

## **WHAT COURT STAFF CAN AND CANNOT DO FOR YOU**

The Court, including the judge, the magistrate, clerk's office personnel, and all court staff, ***must remain impartial at all times***. This basic rule protects everyone coming to court, including you, from unfairness and injustice.

This rule means that no one connected with the court can take sides in any matter before the court. Court personnel will give the same types of limited information to people on both sides of a case, but they cannot provide legal advice to anyone. Please note that information parties or witnesses provide to court staff is not confidential.

The lists below explain what the court can and cannot provide to you.

### **What Court Staff CAN DO**

1. **Court Staff can** provide you with the telephone number of local lawyer referral services. The telephone number for the RI Bar Association Lawyer Referral is (401) 421-5740. They are located at 111 Cedar Street, Providence, RI 02903.
2. **Court Staff can** explain and answer questions about how the court works. This is limited to very basic items such as court hours of operation, hearing schedules, and the type of proceeding on the docket.
3. **Court Staff can** provide you general information about court rules, procedures, and practices.
4. **Court Staff can** provide you information from your case file, including information as to when and where your next court hearing is.
5. **Court Staff can** review your papers for completeness by checking for signatures, notarization, correct county name, and correct case number.

### **What Court Staff CANNOT DO**

1. **Court Staff cannot** provide legal advice or interpretations, or recommendations about what to do. Only a lawyer can give you legal advice. Staff can answer questions that call for factual information—these are generally questions that start with “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” or “how.” They cannot answer questions that call for an opinion or guidance about what you should do—these are generally questions that start with “should,” or “whether.” For example, court staff can explain court rules and procedure, but they cannot suggest which of several available procedures you should follow. Court staff might be able to define a legal word or phrase that you are unfamiliar with, but they cannot tell you what steps to take in light of that definition.
2. **Court Staff cannot** advise you whether or not you should bring your case to court or what steps to take while in court, or give you an opinion about what will happen after you present your case to the court.
3. **Court Staff cannot** advise you what to say in court, other than simple matters of courtesy such as “You should address the Court as ‘Your Honor’.”
4. **Court Staff cannot** let you talk to the judge outside the courtroom. They also cannot talk to the judge on your behalf about your case.
5. **Court Staff cannot** fill out a form for you, or tell you what words to use in your court papers. Court staff might be able to provide a blank form for your use.

6. **Court Staff cannot** sign an order or change an order signed by the judge. We cannot explain the legal meaning or effect of a court order to you.