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Legal Research Guide for Assisting Pro Se (Self-Represented) Patrons in Illinois

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LEGAL RESEARCH GUIDE FOR ASSISTING PRO SE (SELF-REPRESENTED) PATRONS IN ILLINOIS

INTRODUCTION

Law, generally, is a broad subject with many offshoots. Moreover, it is very complex with many intricacies – so complex one needs a license to practice it. The skills practitioners use to conduct legal research have been honed over years of schooling and practice. Yet, lay people often need the ability to locate these vast materials too. Because so many skills are necessary for legal research, it would be difficult to address all of them in this guide.

The goal of this guide is to provide general guidance about assisting pro se patrons with basic legal research and to provide specific materials, which can aid them in their research, the latter being the primary objective. While this guide primarily focuses on helpful Illinois sources, including referrals to places one might get further legal assistance; it also provides some federal and general legal sources to further help pro se individuals. To achieve these goals the guide is divided into three parts: (I) General Overview; (II) Resource List; and (III) Referrals.

The general overview briefly outlines ways that legal research might differ in the language used, the organization of materials, and the level of background knowledge sources will presume readers have. The resource list provides many sources of information with descriptions of what those sources will provide, as well as places one can find the law, including cases, statutes, and regulations. This portion serves to provide those basic foundational materials pro se patrons may need to perform legal research. This task in itself can be a large undertaking. As noted, the pro se patron is not a legal scholar; nor a practicing attorney. Yet, most legal materials are written for those user groups. While some materials are available for pro se individuals specifically (and are highlighted), these cases, statutes, and administrative materials continue to be cumbersome. The third section includes places that a pro se individual may seek out further help. Also, if you need access to the Internet, call or visit your local public library as they likely can provide you with access.

This guide is not intended to provide legal advice or counsel. It serves only to provide resources for individuals seeking to advocate for themselves in a legal dispute or represent themselves in court. Basic guidance for developing a research plan is also provided.

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

In some ways legal research can be similar to other library or online research. There are, however, some substantial differences in the language used, the organization of materials, and the level of background knowledge sources will presume the reader to possess. Therefore, some basic materials, such as those included here, may help lay users build a foundation for their legal research.

A basic guide to legal research is provided by the American Association of Law Libraries. It includes a discussion of various legal research tools and how to create a research plan at <http://www.aallnet.org/sections/lisp/research.html>. This information may assist you both with the use of this guide and in your research generally. For a very extensive guide, you may wish to consult the Chicago Association of Law Libraries' Guide at <http://new.chicagolawlib.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Finding-Illinois-Law.pdf>. Additionally, you may find Southern Illinois University Law Library's "Glossary of Legal Research Terms" helpful as well. <http://www.law.siu.edu/lawlib/guides/glossary.htm>.

JURISDICTION & COURT INFORMATION

It is necessary and important to understand what court system your matter will be governed by (state, federal, bankruptcy, etc.) and how the structure of that system works (i.e. which court do you file in? which court handles appeals? etc.). Resources for this type of information can usually be found on your local court's website. The links below should help you find that information, along with other relevant information on court systems.

Federal Court Website:

This site provides an interactive court-locator map and substantive information on the federal court system (including bankruptcy court).

<http://www.uscourts.gov/FederalCourts.aspx>

National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Website:

The NCSC supplies a state-by state index of state court websites.

<http://www.ncsc.org/Information-and-Resources/Browse-by-State/State-Court-Websites.aspx>

The NCSC also provides a visual representation of court systems by state, statistical information on various state courts (such as how many cases they hear and what types of claims), and other general information on state courts.

<http://www.courtstatistics.org/>

Illinois Circuit Court Websites:

This site provides links to each of the judicial circuit websites and allows you to choose one's county (under the "Local Court Information" heading. Selecting a county then takes you to that county's circuit website and also provides links to the county's website.

<http://www.state.il.us/court/Links/circuit.asp>

This site also provides an interactive map displaying the various counties and Judicial Circuit.

<http://www.state.il.us/court/CircuitCourt/CircuitMap/Map1.asp>

Local Rules

You should also access the local rules for whichever court you will be appearing. From the individual state or federal court website you should be able to access the rules of that court. For example, to access the Second Circuit rules, one can go from the Illinois Circuit Court Websites link (above), to the 2nd Judicial Circuit webpage, which then has a link to "Local Court Rules" at:

<http://www.illinoissecondcircuit.info/>.

