

Michigan Legal Help Program
Request for Proposals (RFP)
Legal Self-Help Center Sites in Michigan

RFP Date: Monday, May 20, 2013

Proposal Due Date: Friday, June 28, 2013

Proposal Format: Via Email Addressing Points Below to trippa@lsscm.org

Applicant: Government Entity; Nonprofit or Other Tax-Exempt Entity

Questions: Angela Tripp at trippa@lsscm.org or 734-998-6100 x 152

1. DESCRIPTION, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP PROGRAM

The Michigan Poverty Law Program (MPLP), as project manager of the Michigan Legal Help Program, requests proposals for Self-Help Center (SHC) sites in Michigan. One purpose of the Michigan Legal Help Program is to help communities open (or sustain or expand pre-existing) legal Self-Help Centers that use the Michigan Legal Help website as a primary resource. The Self-Help Centers will use the Michigan Legal Help website to:

- Provide access to legal information and court forms to individuals in Michigan who are representing themselves in court or need information about legal topics
- Provide court staff, librarians and others with a helpful resource to which they can refer self-represented litigants who need assistance
- Aid in the efficiency of court operations by providing self-represented litigants with access to quality legal information, access to computer programs which will assist them in completing specific court forms, and jurisdiction-specific procedural instructions for completing common and simple legal matters
- Provide referrals to local legal organizations, including legal aid agencies and lawyer referral services, for individuals seeking an attorney
- Provide referrals to local community organizations, for individuals seeking non-legal assistance related to their legal problems

We invite courts, legal aid programs, bar associations, public libraries, law libraries, legal assistance centers, and others to apply to be a Michigan Legal Help-affiliated SHC. Applicants must be government, nonprofit or other tax-exempt entities. There must be a lead applicant entity, but proposals may involve coalitions or partnerships of stakeholders. Evidence of collaboration with key stakeholders is required as explained herein. Proposals may be for a self-help center site to serve one county, or multiple counties, depending on size, population, and resources.

2. BACKGROUND OF MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP PROGRAM

The Michigan Legal Help Program is funded in part by a grant from the Michigan State Bar Foundation. In April, 2010, then Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly established the Statewide Solutions on Self-Help Task Force to promote greater centralization, coordination and quality of support for persons representing themselves in legal matters in Michigan. One result of the SOSTF is the Michigan Legal Help website and its affiliated self-help centers. While the SOSTF was dissolved at the end of 2013, The Michigan Legal Help Program (MLH) continues on as the overall effort to expand, enhance and coordinate assistance for self-represented persons in Michigan. It consists of the statewide interactive website MichiganLegalHelp.org, affiliated local self-help centers, and partnerships with courts, bars, libraries, legal aid and others to educate those who serve the self-represented.

The Michigan Legal Help Program (MLH) is looking for at least eight new Self-Help Center sites at this time. These Self-Help Centers must use the Michigan Legal Help website as the resource for legal information for those areas covered by the website. This is because resources are targeted to the website to assure it has up to date, quality content, including local information to facilitate referrals to lawyers and community organizations. In this way, localities do not have to create or update their own content, making it user friendly and addressing low literacy levels. Also, MLH provides uniform training and other support to help personnel provide quality assistance to patrons of the Self-Help Centers.

3. SELF-HELP CENTER SITE SPECIFICATIONS

A. Proposed location: Each SHC will be located in a space convenient to the public, such as a courthouse law library or other dedicated room in a courthouse, in a public library or a community center.

In your proposal, please indicate where your proposed SHC will be located, and give details about the size of the space, accessibility, ease and availability of parking or access by public transit, and other details that make it a desirable site.

B. Technical requirements: Each SHC must have one or more workstations (computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse); printer; headphones for each workstation; high speed internet connection; and a privacy screen for each monitor/workstation. Recommended technical specifications are attached. For larger self-help centers with a high volume of traffic expected, more workstations will be necessary. As noted below, some funding may be available if needed

for equipment, but all workstations and equipment will be the property of the entity where the center is housed, not the property of MPLP or MLH.

