Information For Pro-Se Litigants

1. As a *pro se* litigant, you are acting as your own attorney. You will be expected to know and follow the law and court rules just as any attorney, including the Texas Rules of Evidence, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, Harris County Local Rules, and the Lawyer's Creed. If you fail to follow the rules, you may permanently lose important rights.

2. The judge, court staff (including the court coordinator, court clerk, court reporter, bailiff), and opposing counsel cannot give you legal advice.

3. Do not attempt to communicate privately with the judge. The term "communication" includes contact by means of phone calls, letters, voice mail messages, faxes, e-mail messages, and direct conversations. You may communicate with the judge if *all* parties and their attorneys (if they are represented) are present. Any such unilateral contact is called "*ex parte*" communication and the district judge will not considered it for any information or argument offered in such a manner for any purpose. The court will return an *ex parte* communication to you unread and notify the other side of the communication. Prohibited communications do not include formal pleadings, motions, and request for relief filed with the clerk.

4. It is your responsibility to provide the Court with a current and reliable mailing address and telephone number. Once you file your pleadings in the case, the clerk will notify you by mail of hearings and / or motions. If you move, you must provide your new address and telephone number to the clerk and the court. If you move and you do not get your mail, you may permanently lose important rights.

5. Your requests to the court should be made in a written motion.

6. You must send a copy of every pleading you file with the court to the opposing attorney, or party (if they do not have an attorney).

7. If you have received notice that a hearing has been scheduled, you must be prepared to present your evidence and witnesses.

8. **How to Get Ready for Court** – You can go to court yourself and watch other cases before yours is scheduled. If you do this, you will see how the court works, where everyone sits and what they do and say. Plan to do this a few days or weeks before your have to go to court.

9. **The Hearing -** At the hearing, a district judge will hear your case. Each party will have a chance to tell his or her side of the story. It is important to bring your paperwork and your evidence such as photos, witnesses, bills, receipts, contracts, or anything else that will prove your case.

10. **How to Dress -** Dress as though you were going to an important job interview. Be neat and clean. Do not wear shorts, flip-flops, tank tops, halter tops, sandals, hats, or other

casual clothing. The court will order you removed from the courtroom if you are dressed inappropriately; this may result in a default of your case.

11. **Timeliness -** Always get to court on time. A good rule of thumb is to arrive at least thirty minutes early in order to allow for time to locate parking, clear the security check and locate the proper courtroom.

12. **Courtroom Demeanor -**You and your witnesses should be quiet in court.

- Do not smoke or chew gum.
- Turn your off cell phone, pagers or other audible nuisances when you are in the courtroom.
- Do not go in and out of the courtroom while waiting for your case to be called.
- Do not bring children to court unless they have been subpoenaed.
- During your case speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, and stay calm.
- Stand when speaking to the judge.
- Call the judge "*Your Honor*."
- Do not interrupt the judge, the attorneys or any other party in the courtroom.
- At all times you should retain a composed and attentive posture whether you are in the audience, appearing as a witness, appearing as a party.
- It is never proper to speak, even in a whisper, with friends or other audience members while court is in session.

13. Violations of any of the above guidelines may result in sanctions being granted against you.

The following associations may be able to assist you in obtaining an attorney:

- **Houston Bar Association Lawyer Referral Program** (713) 759-1133
  1001 Fannin, Suite #1300
  Houston, Texas 77002
- **The State Bar of Texas**
  Lawyer Referral Information Service
  (800) 252-9690 or 1-877-9TEXBAR
- **Lone Star Legal Aid**
  (713) 652-0077 or (800) 733-8394

HOUSTON VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROGRAM
RESOURCE AND REFERRAL GUIDE

FAMILY LAW

Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program (HVLP)
Representation in family and general civil legal matters
713-228-0732

Lone Star Legal Aid
Family & other civil legal matters
713-652-0077

Houston Lawyer Referral Service
For-fee ($) referrals to specialists
713-237-9429

Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)
Counseling & legal representation
713-224-9911

Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
Divorces, protective orders, modifications, enforcement; limited services for non-domestic violence
713-528-2121

NAACP Legal Redress Program
Family law, probate, landlord/tenant, consumer; services for persons with HIV/AIDS
713-526-3389

University of Houston Legal Aid Clinic
Civil & family law
713-743-2094

South Texas College of Law
Simple divorces
713-652-0009

Texas Southern University School of Law Clinic
Family, civil, housing, consumer, immigration
713-313-1139

Southeast Texas Legal Clinic
General civil matters for HIV+ clients
713-523-7852

Attorney General's Office
Child support, paternity establishment
713-974-4876

Domestic Relations Office
Enforcement of child support, visitation, and paternity establishment
713-755-6757

Dispute Resolution Center
Mediation services for disputes between neighbors, family members, landlord/tenant, employer/employee, consumer

matters
713-755-8274

DISABILITY-RELATED ISSUES

Advocacy, Inc.
713-974-7691

The Arc of Texas
Programs and services for persons with mental retardation
800-252-9729