GUIDEBOOKS & RESEARCH GUIDES

Because legal research differs some from other disciplines, it may also be helpful to look at sources that offer guidance on *how* to perform legal research and associated tasks. There are several books on the topic, as well as detailed research guides accessible online. While some of what is within these sources is duplicative of this guide, these sources provide more in-depth coverage of skills necessary for pro se patrons, such as: how to read a case, how to analyze law, legal citations, etc. Some examples are listed below.

Cohen, Morris L. and Kent C. Olson. *Legal Research in a Nutshell*. 11th ed. Eaton, MN: West, 2012.

This book is part of a series ("Nutshells"), which provide general overview on a legal topic*. Written in an easily comprehensible style, it should aid in understanding sources, reading and applying the law, and source selection, as well as in the development of more complex searching strategies.

- *You may also wish to consult subject specific nutshells as well for a substantive overview. Using "Nutshell" as a key word, along with the topic should help you locate these in a catalog (i.e. "nutshell" and "real estate" would bring up Real Estate in a Nutshell)

Sloan, Amy E. *Basic Legal Research*. 5th ed. New York: Aspen Publishers, 2012.

This book is a more comprehensive learning aid, however it is written for a beginning law student not a pro se litigant and may be more complex than other sources. It is, however, a good choice for someone looking to expand their research skills and become more advanced in reading and interpreting the law.

Wojcik, Mark E. *Illinois Legal Research*. 2nd ed. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2009.

While aimed more at law students and practicing attorneys, this book provides in-depth information into researching Illinois law specifically as well as discussion on how to cite Illinois law.

Basics of Legal Research – Cornell Law Library

This guide is not specifically structured for pro se patrons, but it does provide some basic explanation of case reading, citations, and caselaw verification (KeyCite or Shepard's).

<http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/WhatWeDo/ResearchGuides/Basics.cfm>

Other Guidance

There are nine law schools in Illinois. Accessing one or more of the law libraries' webpages may provide helpful research guidance in general and for finding Illinois law. Many schools outline their public access policy, so that you can understand what kind of legal research help a law library may provide. Public institutions tend to have more open public access policies, while private institutions have more varied access policies. Please note, law libraries cannot provide legal advice.

Other libraries in Illinois may also contain helpful Illinois legal information. For example, Illinois State University has a useful guide providing detailed foundational legal information on Illinois at <http://ilstu.libguides.com/ILlaw>. You may also wish to see if your county has a court law library, as it may also be open to the public. Some court libraries may have research terminals that are accessible to the public like that in Lake County (<http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/services/Pages/LawLibrary.aspx>).

Illinois Law Schools' Law Library Websites

*Denotes public law school

DePaul University College of Law (Chicago, IL)	http://www.law.depaul.edu/library/
IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law (Chicago, IL)	http://www.kentlaw.iit.edu/library
John Marshall Law School (Chicago, IL)	http://library.jmls.edu/
Loyola University Chicago School of Law (Chicago, IL)	http://luc.edu/law/library/index.html
Northern Illinois University College of Law (DeKalb, IL)*	http://www.niu.edu/law/library/
Northwestern University School of Law (Chicago, IL)	http://www.law.northwestern.edu/library/
Southern Illinois University School of Law (Carbondale, IL)*	http://www.law.siu.edu/lawlib/
University of Illinois College of Law (Urbana-Champaign, IL)*	http://www.law.illinois.edu/library/
University of Chicago Law School (Chicago, IL)	http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/law/index.html

II. RESOURCE LIST

Many of these print resources are likely available at your local law library and many of the electronic resources, particularly with government information are available for free online. You can check the law library's catalog to see if these resources are available. You should also consult the library's access and reference policies towards public or pro se patrons to understand how the library can assist you.

Understanding the Basics

DICTIONARIES

The language used in law can be very complex. Often words you may be used to speaking will have a more precise, or even different, meaning in the legal community. Legal dictionaries can provide more precise definitions for unknown words or word applications in a legal context.

Nolo's Free Dictionary of Law Terms and Legal Definitions:

Provides free online definitions of legal terms using non-technical language.

<http://www.nolo.com/dictionary>

Nova Publishing Legal Dictionary:

Very similar to Nolo's dictionary in that it is also a free online dictionary and it is specifically aimed at the lay user.

<http://novapublishing.com/catalog/dictionary.php>

Black's Law Dictionary, (10th ed. 2010)(West).

