; since then, the Consolidated Court Automation Programs (CCAP) has worked to perfect the interactive, online versions for the self-help Web site. Each county will set its own timetable for enabling the forms after the local clerk of circuit court has tailored the directions that accompany the forms to reflect county-specific procedures.

By the end of the April, it is expected that every county will have made the Web-based forms available. The self-help family Web site may be accessed at <http://wicourts.gov/services/public/prose.htm>.

###