

## **Top Ten Tips for Self-Represented Litigant (SRL) Cases:**

1. **Use opening statements/instructions.** A brief opening statement or a sign with basic instructions on courtroom procedure can help to alleviate concerns and address basic questions from SRLs.
2. **Encourage staff courtesy.** Lead by example and encourage your clerks and other court personnel to treat SRLs with the same respect and courtesy.
3. **Demonstrate empathy.** Understand the tremendous stress that court can place on all litigants, especially SRLs, and try to demonstrate empathy. Acknowledge their concerns and thank them for their testimony, even if you are ruling against them.
4. **Accommodate disabilities.** Remember that a seemingly difficult SRL may have a disability or mental illness that is a contributing factor to their behavior. Make sure your courtroom is welcoming and accessible for all individuals, even those with physical or mental disabilities.
5. **Be patient.** Remember that taking a few minute to explain something to an SRL can save you time in the long run, benefit the other SRLs in the room, and help the SRLs to maintain faith in the integrity of the judicial system.
6. **Utilize self help and other resources.** Know which resources are available in your courthouse (e.g. standardized forms, language access resources, help desks, court-based self help centers) and your county (e.g. legal aid agencies, social service agencies, bar associations, library-based self help centers). Be prepared to share this information with SRLs when appropriate.
7. **Know your own biases.** It's easy to think you know what someone will say or do based on your prior experience with other SRLs. Don't make assumptions.
8. **Be flexible.** Remember that rule 63(a)(4) allows you to "make reasonable efforts, consistent with the law and court rules, to facilitate the ability of self-represented litigants to be fairly heard."
9. **Be active.** Don't be afraid to ask questions and engage with SRLs who seems nervous, confused, or scared. Make sure the SRL has an opportunity to speak, especially if only one side is represented.
10. **Don't let your emotions get the best of you.** Don't let argumentative SRLs drive you to anger and frustration. Communicate with them calmly and clearly and disengage as necessary when the conversation is no longer productive.