

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS, JUVENILE DIVISION, GEauga COUNTY, OHIO
Judge Timothy J. Grendell

Information Sheet
Rights of Indigent Litigant

WARNING

This Information Sheet is intended to provide you with an overview of the subject matter, effective as of the date noted in the upper left-hand corner. This Information Sheet is not intended to provide you with all legal information that may be necessary for you to decide upon a course of action, and the information provided may not be error-free, complete, or accurate. Moreover, this Information Sheet may not accurately describe the cited sections of the Ohio Revised Code or cited case law. Finally, this Information Sheet is not intended as a substitute for legal advice from a competent licensed attorney, who is familiar with all of the relevant facts of your case, and therefore the Help Center recommends that you seek legal advice from a competent licensed attorney that you select before taking any action. While the Help Center can provide you with a limited amount of general legal information, neither the Help Center staff nor any other Court employee can give you any legal advice.

Background.

The challenges of any person who is a party to a juvenile court proceeding can be magnified if that person lacks the financial means required to pay the costs associated with the legal process. Those costs include (i) the payment of a court cost security deposit that is assessed by the clerk's office when filing certain pleadings, (ii) the actual court costs including the cost of a guardian ad litem, the cost of a parent coordinator, and the cost of preparing a Transcript of Proceedings if the party decides to appeal a decision of a magistrate or the judge, (iii) the cost of a jury trial, and finally (iv) the cost of counsel.¹ Some persons, who may be able to pay for an attorney, decide not to retain an attorney for any number of reasons and will proceed without counsel – what lawyers refer to as a “pro se litigant.”

Fortunately, the Supreme Court of the United States, has determined that the “Due Process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution requires the states to provide counsel to indigents in criminal cases.² The Supreme Court of the United States has expanded that concept to include requiring the states to provide counsel for both children and indigent adults for certain legal proceedings in juvenile court.³ The two driving principles arising from the “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the “due process” clause of Ohio constitution are “incarceration” (i.e., jail time) and “termination of the parent-child relationship.” In most circumstances, if a juvenile legal proceeding can result in incarceration or termination of the parent-child relationship, then a child or a parent who is indigent may have a constitutional right to have appointed counsel.

¹ “counsel” means an attorney or legal counsel.

² *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963).

³ See *In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 1 (1967) and *Lassiter v. Dept. of Social Services*, 452 U.S. 18 (1981).

Moreover, the Ohio legislature has clarified and perhaps expanded upon the right to counsel for children and indigent adults who are parties in certain juvenile court proceedings, by enacting R.C. 2151.352 and R.C. 120.16. For children and adults who qualify as indigents, the State of Ohio provides counsel, paid for by the government, through the Ohio Public Defender program, which is governed by Chapter 120 of the Ohio Revised Code titled "Public Defenders." Additionally, the Ohio legislature has enacted statutes that provide relief for the payment of court cost security deposits, application fees, and the cost of a Transcript of Proceedings, which will be explained below.

What is an Indigent?

Child. For the purpose of appointing counsel, a child is a person under the age of 18.⁴ The Ohio Administrative Code provides that a person who is under the age of 18 years is presumed to be indigent.⁵ Additionally, in determining the eligibility of a child for appointed counsel, the income of the child's parents, guardian, or custodian may not be considered.

Adult. Of course, for the purpose of appointing counsel, an adult is a person over the age of 17. The primary method of determining whether an adult is indigent is set forth in Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-03.

First - the adult is presumed to be indigent in three situations:

- The adult receives certain types of poverty-based public assistance such as federal supplemental security income, Ohio Works First, temporary assistance to needy families, medicaid, aid to families with dependent children, a supplemental nutrition assistance program, refugee cash assistance, refugee medical assistance, poverty-related veterans' benefits, or other poverty-based governmental assistance.
- The adult has been committed to a public mental health facility.
- The adult is incarcerated in a state penitentiary.

Second - if the adult is not presumed to be indigent, nevertheless the adult may be indigent if that adult meets certain income and expense requirements.⁶ Those requirements are set forth in the Ohio Public Defenders form titled "Financial Disclosure Form" [also known as ODP-206R rev. 12/2017]. The fundamental rule is that the gross income cannot exceed 187.5 percent of the federal poverty level or net income cannot exceed 125 percent of the federal poverty level.