This dictionary is available as a mobile app, online through limited paid commercial databases, and in traditional book form. While it is not free, your local law library (and possibly public library) should have this in print. While this dictionary is much more comprehensive, its definitions are also much more technical.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Legal encyclopedias provide comprehensive but brief articles on various legal topics. In the same manner as general encyclopedias, legal encyclopedias are arranged alphabetically by topic. Most legal encyclopedias contain an index at the end of the final volume. Encyclopedias can be used to provide a topical overview, as well as cites to case law on the topic. While *American Jurisprudence* and *Corpus Juris Secundum* are the most common general legal encyclopedias, they are not freely available online.

You may find these encyclopedias at your local law library. States may have their own specialized encyclopedias as well (e.g. Illinois Jurisprudence).

American Jurisprudence 2d (Am. Jur.) (via Thompson Reuters)

Am. Jur. provides articles with short footnotes citing only those cases the editors have targeted as the most significant. These encyclopedias cite important federal statutory material as well.

Corpus Juris Secundum (C.J.S.) (via Thompson Reuters)

The C.J.S. provides articles that are annotated with relevant case law. The C.J.S. tends to provide more cases citations, and fewer statutes than Am. Jur. If there is an appropriate topic and key number for your subject, C.J.S. will also provide these. Thus, C.J.S. will be helpful in getting you ready to use the various West digests

Illinois Jurisprudence (via LexisNexis)

This encyclopedia, with content specifically focused on Illinois, provides helpful summaries of different areas in Illinois law and in doing so provides citations to various cases, statutes, and regulations. It also highlights certain strategies and gives guidance in certain areas of the law.

Illinois Law and Practice (via Thompson Reuters)

Another Illinois-specific encyclopedia, Illinois Law and Practice also cites to primary authority while giving an overview of the law in the terminology used in Illinois.

WEX- Legal Information Institute Online Community-Built Encyclopedia

This site is a free community-built encyclopedia where individuals can browse and search for various legal topics. Articles are written by members of an editorial board consisting of legal scholars and accomplished attorneys. WEX provides good general overview articles, but cites minimal case law for topics. WEX also functions as a dictionary.

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/>

The Law

PRIMARY SOURCES OF LAW

A primary source in law often refers to the text of the law itself. This means constitutions, statutes, codes, and ordinances, as well as agency decisions or other materials put out by administrative branches. Case law is also primary source law.

STATUTES, CODES, ORDINANCES, ETC.:

United States Code

The United States Code is available for free through the Government Printing Office (GPO). This site allows you to browse by topic within the code or search the code for key terms. Codes are available in print and may be found at your local public, university, or law library.

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/>

Illinois Compiled Statutes

The Illinois General Assembly provides access to Illinois statutes. If you do not know the specific section(s) you are searching for, one can select “Search” near the top of the webpage, and then search either by using keywords or the Act name. One can also search for current bills, legislative reports, and other useful information. The Guide at <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/using.asp> also provides important information you should keep in mind. The Illinois Compiled Statutes are also available in print and may be found at your local Illinois library.

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs.asp>

Other State Codes

Each state has its own state laws. These are sometimes called laws, statues, or codes. The organization of each states law varies. All states now have a website, most of which offer the laws online through the state website. American Law Sources Online (ALSO) provides a link to each state website and provides an online source for most of those codes not listed on the appropriate states site. Codes are available in print and may be found at your local public, university, or law library.

[http://www.lawsource.com/also/#\[United%20States](http://www.lawsource.com/also/#[United%20States)

Municipal Codes

Municode provides links to municipal codes across the United States. Available codes can be downloaded as a PDF file. These codes vary in how easily they may be searched.

<http://www.municode.com/Library/Library.aspx>

Illinois Codes (via Municode)*

Provides a list of the Illinois specific municipal codes available on this website.

<https://www.municode.com/library/il>

*Individual municipalities may have a website as well. Often communities will post their township, city, or county codes on these respective sites.

For instance, one can access Cook County’s municipal code by visiting the county’s webpage at <http://www.co.cook.il.us/portal/server.pt/community/government/226/legislation> or by selecting “Cook County” from the above link, which takes you to https://www.municode.com/library/il/cook_county.