Please indicate in your proposal how many workstations you propose for your site, and whether these workstations already exist or whether they will need to be acquired in order to open the SHC. Please also explain how you will ensure users' privacy while they are using the workstations (i.e., privacy screens between workstations, separate rooms for workstations, etc.).

C. Stakeholders: In order for a SHC to be successful, a site must have a **local planning committee**. It is typically beneficial if this group is chaired by a key leader such as a chief or other judge, or another lead stakeholder. Members of the committee should include other major local stakeholders, including (but not limited to): local legal aid organization(s); judiciary and clerk staff from the jurisdiction(s) the site will serve; the local bar association; county board; domestic violence survivor advocate groups; and other social or civic community organizations. Other community partners should be recruited as stakeholders, even if they do not serve on your planning committee. See Roles of Stakeholders section below for more information.

For each site that is selected to host a SHC, that site's local planning committee is responsible for working with MLH to complete the SHC planning process. The planning committee chair must assure that the necessary partners are invited and engaged, and facilitate the planning process (with assistance from MLH). Each site plan will include strategies identified by the local planning committee to build sustainable funding for the SHC to continue after any initial funding provided by MLH. If your proposed site is going to serve multiple jurisdictions, please include representatives from all jurisdictions on the planning committee and as community partners.

Please outline your proposed local planning committee and list other community partners and stakeholders who are committed to the project – we are looking for a breadth of contacts and depth in collaborative efforts with these partners. Please also submit two or three letters of commitment from community partners and stakeholders. Please identify which stakeholder is the lead applicant that will be primarily responsible for handling the financial aspects of the SHC (i.e., which stakeholder will employ the navigator if the site has a designated navigator, handle purchasing of equipment and supplies, annual accounting, etc.).

D. Navigators: Navigators are non-lawyers who assist SHC users with using the Michigan Legal Help website and provide other appropriate assistance. They do not give legal advice. In Illinois, where this model has been operational for more than 10 years, frequently the SHC is located in the law library where the law librarian helps patrons navigate the web site. In

smaller locales, public librarians sometimes fill that function. Larger SHCs with a high volume of expected visitors often have one full time or two part-time navigators with smaller sites using one part-time navigator with set hours posted.

If a site is going to be located in a staffed library, that site may opt to train library staff to act as navigators to assist patrons with the website. Potential sites are encouraged to think creatively about who might be good navigators – whether existing staff may fulfill a navigator position, or whether your area has paralegal or law students who could serve as interns, externs, or volunteers (although all students must be supervised, and reminded not to give legal advice). Navigators are employees of the SHC or the entity where the SHC is housed, not of MPLP or MLH.

Please explain how your site will be staffed, and who will supervise the navigators.

E. Plan for Sustainability: Each potential SHC site needs to outline a plan for long-term sustainability of the site and the costs associated with operation of the site, including navigators, occasional computer/printer upgrades and maintenance, and office supplies. The MLH will assist with sustainability planning and will also assist the selected sites with start-up costs and equipment costs (see below), with a possibility for additional stipends where necessary. However, proposing sites must demonstrate some capacity for long-term sustainability and/or fundraising for the future of the SHC. Michigan’s existing self-help centers have found that local investment not only helps residents and courts but in the end can save funding costs for courts. In Grand Rapids, a study showed that the Legal Assistance Center saved the equivalent of 2 or more court staff’s time in trying to assist self-represented litigants. In Illinois, every county now has a staffed SHC affiliated with their statewide client web site.

Please include a one year SHC budget in your proposal, and suggest how your SHC could be sustained in the future. We suggest referring to the following to determine estimated costs of operating the site: the technical specifications attached; potential costs related to space for the SHC; hourly wages of county employees or librarian staff to determine costs of navigator, and a small budget for office supplies (paper, pens, etc.). Note whether these costs are already covered, such as library personnel who will assist patrons and is already on staff as part of the library budget.