Mental Health/Mental Retardation Authority of Harris Co.
Information, assessment, and referral
713-970-4444

GENERAL LEGAL

HVLP
713-228-0732

Lone Star Legal Aid
713-652-0077

Dispute Resolution Center
713-755-8274

Houston Lawyer Referral Service
713-237-9429

NAACP Legal Redress Program
713-526-3389

LegalLine
Free phone advice on 1st & 3rd Wednesday each month, 5-9 pm
713-759-1133

Consejos Legales
Spanish-version of LegalLine, 1st Thursday each month, 5-9 pm
713-755-1133

Legal Hotline for Older Texans
For 60+ Texans, answer legal questions free, referrals
800-622-2520

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/SHELTERS

Texas Abuse Hotline
24-hour hotline for abuse & neglect of children and elderly
800-252-5400

Family Violence Legal Hotline
Counseling & information about legal rights & options
800-374-4673

Bay Area Women's Center
Women's shelter
281-422-2292

HAWC
713-528-2121

AVDA
713-224-9911

Family Violence Unit of District Attorney's Office
Parental kidnapping, family violence, protective orders, criminal non-support
713-755-5888

Houston Police Department's Family Violence Unit
713-308-1100

Harris County Sheriff's Family Violence Unit
713-967-5743

Children's Protective Services (CPS)
Investigation of child abuse
713-394-4000

Adult Protective Services
Investigation of elder abuse
713-767-2700

GUARDIANSHIP/PROBATE

HVLP
713-228-0732

South Texas College of Law
713-652-0009

University of Houston Legal Aid Clinic
713-743-2094

Lone Star Legal Aid
713-652-0077

Houston Lawyer Referral
713-237-9429

NAACP Legal Redress Program
713-526-3389

IMMIGRATION

Catholic Charities
713-874-6570

YMCA International Services
713-339-9015

IRS Issues

HVLP Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic
Tax controversies, innocent spouse
713-228-0735

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
Free tax return preparation
800-829-1040

Consumer Issues

HVLP
713-228-0732

Lone Star Legal Aid
713-652-0077

NAACP Legal Redress Program
713-526-3389

Houston Lawyer Referral Service
713-237-9429

Dispute Resolution Center
713-755-8274

Better Business Bureau
713-868-9500

Attorney General's Consumer Protection Hotline
Consumer complaints against individual or business
800-621-0508

Consumer Fraud Harris County DA
713-755-5836

Employment/Wage Issues

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Wage disputes involving discrimination issues
713-209-3320

Texas Workforce Commission
Employment-related problems
800-832-2829

State Board of Labor
Salary complaints & disputes
800-832-9243

Social Security Matters

South Texas College of Law
713-652-0009

Southeast Texas Legal Clinic
Only for persons with HIV/AIDS
713-523-7852

NAACP
713-526-3389

CRIMINAL MATTERS

Harris Co. Criminal Lawyers
713-227-2404

Harris Co. Criminal Lawyers
Spanish
713-224-4864

District Attorney's Office
Files criminal charges
713-755-7114

Texas Southern University
Traffic violations and misdemeanors
713-313-1139

CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

American Civil Liberties Union
713-942-8146

GLBT ISSUES

Lambda Legal
214-219-8585

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Houston Police Dispatch
713-222-3131

HPD Family Violence Unit
713-308-1100

Harris Co. Sheriff's Office
713-221-6000

Harris Co. Constable's Office
281-376-3472

OTHER RESOURCES

Rape Crisis Hotline
713-528-RAPE

Crisis Intervention of Houston
Crisis intervention & suicide prevention, 24/7
713-HOTLINE

United Way Helpline
Provides referrals to agencies and social services; emergency aid, continuing education, medical resources, shelters
2-1-1 | 713-957-HELP | 800-833-5948

Harris Co. Social Services
Assistance with payment of rent, utility, phone bills
713-696-7900

Texas Dept. of Human Services
Help with food, shelter
713-767-2000

Interfaith Ministries
Rent & utility assistance
713-522-3955

Star of Hope Mission
Emergency shelter
713-748-0700

AARP (American Association of Retired Persons)
800-424-2277

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
Free tax return preparation
800-829-1040

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

TEXAS RULES OF COURT:
http://www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/

HARRIS COUNTY LOCAL RULES:
http://www.justex.net/LocalRules/LocalRules.aspx

LIBRARY RESOURCES:

Harris County Law Library http://www.co.harris.tx.us/law/
1019 Congress, 17th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002

Hours of Operation:
Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Saturday 9:00 a.m – 5:00 p.m

Houston Public Library: http://www.houstonlibrary.org/
500 McKinney Street
Houston, Texas 77002

FREE LEGAL RESEARCH SITES ON THE INTERNET:

http://www.co.harris.tx.us/law/research.html

http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Index.aspx