ADMINISTRATIVE SOURCES:

Federal Agencies

Administrative units of the federal government (agencies) are often charged with interpreting the laws that govern their field. Additionally, these agencies drafts rules and regulations pertaining to the areas they govern. These rules, regulations, and decisions are binding. While agencies will have websites of their own which contains this and other relevant information, the federal government also prints all regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The CFR is available in print and may be found at your local public, university, or law library. It is also available online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/>. The online CFR is updated more frequently than in print. USA.gov also provides a comprehensive list of the United States’ government departments and agencies, accessible at <http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml>.

State Agencies

States have administrative units as well. Most state websites link to their state regulations in a location similar to where you can access the laws of the state. State agencies each have their own websites as well. USA.gov also provides helpful contact information at the state level at <http://www.usa.gov/Agencies.shtml#State, Local, and Tribal Government>. Illinois’s website is located at <http://www.illinois.gov/Pages/default.aspx>. This provides links to all three branches of Illinois’s government (the legislative, executive, and judicial branches). Specifically, Illinois’s state agencies are accessible from <http://www.illinois.gov/SitePages/Agencies.aspx>.

If your legal issues has to do with an administrative agency (i.e. DCFS, Department of Revenue, Department of Natural Resources, etc.) you should look at their site for any rules, regulations, or decisions that may affect your issue. State laws are often interpreted by the state attorney general as well. Most states’ attorney general website contains copies of issued opinions interpreting state law. Illinois’s Attorney General opinions can be found at <http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/opinions/index.html>.

The table below provides some agencies that may be helpful:

<p>Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• http://www.state.il.us/dcfs/index.shtml

<p>Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www2.illinois.gov/hfs/Pages/default.aspx
<p>Department of Revenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://tax.illinois.gov/#&panel1-1
<p>Secretary of State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/ Includes Registered Business Information • http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/business_services/home.html

Illinois Administrative Code

The Illinois Administrative Code may be accessible in print at your local public, university, or law library or online at <http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/titles.html>. Make sure to note the disclaimer provided at the top of the webpage.

CASE LAW (JUDICIAL OPINIONS):

Case law refers to reported judicial opinions that interpret the law and become law themselves. A judicial opinion can only be cited as primary law where it is binding on the court applying it and no higher court has a decision in opposition to its ruling. In all other circumstances cases have less authority and serve only in a persuasive manner*. Published cases are published in the West Reporter System. Complete copies of the Reporters can be found at a law library. Some online sources provide case law free, though coverage is incomplete.

*The process of determining the ‘value’ of case law as a primary source is covered more fully in the general overview documents.

United States Court Opinions

The GPO provides opinions from the United States district, appellate, and bankruptcy courts going back to 2004.

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=USCOURTS>

Recent Supreme Court Opinions

Opinions of the United States Supreme Court may be found on the Supreme Court’s webpage at <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/opinions.aspx>. These opinions may be searched using the Case Citation Finder: <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/casefinder.aspx>.

Illinois Court Opinions

The Illinois Courts Website provides opinions from the Illinois Supreme Court and appellate courts that may be searched going back to 1996. Workers' Compensation opinions are also included dating back to 2005 at <http://www.state.il.us/court/Opinions/archive.asp>. For recent appellate court decisions see <http://www.state.il.us/court/Opinions/archive.asp> and for recent Illinois Supreme Court decisions see http://www.state.il.us/court/Opinions/recent_supreme.asp.

You may also wish to check for a court library near you, by visiting the Illinois Judiciary map and finding your district or circuit at <http://www.state.il.us/court/CircuitCourt/CircuitMap/Map1.asp>. The court library may have Illinois court opinions going back further than most other free resources.

Pacer

<http://www.pacer.gov/findcase.html>

PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Resource) provides access to case and docket information at the federal court level. You must register for an account to use PACER, and you are charged \$0.10 per page retrieved (with a cap at \$3.00/document), but if your total adds up to less than \$15.00 in a quarter, you will not be charged for your use. Refer to <http://www.pacer.gov/psc/hfaq.html> for more information on using PACER.

You may also wish to browse www.recapthelaw.org to see if the document you seek has already been added to this archive. You can also add your PACER documents to the archive so that others can access them freely as well.

FindLaw

FindLaw allows for the browsing of state materials, including case law, as well as federal and Supreme Court judicial opinions. Simple browse sorts by jurisdiction and topic, more advanced browsing allows for searches based on party information, citation, topic, or to browse decisions by jurisdiction.

<http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/>

Google Scholar

Google Scholar now allows searches based on Google algorithms to retrieve cases published on the web from a variety of sources.