F. Commitment to Michigan Legal Help Website and Uniformity: One primary goal of the Michigan Legal Help Program is uniformity and efficiency. This includes using existing resources to maintain high quality materials and a user friendly website so that its products are updated and trustworthy. Because the self-help centers are based on the Michigan Legal Help website, all stakeholders **must** be committed to using the site and its materials at their SHCs. This means that the Centers must **not** distribute other versions of materials that are available on the site or

create or use their own web pages covering those topics – they must instead use the materials that are on the Michigan Legal Help site. This will remain true as MLH expands and additional materials are available on the site. MLH will assist SHC sites in developing a customized local home page which leads to the statewide website.

Centers and court staff must also agree to help MLH keep the new statewide website up to date by providing MLH with information upon request or advising MLH should local procedures change. Furthermore, all courts related to the SHC site **must** accept pleadings produced using the site. All court forms produced using the site are SCAO-approved.

This also includes a commitment to the statewide MLH branding protocols, and the evaluation protocols for MLH, which will be used to evaluate each self-help center and also for future planning purposes. Each SHC will be expected to keep statistics concerning number of users, types of materials accessed, and other statistics according to protocols developed by MLH. MLH will provide training and assistance to help SHC sites accomplish this.

It also includes agreement to assist in developing and complying with quality assurance protocols or guidelines for the operations of SHCs in Michigan. In addition, all selected sites will participate in the evaluation of the MLH. These requirements, and other information, are contained in the Michigan Legal Help Self-Help Center Operation Protocols attached.

In your proposal, please include a statement of commitment to these principles.

G. Demonstrated Need: What is particular to your proposed SHC's service area that makes getting a SHC important? What is unique about your county and its residents that make their need particularly compelling? How many patrons do you expect the proposed SHC to serve each month? How did you reach that estimate?

4. ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to participating in the local planning committees related to their local SHC, individual stakeholders have other suggested roles, which are outlined below:

Community partners: Community partners are integral to the planning and success of the legal self-help center. These partners may include the local bar association, county board, domestic violence survivor advocate groups, and other social or civic organizations. The SHC staff relies on these partners for continuing support in raising public awareness so that the center continues to provide free legal information to vulnerable community residents. Community partners also refer clients to the SHC and help provide information about local organizations to the website to assist with legal and non-legal referrals.

Public library: Particularly in rural counties, the public library is often the only place that provides public access computers with fast and reliable internet access. These libraries are also usually open when the courthouse is closed. Librarians can be natural “navigators” who are accustomed to providing the public with information, but not legal advice. SHC sites located in courts may want to also consider opening additional satellite SHC offices in local libraries.

Local legal aid organizations: A SHC’s local legal aid organization is an essential component of the legal services delivery system to low-income residents, senior citizens, and the disabled. If a Center patron fits in any of these populations, he/she may be able to obtain legal advice and representation from a local legal aid attorney. Additionally, legal aid organizations will be a source of referrals to the SHC for those clients they cannot serve.

Bar associations and lawyer referral services: Local bar leadership and assistance in educating bar members is essential to the success of each SHC.

Judiciary and court clerks: They are key partners in setting up a legal SHC and continued operations of the SHC. Without their support, the Center will not be successful. Both have a continuing role in promoting the SHC and ensuring that the legal self-help center continues to operate efficiently whether or not the SHC is located at the court. Clerk staff are encouraged to distribute a one-page handout with legal assistance referral information to distribute to pro se litigants (hand-outs will be provided to SHC sites for this purpose).

Human Services Organizations: Local community organizations can often direct their patrons to legal self-help resources, including the website and SHC, and they can help identify emerging needs and also receive referrals of self-represented litigants who have collateral non-legal issues related to their problem.

Michigan Legal Help Program: MLH is responsible for the Michigan Legal Help website, upon which each local SHC is based. MLH is also responsible for the development of each SHC site’s local SHC homepage. MLH will provide ongoing training and support to SHC partners including navigators, court and clerk staff, librarians, DV advocates, etc.