Finally⁷ - even if the adult is not presumed to be indigent and if the adult does not meet the financial requirements identified in the Financial Disclosure Form, the adult is not precluded from eligibility for appointed counsel.⁸ Factors to be considered as to whether to appoint counsel are:

⁴ See R.C. 2151.011(B)(6) for a definition of "child."

⁵ Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-03(B)(4).

⁶ Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-03(C).

⁷ See the guidelines published by the Ohio Public Defender's Office at <https://www.opd.ohio.gov/static/County+Resources/Fees/Federal_Poverty_Guidelines.pdf>

⁸ Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-03(E).

- The number, complexity, and seriousness of charges the applicant faces must be considered when deciding whether an applicant has sufficient funds to hire qualified counsel.
- If an applicant who is not indigent has tried but is unable to employ qualified counsel, then counsel should be appointed.
- A party who retains counsel but does not have sufficient funds to pay for experts, transcripts, and other related expenses should be declared indigent for those purposes.

Appointment of Counsel.

Child. Under R.C. 2151.352, a child is entitled to counsel at all stages of a legal proceeding under Chapters 2151 and 2152. The statutory right to counsel for a child includes any legal proceeding where the child is a delinquent,⁹ a juvenile traffic offender,¹⁰ or is unruly.¹¹ If the child is indigent, then the child is entitled to have counsel appointed under Chapter 120, which is the Ohio public defender program. As explained above, a child is presumed to be indigent, despite the income of the parents.

- **Court's Duty to Advise.**¹² If a child appears before a juvenile court without counsel in any legal proceeding under Chapters 2151 or 2152, which includes a legal proceeding as a delinquent, juvenile traffic offender, or unruly child, the judge must ascertain whether the child knows of his or her right to have counsel, and if indigent, then his or her right to have counsel appointed under Chapter 120 (i.e. – a public defender) upon request of the child or the child's parent.
- **Waiver of Right to Counsel.**¹³ After being advised by the Court, a child may waive his or her right to counsel. However, the waiver must be made in open court, recorded, and in writing. Moreover, the Court must determine whether a child has knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily waived the right to counsel. In doing so, the court shall look to the totality of the circumstances including, but not limited to: the child's age; intelligence; education; background and experience generally and in the court system specifically; the child's emotional stability; and the complexity of the proceedings. The Court shall ensure that a child consults with a parent, custodian, guardian, or guardian ad litem, before any waiver of counsel. However, no parent, guardian, custodian, or other person may waive the child's right to counsel.

There are a few circumstances when a child cannot waive the right to counsel:¹⁴

- Any circumstance where the juvenile court is considering whether to transfer the case to another court for criminal prosecution under Juv.R. 30;

⁹ "Delinquent" is defined in R.C. 2152.02(E).

¹⁰ "Juvenile traffic offender" is defined in R.C. 2152.02(N).

¹¹ "Unruly" is defined in R.C. 2151.022

¹² R.C. 2151.352

¹³ Juv.R. 3

¹⁴ Juv.R. 3(A).

- when a serious youthful offender dispositional sentence has been requested; and
- when there is a conflict or disagreement between the child and the parent, guardian, or custodian; or if the parent, guardian, or custodian requests that the child be removed from the home.
- Exercising the Right to Appointed Counsel. If the child requests that counsel be appointed, then the child or the child's parent should complete and file with the clerk's office the form titled Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) together with the Financial Disclosure Form. The child should indicate in Part III (i.e., "Presumption Eligibility") that the child is a "Juvenile." The child need not complete Parts IV, V, or VI.
- Termination of Parent-Child Relationship. In addition to legal proceedings where the child is alleged a delinquent, juvenile traffic offender, or unruly, there is a legal proceeding under R.C. 2151.23(A)(1) where the Court could order that permanent custody of a child be awarded to the Geauga County Job & Family Services ("JFS") resulting from JFS filing a complaint alleging that a child is abused, neglected, or dependent. Sometimes, such complaint is filed by another interested person (e.g., grandparent, school official, etc.).¹⁵ In effect, if the Court grants JFS permanent custody, then the parent-child relationship is terminated, thus making the child eligible for adoption. Juv.R. 2(Y) provides that a child who is the subject of a JFS abuse, neglect, or dependency proceeding is deemed to be a "party" to that legal proceeding, which results in a duty for the Court to appoint two "representatives" for such child.
 - First, pursuant to Juv.R. 4(B)(5), the court shall appoint a "guardian ad litem" (a "GAL"), whose primary duty is to determine the "best interest" of the child and typically will prepare a report setting forth recommendations, which will be submitted to the Court at a hearing. The GAL might recommend that the "best interest" of a child is to terminate the parent-child relationship. Indeed, the GAL may even file a motion with the Court requesting the termination of the parent-child relationship.
 - Second, pursuant to R.C. 2151.352, the child is entitled to have counsel, and if indigent, to have counsel appointed upon request. The primary duty of counsel is to be a zealous advocate for the child.¹⁶ Assuming the child is capable of understanding and deciding, the Court has similar requirements of advising the child regarding the right to counsel, the appointment of counsel, and the right of waiver.