<http://scholar.google.com/schhp?hl=en&tab=ws>

DIGESTS

Digests are the traditional means of finding cases and are typically published to correspond to various reporters. Examples of jurisdiction-based digests include the Federal Practice Digest, the Illinois Digest, and the Pacific Digest. The Decennial Digest covers all jurisdictions in 10-year increments. Digests divide the law into hundreds of subtopics, which are then subdivided into principles or points of law. The digest links the various points of law and provides brief abstracts that summarize the points of a case and provide citations for each case. Digests can be extremely helpful but are not available online without a commercial database (i.e. LexisNexis or Westlaw). You may find digests at your local law library and a reference librarian may be able to provide assistance on how to use digests.

CORE DATABASES

The two primary databases for legal research are WestlawNext and LexisNexis, while Bloomberg Law has also recently been developed into a competitor. These are extremely expensive commercial databases that are not cost-effective for pro se litigants. Lexis offers a very simplified version at <http://lexisweb.com> and some academic libraries may have access to LexisNexis Academic. A reference librarian may be able to assist you in navigating LexisNexis Academic. Pro se users can use FindLaw.com as well. Both of these sites, while used as examples to locate case law, also offer additional material on state and federal law, such as articles, subject overviews, and links to other sources. For Pro se legal researchers 'databases' are more comprehensive online resources which have varying searchable formats.

Cornell's Legal Research Search Engine

Cornell's online law resources are among the best freely available on the web. Their search engine allows users to search blawgs (a blog related to the law), online resources, legal research guides, or all of the above. They also have state and federal codes, some case law, topical materials, federal regulations, and more. This search engine is quite comprehensive and user friendly.

<http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/WhatWeDo/ResearchGuides/CLL-Legal-Research-Engine.cfm>

Justia.com

This comprehensive source provides links to blogs, news sources, legal opinions, topical overviews, forms, expert witness databases, etc.

<http://www.justia.com/>

The Public Law Library

The PLOL touts itself as “one of the largest free law libraries in the world”. It assembles law available for free across many different Internet locations and provides this single site which can be searched for cases, statutes, regulations, court rules, legal forms, etc.

<http://www.plol.org/Pages/Search.aspx>

JOURNALS

Law Journals can be helpful to individuals who are seeking a more advanced understanding of a legal topic, or for those who wish to have broader background knowledge on their subject. Journal articles can also be used as a method to retrieve case citations, which may be relevant to your issue. Journal articles in law are generally subject specific, so the best journal is usually going to be the one related to your issue topic (e.g. health law, family law), however [rankings](#) of law journals are available. Journals typically must be accessed from a law library as online resources for law journals are limited. Other university libraries (non-law) may also have access to these journals in print or online (e.g. via LexisNexis Academic). Some free options are listed below.

FindLaw.com (also in Case Law section)

Search law journals by topic <http://stu.findlaw.com/journals/index.html>.

Search law journals by journal name <http://stu.findlaw.com/journals/law-review.html>.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar uses its Google algorithm to locate law articles available online. Works well to locate online copies of specific citations when available.

<http://scholar.google.com/schhp?hl=en&tab=ws>

KEY SUBJECT HEADINGS FOR CATALOG SEARCHING

A few suggestions for coming up with search terms are listed below, based upon guidance from the [Legal Information Institute](#) at Cornell:

1. Use a dictionary, especially a legal dictionary or thesaurus.
2. Pay attention to repeated words that show up in general topical material.
3. Ask a librarian, or other person familiar with the topic, for suggestions.
4. Brainstorm by jotting down as many synonyms and related words as you can because different resources use different terminology to refer to the same topic. For example, "children" could be listed under "infants," "minors," or "parent and child."

PUBLISHERS AND OTHER GENERAL PRINT SOURCES

A variety of books have been published which directly address pro se litigants and researchers. These books are usually subject specific. The following publishers can provide a list of title for purchase or to procure from your local library.

Nova Publishing

Provide books, forms, and software for business, personal, and divorce law. Additional simple legal resources available on Nova's website (i.e. FAQs, dictionary, etc.). Most titles are available as e-books and may be carried by public and law libraries.

<http://www.novapublishing.com/catalog/index.php>

Nolo Press

Creates and sells books, forms, software, and online legal service for pro se individuals. Nolo Press also has an attorney directory and some free legal information online. Many public and law libraries frequently carry their titles.