5. THINGS TO BE PROVIDED BY THE MICHIGAN LEGAL HELP PROGRAM

MLH will assist the local planning committee with the SHC planning process – helping to identify key partners, convene meetings, etc. MLH will also provide materials and support needed to open each SHC. This includes signage, brochures and other publicity for the SHC, press releases, text for county board resolutions, sample job descriptions for navigators, etc. MLH will guide each local planning committee through the process of setting up their SHC site. MLH will also create a specific web landing page for the statewide website for each SHC.

MLH will provide initial and ongoing training for the SHC navigators, and ongoing technical support for the SHCs for things related to the website. MLH will not provide technical support for the equipment in the SHC.

A limited amount of funds are available to help with start-up costs. This could mean equipment for a site, or funds for printing promotional materials, or other start-up costs that a site needs. Funds from a total pool of about \$30,000 may be used to assist the chosen SHC sites. If your site does not need financial help to participate as an MLH-affiliated site, please indicate that in your proposal so that if your proposal is selected, we can allocate these funds to other sites that need help. Please indicate whether you request a portion of these funds, the amount requested and what they would be used for, e.g. to help defray operating or other costs for the first year of operations upon a demonstrated need, equipment, or something else. The site's longer term sustainability strategy should also be outlined as it will be considered when the MLH is selecting SHC sites.

6. FORMAT AND DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS

RFP responses should be emailed to Angela Tripp at trippa@lsscm.org by June 28th, 2013. Questions regarding the proposal or the process can also be directed to Angela at trippa@lsscm.org or 734-998-6100 x 152.

Proposals should address all points noted above and affirmatively state a commitment to the SHC responsibilities noted herein. Proposals should also provide any additional information you think MLH should know.

7. PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS and PROJECT TIMELINE

The Michigan Legal Help Program, with assistance from the MLH Self-Help Center sub-committee, will review proposals, and conduct follow-up interviews with selected SHC applicants before deciding which sites will be opened in 2013. It is expected that the SHC choices will be made by August 1, 2013, and that all sites will begin operation before December, 2013.

**Recommended Minimum Specifications
For Legal Self-Help Center Public Access Computers
(updated June 2011)**

Computers:

- Core 2 Duo
- 2GB of RAM
- Sound card
- Front headphone jack

Peripherals:

- Laser printer (capacity depends on traffic, but ideally 500 sheet tray and at least 8ppm)
- Monitor (flat screen preferred); should be set at a minimum resolution of 1024x768 (if monitor is not widescreen) or 1280x800 (if monitor is widescreen)
- Headphones (speakers optional)
- Mouse
- Keyboard

Software:

- Windows Operating System (XP Pro or 7)
- Microsoft Word 2003 or above (Word Processing Software required for HotDocs RTF files)
- Internet Explorer 7.0 or above (required for HotDocs automated documents)
- Flash 9 or above (required for A2J automated documents)
- Adobe Reader 9 or above (required for PDFs on site and in HotDocs/A2Js)
- Antivirus software
- Anti-spyware software (if not part of antivirus)
- Internet content filtering/blocking software, if the center wants to block access to certain websites, such as Cyber Patrol or similar (<http://www.cyberpatrol.com/>) . (may already be in use at the location – check with IT department)
- Hard drive and configuration protection software, such as “Drive Shield” or similar (<http://www.centuriontech.com/products/driveshield/>)
- Windows Firewall enabled or ^{3rd} party firewall software (such as McAfee's personal firewall)

Internet Connection:

- Broadband required. Actual configuration and costs (T1, partial T1, DSL, or Cable) depend on what is available in a particular location.
- Router - depends on the available broadband connection. Linksys is our preferred router/switch manufacturer.