Thus, if the Court appoints a GAL who is not an attorney (or is an attorney, but is unwilling to serve the dual function of GAL and attorney), then the Court may need to appoint independent counsel. This could occur if the GAL is a CASA.¹⁷

¹⁵ R.C. 2151.27 permitted interested persons, including JFS, to file an abuse, neglect, or dependency complaint under R.C. 2151.23(A)(1).

¹⁶ *In re Williams*, 101 Ohio St.3d 398, 2004-Ohio-1500.

¹⁷ For more information regarding a CASA and a Guardian Ad Litem, see the Information Sheet titled "The Guardian Ad Litem."

In many cases the Court will appoint for a child a person who will serve the dual function of GAL and counsel. However, in that case a conflict of interest can arise if that person, as the GAL, determines that termination of the parent-child relationship is in the “best interest” of the child, but the child, who is capable of doing so, expresses a desire to not have the parent-child relationship terminated. Typically, the child’s wishes are expressed to the Court in an “in camera” interview¹⁸ by the judge or magistrate. When the GAL, who is also serving as counsel for the child, determines that termination of the parent-child relationship is in the “best interest” of the child, then that person is less able to serve as a zealous advocate for that child, and the child may be denied “due process of law.” In such cases, the Supreme Court of Ohio, has determined that the juvenile court must make a case-by-case analysis and determine whether the child should be appointed independent counsel for the sole purpose of zealous advocacy and not also serve as the child’s GAL.¹⁹ In cases of abuse, neglect or dependency, the Court should appoint independent counsel under “certain circumstances.” Those circumstances include the child consistently expressing a desire that differs with or is otherwise inconsistent with the GAL’s recommendations when the child is of an age to make that decision. Indeed, Juv.R. 4(C)(2) provides:

- (1) *When the guardian ad litem is an attorney admitted to practice in this state, the guardian may also serve as counsel to the ward providing no conflict between the roles exist.*
- (2) *If a person is serving as guardian ad litem and as attorney for a ward and either that person or the court finds a conflict between the responsibilities of the role of attorney and that of guardian ad litem, the court shall appoint another person as guardian ad litem for the ward.*

In that situation, the child, or parent, custodian, or guardian of that child should consider preparing and filing a motion with the Court requesting independent counsel of the child.

Note: In any case where (i) a parent, guardian, or legal custodian believes that an attorney should be appointed for a child or (ii) an adult is indigent and that the court should appoint an attorney for that adult, then consider preparing and filing the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) together with the Financial Disclosure Statement.

- Cost of Appointed Counsel. Juv.R. 4(G) provides:

*(G) **Costs.** The court may fix compensation for the services of appointed counsel and guardians ad litem, tax the same as part of the costs and assess them against the child, the child's parents, custodian, or other person in loco parentis of such child.*

¹⁸ An “in camera” interview is an interview solely between the Judge and a child.

¹⁹ See *In re Williams*, 101 Ohio St.3d 398 (2004), 2004-Ohio-1500; and *In re D.M.*, 2019-Ohio-1497.

Note: If that person who is ordered to pay such costs is indigent, then consider preparing and filing the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) together with the Financial Disclosure Statement.

Indigent Adult.

Background. As noted above, the Supreme Court of the United States has determined that the Fourteenth Amendment requires the states to provide an indigent adult person with counsel in juvenile court in two situations. The first is if the court may permanently terminate the parent-child relationship, typically as the result of an abuse, neglect, or dependency case. The second is if the court may incarcerate that adult, typically in a contempt of court hearing resulting from a failure to abide by a court order (e.g., parenting time, child support, etc.).

Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings. If JFS (or another person) files a complaint²⁰ with the Court that alleges the abuse, neglect, or dependency of a child, which could eventually result in the Court granting JFS permanent custody²¹ (or rather the termination of the parent-child relationship), then the parent(s) has a right to counsel, and if indigent, the right to have counsel appointed under Chapter 120 (i.e., appointment of a public defender).²²

R.C. 120.16(E) empowers the Court to appoint counsel other than the public defender, stating:

Nothing in this section shall prevent a court from appointing counsel other than the county public defender or from allowing an indigent person to select the indigent person's own personal counsel to represent the indigent person. A court may also appoint counsel or allow an indigent person to select the indigent person's own personal counsel to assist the county public defender as co-counsel when the interests of justice so require.

Similar to the right to counsel for a child, in an abuse, neglect, or dependency proceeding, if the parent appears without counsel, the Court will advise the parent of the right to counsel, and if indigent, the right to have counsel appointed under Chapter 120 (i.e., a public defender). Likewise, a parent can waive the right to counsel.

Note: If a parent is indigent and desires the appointment of counsel, and if the Court does not otherwise appoint counsel on its own accord, then the parent must prepare and file (1) the Financial Disclosure Form and (2) the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0).

However, R.C. 2151.352 essentially provides that in legal proceeding dealing with child custody (including parenting time matters) commenced as a civil action by a nonparent, under

²⁰ The complaint is filed under R.C. 2151.27, with the juvenile court having jurisdiction under R.C. 2151.23(A)(1).

²¹ "Permanent Custody" means a legal status that vests in a public children services agency or a private child placing agency, all parental rights, duties, and obligations, including the right to consent to adoption, and divests the natural parents or adoptive parents of all parental rights, privileges, and obligations, including all residual rights and obligations.

²² The right to appointed counsel for an indigent parent arises if the complaint is filed under R.C. 2151.27 and the Court has jurisdiction to hear the complaint under R.C. 2151.23(A)(1). The termination of the parent-child relationship can occur only if a public child services agency (e.g., Geauga County Job & Family Services) files a Motion Requesting Permanent Custody under R.C. 2151.413 and the Court holds a hearing under R.C. 2151.414.

R.C. 2151.23(A)(2), which is a “private custody” case (and not an abuse, neglect, or dependency case) an indigent nonparent is NOT entitled to appointment of counsel if the result cannot be a grant of permanent custody to JFS.²³ An example where an indigent parent does not have a right to appointed counsel is where a nonparent (such as a grandparent) files a complaint alleging that the parent is “unsuitable,” and thus the Court could grant the nonparent temporary and eventually legal custody of the child,²⁴ even if the complaint alleges dependency.²⁵

Contempt of Court Proceedings. Chapter 2705 grants the court power to penalize persons who fail to obey a court order. The penalties are defined in R.C. 2705.05(A), which states:

- (1) For a first offense, a fine of not more than \$250, a definite term of imprisonment of not more than 30 days in jail, or both;
- (2) For a second offense, a fine of not more than \$500, a definite term of imprisonment of not more than 60 days in jail, or both;
- (3) For a third or subsequent offense, a fine of not more than \$1,000, a definite term of imprisonment of not more than 90 days in jail, or both.

A court order includes a juvenile court order regarding child support or parenting time rights (i.e., visitation rights) and in some cases companionship rights granted to a nonparent.²⁶ In addition to an enforcement proceeding initiated by the Child Support Enforcement Agency, any person who has a claim to a child support order or a parenting/companionship time order may initiate a contempt proceeding against the accused person.

Upon filing a contempt action, the clerk of courts will set a hearing date as required under R.C. 2705.05 and will serve a summons upon the accused, which will include a Notice of various obligations and rights. Among those rights is the right to be represented by counsel, and if the accused is indigent, then the right to have appointed counsel if requested. However, the indigent accused must apply for appointed counsel under Chapter 120 (i.e., a public defender) within three days after receipt of the summons. If the accused fails to make a good faith effort to obtain counsel or request appointed counsel, then the Court may refuse a continuance and proceed with the contempt hearing.²⁷