<http://www.nolo.com/>

OTHER LEGAL WEBSITES

Numerous legal websites are available today for users with legal information needs. Individuals doing legal research must be careful to pay attention to the information put out on sites and to evaluate website for content integrity, factual basis, and bias. For a good guide on how to evaluate legal online sources see the guide published by SIU School of Law at <http://www.law.siu.edu/lawlib/guides/eval.htm>.

General Information Websites, such as those listed above, are a good place to start, but other types of website may greatly assist the pro se patron. Specifically, topical websites, institutional websites, and blawgs and legal Q&A site may be beneficial.

TOPICAL LEGAL WEBSITES

As mentioned, legal research is very subject specific and often the best sources for lay persons are those which provide specific and relevant resources based on the precise legal topic at issue. Searching for sites that focus on a specific type of law can be helpful. Usually these sites will be general reference sites, but will provide subject-specific resources. These sites are often excellent data sources as well.

Traffic Law <http://www.mit.edu/~jfc/laws.html>

Provides links to various state traffic codes, explains specific terminology, provides other traffic law resources.

Civil Rights Law <http://www.clearinghouse.net/>

Provides current and pivotal case law, statistical data, and sample litigation documents.

Consumer Law <http://www.nclc.org/>

Sponsored by the National Consumer Law Coalition, this site features information, articles, how to guides, and FAQs relating to consumer law.

INSTITUTIONAL WEBSITES (ACADEMIC, BAR ASSOCIATIONS, ETC.)

Law Schools and professional organizations often provide guidance on specific legal issues as well. Sometimes this information is topical as well, such as when sponsored by an advocacy group, other times the website addresses general legal information.

American Bar Association

Provides some materials for pro se litigants (mostly consumer rights materials), but also contains a large selection of publications and topical areas - some of which is free access.

http://www.americanbar.org/publications_cle.html

Illinois Legal Aid (Also in Part III)

Provides extensive pro se assistance via their website. While this varies from state to state, checking your local legal aid is a good idea. In addition to potentially qualifying for services they often offer fact sheets, Q&As, or other resources.

www.illinoislegalaidonline.org.

Illinois Bar Association

Addresses specific types of legal issues at <http://www.illinoislawyerfinder.com/articles/you-and-the-law> and also provides a page with general information for the public <http://www.isba.org/public>.

<http://www.isba.org/>

BLAWGS & LEGAL Q&A WEBSITES

Blogs about the law (Blawgs – may see referred to as either blogs or blawgs), can also be a good source of relevant discussion. As can sites which offer Q&A for individuals, or allow individuals to peruse Q&A answers. Again, these tend to be topically oriented so finding a blog closely related to your issue will produce the best results. Remember to evaluate the credibility of the content you access. (See guide referenced on page 14 for more information).

AVVO Online

This site allows individuals to post legal questions and allows lawyers to look through and provide answers anonymously. Archives old answers for continued community review. Can be helpful for determining issue or search terms, but be sure to personally verify substantive answers elsewhere.

<http://www.avvo.com/ask-a-lawyer>

Just Answer.com

Allows individuals to post legal questions, along with a fee they are willing to pay for the answer.

Attorneys can choose to answer for the fee or not. Does not archive old questions or answers.

<http://www.justanswer.com/law/>

Legal Blawg Archive

Library of Congress archive of various legal blawgs going back to 2007. Good source for finding subject specific blawgs.

<http://www.loc.gov/law/find/web-archive/legal-blawgs.php>

FindLaw Illinois Blogs

For blogs on a wide variety of subject areas in Illinois, visit Findlaw's list of Illinois blogs and look for your topic.

<http://legalblogs.findlaw.com/blog-index/chicago-illinois/>

III. REFERRALS

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

- **Illinois Bar Association Phone Referral/ Consultation Service**

Phone: (800) 922-8757 Website: <http://www.illinoislawyerfinder.com/phonereferral.html>

- Referral number for attorneys who have agreed to provide half hour phone consultations for a price not to exceed \$25.

