

Free Resources for Pro Se Litigants in Federal Court

Representing yourself in federal court—whether in a civil or criminal case—is a daunting challenge. Fortunately, there are several free resources available to help you better understand federal court procedure, draft filings, and access case law. Below is a guide to some of the most useful tools and services.

1. Federal Pro Se Handbooks and Guides

- Representing Yourself in Federal District Court: A Handbook for Pro Se Litigants - Created by the Access to Justice Task Force, this handbook explains federal court procedures, rules for filing, and basic courtroom expectations. [Download Handbook](<https://www.ded.uscourts.gov/sites/ded/files/Pro%20Se%20Handbook.pdf>)

2. District Court Pro Se Assistance Programs

- Federal Pro Se Legal Assistance Project (SDNY & EDNY) - Free, limited-scope legal services for self-represented litigants in the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York. [Learn more](<https://www.citybarjusticecenter.org/projects/federal-pro-se-legal-assistance-project/>)
- NDNY Pro Se Assistance Program - Free help with drafting pleadings for civil actions in the Northern District of New York. [Learn more](<https://ndnyfcb.org/about-us/pro-se-assistance-program/>)
- Federal Pro Se Clinic (CDCA) - Assistance with civil procedures and documents in the Central District of California. [Learn more](<https://publiccounsel.org/services/federal-court/>)
- District of Connecticut Federal Pro Se Legal Assistance Program - Brief legal counseling and claim evaluation. [Learn more](<https://law.qu.edu/academics/clinics-and-externships/federal-pro-se-legal-assistance-program/>)

3. Legal Research and Document Access

- PACER / CM/ECF - Official system for filing and accessing federal case documents. [PACER](<https://pacer.uscourts.gov/>)
- CourtListener - Free access to millions of federal court opinions. [CourtListener](<https://www.courtlistener.com/>)
- RECAP Archive - Free repository of PACER filings. [RECAP](<https://free.law/recap/>)
- Additional research tools: [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/schhp?hl=en&as_sdt=0,33), [Justia](<https://law.justia.com/>), [FindLaw](<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/>)

4. Public Law Libraries and Self-Help Centers

- Public Law Libraries provide free access to case reporters, statutes, practice guides, and form books. [Learn more](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_law_libraries_in_the_United_States)

5. Clerk's Office Resources

- Many federal courts employ pro se law clerks or staff who can explain procedural rules and filing requirements. They cannot give legal advice but can connect litigants with resources. [U.S. Courts – Representing Yourself](<https://www.uscourts.gov/services-forms/representing-yourself-federal-court>)