Typically, our Court will set a “for cause” hearing to determine whether there is cause to find the accused to be in contempt of court. Often if the accused is found to be in contempt, then the Court will suspend an imposition of a penalty (which could include jail time) if the accused will abide by a “compliance plan,” and then the Court will appoint counsel for an indigent accused at the “show cause” hearing. If the accused does not fully comply with the “compliance plan,” then the Court will set and hold a second hearing, known as an “imposition hearing” or a “purge hearing,” for the purpose of imposing the suspended penalty. While the Supreme Court of Ohio has determined that an accused indigent does not have a right to

²³ More specifically, see the exceptions in R.C. 2151.23(A)(2), (3), (9), (10), (11), (12), R.C. 2151.23(B)(2), (3), (4), (5), and R.C. 2151.23 (C), (D), and (F)(1) or (2).

²⁴ See *In re C.K.*, 2013-Ohio-4513 [Ohio Ct. App., Montgomery Cty. 2013]; *In re D.H.*, 2012-Ohio-2272 [10th App. Dist.]; and *In re T.C.K.*, 2013-Ohio-3583 [Ohio Ct. App., Washington Cty.]

²⁵ *Johnson v. Baronzzi*, 2006-Ohio-4955 [Ohio Ct. App., Columbiana Cty.]

²⁶ R.C. 2705.031(B).

²⁷ R.C. 2705.031(C).

appointed counsel at a “purge hearing,”²⁸ the Ohio Public Defender department will accept a court appointment of counsel at an “imposition hearing,” and, in most cases, our Court will appoint counsel for an “imposition (or purge) hearing.”²⁹

Note: If the accused is indigent and desires the appointment of counsel for either a “show cause hearing” or an “imposition hearing,” then the accused must prepare and file, within three days after receipt of the summons or notice (1) the Financial Disclosure Form and (2) the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0).

If an indigent adult fails to properly and timely apply for appointment of counsel (essential a timely filing of both the Financial Disclosure Form and the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0), then the Court may proceed with the hearing, find the accused in contempt of court, and impose a jail sentence.³⁰

\$25 Application Fee. R.C. 120.36 requires that the clerk’s office assess a \$25.00 application fee when an indigent adult applies for appointed counsel from the public defender’s office. However, if a party submits for filing an Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) for appointment of counsel, together with the Financial Disclosure Form, then that party need not pay the \$25 application fee at the time of filing. R.C. 120.36 permits the party to pay the \$25 application fee within seven days after filing that motion for appointed counsel and the Financial Disclosure Form. The clerk’s office will accept those filings without collecting the \$25 application fee. If that party does not pay the \$25 application fee within the seven-day period, then the Court shall assess that fee upon the final disposition, as court costs. Moreover, R.C. 120.36(A)(1) permits the Court to waive or reduce the payment of that \$25 application fee. When paid, the \$25 application fee is non-refundable even if that party is determined to be indigent.

Note: When applying for appointed counsel, the indigent adult should consider requesting a waiver of the \$25 application fee on the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0).

Waiver of Security Deposit for Court Costs.

Background. R.C. 2323.31 allows a common pleas court to require the payment of a “security deposit” for court costs before accepting the filing of a complaint, motion, or other pleading (collectively “Pleading”). Our court decided to exercise that power and to assess a security deposit in juvenile matters by promulgating Local Rule 5. For example, the clerk of courts requires the payment of \$100 before accepting the filing of an initial complaint, and \$50 for the filing of a post-decree motion.

Indigency Exception. R.C. 2323.311 and Local Rule 5 provides that if an indigent adult prepares and files form GCJF 12.7 - Financial Disclosure Affidavit, together with any Pleading that requires payment of the court cost security deposit, then the Clerk of Courts must accept the Pleading without payment of any security deposit. The clerk’s office will present that affidavit to the judge or magistrate, who will determine whether the party is indigent.³¹

²⁸ See *Liming v. Dantos*, 133 Ohio St.3d 509, 2012-Ohio-4783

²⁹ The Ohio Public Defender determined in a Police Statement titled “Purge Hearings in Contempt Cases,” dated November 6, 2012, that Chapter 120 permitted public defenders to be appointed as counsel for an indigent accused at a purge hearing.

³⁰ See *Souders v. Souders*, 2016-Ohio-3522 [1st App. Dist.]

³¹ See R.C. 2323.311(A).