- **Illinois Legal Aid Online**

Website: <http://illinoislegalaid.org/>

- Online resources for pro se litigants to access forms and use FAQs to answer basic legal and procedural questions. Additional assistance, computer use, and printing available at onsite Self-Help Center locations throughout state:

<http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=directory.selfHelpCenterList>

- **Land of Lincoln Legal Aid Foundation (central & southern Illinois)**

Website: <http://lollaf.org/>

- Income-based assistance for cases involving housing, family law, consumer issues, public benefits and health, education, and services for senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
- No criminal cases (including traffic), personal injury, worker's compensation, or malpractice accepted.
- To determine which office might assist you and for access the correct phone number visit: http://lollaf.org/?page_id=819

- **Prairie State Legal Services (northern Illinois except Cook County)**

Phone: (800) 331-0617

Website: www.pslegal.org

- Stated priority is protecting eligible persons (based on income or age) from serious risk to health or safety in those situations where a legal solution can remedy the issue, such as utility shut-off cases, abuse cases, denials or essential medical care, etc. Next priority is to help eligible persons meet basic needs- medical care, housing, government-based benefits, etc.

- **Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services (Cook County)**

Phone: (312) 738-9200

Website: <http://www.carpls.org>

- Income-based assistance for housing, employment, education, consumer debt, divorce, guardianship, estates, public benefits, health care. Advice only, no in-court representation.

- **Equip for Equality (statewide – 4 locations)**

Phone: (800) 758-0559 (Southern Illinois Region); (800) 758-0464 (Central Illinois Region); (800) 758-6869 (Northwestern Illinois Region); (800) 537-2632 (Chicago – Main Office).

Website: www.equipforequality.org

- Provides advice, referral, and some representation to persons with disabilities for issues arising from their disability, including (but not limited to) public benefits, education, employment, housing, other discrimination, special education, etc.

TOPICAL LEGAL SERVICES

- **Bankruptcy Help Desk**

Phone: (312) 435-6030

Website: <http://www.ilnb.uscourts.gov/bankruptcy-assistance-desk>

- Provides information on bankruptcy basics and a glossary. For those near Chicago, you can appear in person at the Dirksen Federal Building during clinic hours and meet for a free consultation with an attorney.

- **The American Bankruptcy Institute**

Website: <http://bankruptcyresources.org/content/resources?state=IL> (select the “Pro Bono” tab).

Identifies different programs that may be able to assist you with your bankruptcy issue.

- **Illinois Attorney General (hotlines and helplines)**

Information from: <http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/about/hotlines.html>

<p>Consumer Fraud Hotlines 1-800-386-5438 (Chicago) 1-800-243-0618 (Springfield) 1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale)</p> <p>Línea Gratuita en Español 1-866-310-8398</p>	<p>Toll-Free TTY Numbers 1-800-964-3013 (Chicago) 1-877-844-5461 (Springfield) 1-877-675-9339 (Carbondale)</p>
<p>Homeowner Helpline 1-866-544-7151 (Voice/TTY) 312-814-5094</p>	<p>Crime Victims Assistance Line 1-800-228-3368 1-877-398-1130 (TTY)</p>
<p>Environmental Crime Hotline 1-888-288-9436</p>	<p>Health Care Hotline 1-877-305-5145</p>
<p>Identity Theft Hotline 1-866-999-5630 1-877-844-5461 (TTY)</p>	<p>Senior Citizen Consumer Fraud Hotline 1-800-243-5377</p>
<p>Military & Veterans Rights Hotline 1-800-382-3000</p>	<p>Illinois Sex Offender Registration Team (ISORT) 1-888-41-ISORT (1-888-414-7678)</p>
<p>Recall Hotline 1-888-414-7678</p>	<p>Public Access Counselor 1-877-299-FOIA (1-877-299-3642)</p>

SPECIFIC GROUP-ORIENTED LEGAL SERVICES

- **Disaster Victims**

- Consult this great resource provided by the Illinois State Bar Association at <http://www.illinoislawyerfinder.com/sites/all/themes/ill/files/Pamphlets/Booklets/Disaster%20Legal%20Services%20Manual.pdf> (pages 44-61 contains contact information).

- **Student Legal Services**

- Different universities may provide legal assistance to students. If you are an enrolled student, check your university's website. (e.g. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: <http://www.odos.uiuc.edu/sls/index.html>)

- **Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (via John Marshall Law School)**

Phone: (312) 360-2656

Website: <http://www.jmls.edu/veterans/>

- Assists in appealing an already denied veteran's benefits claims. For assistance in filing an initial claim, contact a Veterans Service Organization <http://www.va.gov/vso/>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Visit Illinois Legal Aid's list of Helpful Organizations for a comprehensive list of organizations that may be able to assist you

<http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.helpfulOrgsAll>