Consumables:

- Printer paper
- Printer toner and/or drum units (depending on printer)

Michigan Legal Help Program Operating Protocols for Michigan Legal Help Affiliated Self-Help Centers

I. Introduction and Purpose

These protocols apply to all local Self-Help Centers (SHC) selected to be part of the Michigan Legal Help Program and affiliated with the www.MichiganLegalHelp.org website. In order to meet mutual goals of assuring quality and consistency throughout the Michigan Legal Help Program statewide, each SHC is expected to operate according to these protocols and to work as needed with website vendor, the Michigan Poverty Law Program (MPLP) on plans to implement them. These are initial protocols and may be changed or revised in the future.

The Michigan Legal Help SHC sites are part of the overall purpose of the Michigan Legal Help Program to promote coordination and quality of support for persons representing themselves in civil legal matters in Michigan. The purpose of the SHC project is to help communities open (or sustain or expand pre-existing) legal Self-Help Centers that use the new statewide interactive self-help website www.MichiganLegalHelp.org to:

- Provide access to legal information and court forms to individuals in Michigan who are representing themselves in court or need information about legal topics
- Provide court staff, librarians and others with a helpful resource to which they can refer self-represented litigants who need assistance
- Aid in the efficiency of court operations by providing self-represented litigants with access to quality legal information, access to computer programs which will assist them in properly completing specific court forms, and jurisdiction-specific procedural instructions for completing common and simple legal matters
- Provide referrals to local legal organizations, including legal aid agencies and the private bar, for individuals seeking an attorney
- Provide referrals to local community organizations, for individuals seeking non-legal assistance related to their legal problems.

II. Operations and Services

A. *Location:* Each SHC site should be located in a space convenient to the public, such as a courthouse law library or other dedicated room in a courthouse, in a public library, or a community center.

B. *Hours of operation:* Each SHC site should establish and maintain regular hours of operation that provide the most effective access possible for the public.

C. *Technical requirements:* Each SHC site must have one or more workstations (computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse); printer; headphones for each workstation; high speed internet connection; and a privacy screen for each monitor/workstation. Recommended technical specifications are attached. For larger self-help centers with a high volume of traffic expected, more workstations will be necessary.

D. *Planning committee:* Each SHC site must have a local planning committee. The local planning committee should be chaired by a key leader such as a chief or other judge, or another lead stakeholder. Members of the committee should include other major local stakeholders, including (but not limited to): local legal aid organization(s); judiciary and clerk staff from the jurisdiction(s) the site will serve; the local bar association; county board; domestic violence survivor advocate groups; and other social or civic community organizations. Other community partners should be recruited as stakeholders, even if they do not serve on your planning committee.

Each site's local planning committee is responsible for working with MPLP to complete the SHC planning and implementation process. The planning committee leadership must assure that the necessary partners are included and engaged, and facilitate the committee process (with assistance from MPLP).

E. *Financial lead:* Each SHC site must designate an appropriate entity which will be responsible for handling the financial aspects of the SHC. This stakeholder will employ the navigator if the site has a designated staff Navigator, handle purchasing of equipment and supplies, annual accounting, financial reporting and other relevant financial and related administrative tasks.

F. *Navigators:* Each SHC site should identify one or more Navigator to staff the SHC. Navigators are non-lawyers who assist SHC users with using the Michigan Legal Help website and provide other appropriate assistance. They do not give legal advice. Staff who are navigators are employees of the SHC or the entity where the SHC is housed, not of MPLP or of the Michigan Legal Help Program. Continuity of staffing should be an important goal of each SHC site. Navigators should be available whenever the SHC site is open to the public. Having a primary Navigator who is a volunteer is not ideal as a long term solution for a SHC, but is permissible, subject to adequate supervision. Having attorneys serve as Navigators is also not ideal since the Navigator must provide only information and not legal advice, but if attorneys are used they should be instructed in the Navigator role to avoid creating an attorney client relationship.

G. Training of Navigators and other key personnel: All Navigators and any other key personnel such as supervisors or assistants must satisfactorily complete training provided by MPLP or its designees. This training will help navigators and other key personnel develop knowledge and quality skills to provide Navigator services, to comply with ethical and other guidelines to avoid the unauthorized practice of law (including distinguishing between information and legal advice) and for any related administrative or supervisory duties.

