

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



Family Court to launch Judiciary’s new service for self-represented litigants

October 7, 2020: As many people who have filed for divorce in Rhode Island Family Court are not represented by legal counsel, the Judiciary is introducing an online tool that will be helpful for certain case filings.

The Family Court will be the first in the Rhode Island Judiciary to launch a service known as “Guide & File” for self-represented litigants and other users of the Judiciary’s electronic case filing system. Guide & File is a web-based electronic tool that enables litigants to create legible legal documents for specific types of case filings from any computer having internet access at any time.

The Family Court will offer the service as a pilot program to assist parties involved in basic divorce proceedings to generate the two documents that are needed to finalize a divorce: a decision pending entry of final judgment and a final judgment. Oftentimes, self-represented litigants are uncertain of what must be included in these required documents. The new service will help them through the confusion. At present, the service is not offered as a way to initiate divorce proceedings.

After accessing Guide & File, users are prompted to answer a series of questions that, much like popular tax-filing programs, would create further questions and ultimately produce a document suitable for filing with the court.

Guide & File, which is a Tyler Technologies product, is accessible on www.courts.ri.gov in the Self-help Center, on the Family Court’s home page, and on the Family Court’s Virtual Clerk’s Office page, which includes an explanation of the service.

Family Court Chief Judge Michael B. Forte has enthusiastically supported the advent of Guide & File and has instructed his staff to develop other Guide & File tools. “Since mid-March when the pandemic hit, and the number of people allowed in the courthouses was drastically reduced, my staff and I have diligently sought creative means to augment the public’s ability to access justice in a convenient, safe way. The availability of Guide & File for finalizing divorce documents is another solid step in this direction.”

In August, Family Court opened a “virtual clerk’s office” that allows the public to remotely conduct business previously done in courthouses from any electronic device having a microphone and audio-visual capabilities. Earlier that same month, Chief Judge Forte presided over two night-court sessions during which 16 divorces were heard and decided remotely at times and in places that were more convenient for the litigants and their attorneys.

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