- If the judge (or magistrate) approves that affidavit, then the clerk of court must waive payment of a security deposit, including advanced payments for the future cost of service by publication or service of process (e.g., civil subpoena).
- If the judge (or magistrate) disapproves that affidavit, then the clerk must still retain the filed pleading, and the judge shall issue an order requiring payment of the security deposit within 30 days after the order. If payment is not timely made, then the judge may dismiss the action.³²
- Finally, R.C. 2323.3119(B)(6) permits the judge (or magistrate) to determine that the applicant is indigent even if the federal guidelines provided for in the Financial Disclosure are exceeded. Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-03(E) provides guidance for that determination.

Note: If the applicant's Financial Disclosure Form exceeds the required limits of the federal poverty guidelines, then the applicant should consider preparing and filing the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0), requesting a waiver of the security deposit and file it together with the Financial Disclosure Form.

Waiver of Actual Court Costs.

- Cost of Transcript of Proceedings.

Background. If an indigent adult decides to file a Notice of Appeal of a final order or decides to object to a magistrate's decision, in most cases it is imperative that the indigent adult order a Transcript of Proceeds for those hearing days that resulted in the order or magistrate's decision to be appealed or objected to. For more information see the Help Center information sheets titled "The Appellate Process" and "Conduct During A Hearing." However, preparation of a Transcript of Proceeding can be quite costly depending upon the length of time of the applicable hearings.

Duty to Pay for Transcript. Fortunately, the due process clause of the U.S. Constitution and the Ohio Constitution requires the trial court to provide a Transcript of Proceeding, at the public expense, in actions where the Court could grant JFS permanent custody (or rather terminate parental rights).³³ Moreover, Ohio Admin.Code 120-1-17 states:

The county may seek reimbursement for the costs of experts, interpreters, and transcripts requested by the defense by submitting such invoices on forms prescribed by the Ohio public defender. Expert and interpreter fees will be reimbursed only when the expert or interpreter is answerable only to defense counsel. To qualify for reimbursement, requests for experts must be held ex parte if so requested in writing by defense counsel. Transcript expenses will be reimbursed only when the transcript is produced for use by defense counsel at trial, on appeal, or in post-conviction proceedings. Reimbursement will not be made if these costs are presented through the attorney's bill for services.

³² R.C. 2323.33.

³³ See *State, ex rel. Heller v. Miller* (1980), 61 Ohio St.2d 6; and *M.L.B. v S.L.J* (1996), 519 U.S. 102.

Note: To request a transcript, Local Rule 16 requires you to file a Request for Transcript (GC JF 6.0). In order to have the cost waived, you must also file an Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) together with the Financial Disclosure Form

- Cost of non-CASA Guardian Ad litem. To obtain a waiver of the cost of a non-CASA guardian ad litem, Local Rule 30(A)(2) permits an indigent adult to file the Financial Disclosure Form and request a waiver of such court costs.
- Cost of Parent Coordinator. To obtain a waiver of the cost of a parent coordinator, Local Rule 29(I)(7) permits an indigent adult to file the Financial Disclosure Form and request a waiver of such court costs.
- Other Court Costs. To obtain a waiver of any other court costs, an indigent adult must file the Indigency Motion (GC JF 14.0) together with the Financial Disclosure Form and describe in that motion those court costs to be waived or reduced.

LEGAL PRACTICE IN THE JUVENILE COURT IS RESTRICTED BY LAW TO ATTORNEYS WHO ARE LICENSED BY THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE HANDLING THEIR OWN LEGAL MATTERS. IF AN INDIVIDUAL WISHES TO HANDLE HIS OR HER OWN CASE, THAT PERSON MAY ATTEMPT TO DO SO, HOWEVER DUE TO THE COMPLEXITY OF THE LAW AND THE DESIRE TO AVOID COSTLY ERRORS, MANY PERSONS WHO HAVE MATTERS BEFORE THE COURT ARE REPRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO REPRESENT YOURSELF AND USE THE COURT'S FORMS, BE AWARE THAT STATE LAW PROHIBITS THE JUDGE, MAGISTRATE, AND EMPLOYEES OF THE GEAUGA COUNTY JUVENILE COURT, INCLUDING THE HELP CENTER STAFF, FROM PROVIDING YOU WITH LEGAL ADVICE. IF YOU NEED LEGAL ADVICE, THEN YOU SHOULD CONTACT AN ATTORNEY OF YOUR CHOOSING.