H. Supervision of Navigators: Each SHC site shall provide adequate supervision of SHC navigators. Supervision shall include the following: overseeing the statistics and data collection about SHC visitors; conformity with these Protocols; the general operation of the SHC; regular performance evaluations of the Navigator(s); and all other aspects of supervision normally undertaken for an employee. The supervisor shall also help facilitate the Navigator's relationship with court staff and other key stakeholders, if necessary. All Navigators, volunteers and other staff of a SHC site should have written position descriptions summarizing their expected duties.

I. Volunteers: If a SHC site chooses to use volunteers, protocols should be developed to provide for their screening and training. The site's Navigator(s) must provide oversight of volunteers, and their work should routinely be evaluated by the site Navigator or the Navigator's supervisor.

J. Plan for sustainability: Each SHC site needs to outline a plan for long-term sustainability of the site and the costs associated with operation of the site, including Navigators, occasional computer/printer upgrades and maintenance, and office supplies.

K. Requirement to use Michigan Legal Help website: Because the SHC sites are based on the Michigan Legal Help website, all SHC sites must use the website and its materials. The SHC sites must not distribute other versions of materials that are available on the Michigan Legal Help website, create or use their own web pages covering those topics, or provide links to other resources covering those topics. MPLP will assist SHC sites in developing a customized portal page which leads to the Michigan Legal Help website. It is not expected that supplemental materials and resources would be needed in the areas covered by the website, particularly since the website will include SCAO forms that must be accepted by all courts and information about local court procedures. However, if a SHC site believes that any supplemental materials or other resources are needed in areas covered by the website, these must be reviewed and approved by MPLP before use. SHCs are also asked to share with MPLP online or other materials and resources in areas not yet covered by the Michigan Legal Help website in order to receive input and help assure consistent messages by the overall Michigan Legal Help project.

All courts related to the SHC site must accept pleadings and court forms produced using the website. To the greatest extent possible, all court forms used on the site will be SCAO-approved.

L. Requirement to use Statewide Evaluation Protocols: Each SHC site must also use the statewide evaluation protocols, which evaluate each self-help center to assist in improving that individual site and the overall Michigan Legal Help Program and also for future planning purposes. Each SHC site which is staffed will be expected to keep statistics concerning the

number of users, types of materials accessed, and other statistics according to protocols provided by MPLP. In addition, all SHC sites will participate in the evaluation of the overall project, in addition to evaluation of each individual site.

M. Requirement to use Michigan Legal Help branding and cooperate in communications to the public: Each SHC site must also use the Michigan Legal Help branding or co-branding protocols provided by the Michigan Legal Help Program identifying the SHC as a partner program in the Michigan Legal Help overall. Each SHC site must submit proposed public announcements, press releases and similar communications to MPLP for advance review.

N. Commitment to keeping the Michigan Legal Help website current: Each SHC site must help MPLP keep the new statewide website up to date by providing MPLP with information upon request or advising MPLP should local procedures change. Assistance from the SHC sites will also be welcome regarding local community and legal resources to be listed on the Michigan Legal Help website. MPLP will consider all input in good faith, but final decisions about entities, links and resources to be listed or other content to be posted on the Michigan Legal Help website rest with MPLP.

O. Integration within the court: The SHC staff should arrange regular meetings with court administration, judicial officers, and other operational staff to discuss administrative and general issues facing self-represented litigants. These meetings may be coordinated by staff or members of the local planning committee.

P. Community collaboration: Each SHC site should utilize the referrals available on the Michigan Legal Help site and develop referral protocols with all appropriate community based organizations and lawyer referral services to ensure efficient and effective referral of matters where counsel is necessary. MPLP will provide samples of model community referral protocols to each SHC site.

Q. Legal referrals: SHC site staff must not refer litigants to any particular attorney for representation. All referrals for representation or other services must be to an office or entity listed on the Michigan Legal Help website. These will include legal aid, bar association lawyer referral programs and recognized specialty pro bono panels.

R. Notice to SHC visitors: Each SHC site should display in a conspicuous place a notice in a form provided by MPLP that services are not intended to give one side of a case an advantage over the other, and that no attorney-client relationship exists between the self-help center personnel and the litigant using the center. This notice should include the warning that the absence of an attorney-client relationship means that communications between the litigant and the self-help center staff and volunteers are not privileged and that the self-help center staff and volunteers may provide services to the litigant's opposing party.

III. Scope of Services

- A.** Each SHC site must provide services that are competent, neutral, and unbiased, and that are designed to provide practical legal information to self-represented litigants and do not provide legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship.
- B.** When a litigant cannot be effectively assisted in the SHC, staff shall promptly refer that litigant to appropriate legal assistance whenever possible.
- C.** No SHC site staff shall provide assistance on any issue in which the litigant using SHC services is actively represented by an attorney.
- D.** SHC site staff must not make any public comment about a pending or impending proceeding in the court as provided in the canons of judicial ethics.
- E.** SHC sites should assist litigants to the extent possible whether or not the litigants live in the county where the SHC is located, or whether or not the litigants have a case in that court.
- F.** Each SHC site must comply with all applicable ethics rules, laws or regulations and must also adopt the following ethical guidelines and make them known to all staff and volunteers.

IV. Ethical Guidelines for Self Help Centers

- A. *Independence and integrity.*** All SHC site staff must at all times uphold the independence and integrity of the site.
- B. *Avoiding inappropriate conduct.*** All SHC site staff must recognize that they may be perceived by the public as representatives of the court or the justice system and must at all times avoid engaging in conduct that creates the appearance of impropriety.
- C. *Impartiality and diligence.*** All SHC site staff must perform their duties impartially and diligently. Impartiality means delivering services in a neutral manner. Diligence requires that the staff provide litigants with pertinent information to allow them to address their matter or bring it before the court. This may include appropriate referrals to other resources as well as direct information and assistance at the SHC site.
- D. *Respect and patience.*** All SHC site staff must be aware of the social and economic differences that exist among litigants and treat users of the center with patience and respect. However, if a litigant becomes unruly, disruptive, violent, or harasses SHC site staff, staff may ask the litigant to leave the office.
- E. *Bias and prejudice.*** All SHC site staff must assist litigants who seek assistance without exhibiting bias or prejudice based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or other similar factors.
- F. *Competent legal information.*** SHC site staff must provide the litigants who seek assistance with accurate procedural and legal information and education so that the litigants will have increased access to the court. SHC sites are not intended to replace private counsel.

G. Full notification of limits of service. SHC site staff must ensure that conspicuous notice is given that no attorney-client relationship exists between the center, or its staff, and the user of the SHC site. The notice must include the admonition that the absence of an attorney-client relationship means that communications between the user of the SHC and the SHC staff are not privileged and that the services may be provided to the other party in litigation. MPLP will provide each SHC site with a notice to display.

H. Public comment. SHC site staff must not make any public comment about the litigants or about any pending or impending matter in the court.

I. Gifts or payments. SHC site staff must not accept anything of value in the form of gifts, favors, bequests, or loans from the litigants whom they assist, since this may give the appearance of impropriety or partiality.

J. Communications with officers of the court. SHC site staff must avoid ex parte communications with judges or judges' staff. Communications about purely procedural matters or the functioning of the court are allowed and encouraged.

K. Communications with represented litigants. SHC site staff must not provide assistance on any issue on which an attorney actively represents a litigant. This does not prohibit assistance on how to file a substitution of attorney, or respond to a request to be relieved as counsel.

L. Attorneys volunteering in a self-help center. Volunteer attorneys must not distribute business cards or otherwise solicit or accept clients from their work at the self-help center. Volunteer attorneys must not refer litigants to any particular attorney for representation. All referrals for representation or other services must be to an office or entity listed on the Michigan Legal Help website.

Revised May, 2013