

# EZLegalFile Service Bureau

## Interactive Forms Online Statewide

In 2001, the [Superior Court of San Mateo County](#) developed a highly successful set of interactive Judicial Council legal forms to help self-represented litigants file legal forms properly. The interactive forms were so effective that San Mateo was asked to share the technology with other courts. In response, it created the EZLegalFile Service Bureau to make the forms available throughout the state in an Internet-based form-completion program ([www.EZLegalFile.org](http://www.EZLegalFile.org)).

The bureau offers Judicial Council forms that are required for matters that most concern self-represented parties:

- Family law, including dissolution of marriage, custody, support, and paternity issues
- Domestic violence restraining orders
- Guardianship petitions
- Small claims
- Unlawful detainer (evictions)

A third-party vendor supplies access to the programs. The software was developed to allow thousands of simultaneous users, and the forms can be customized with local court in-

### Spreading the Costs

To join the EZLegalFile Service Bureau, a court pays less than \$3,000 and adds a link to EZLegalFile on its local court Web site. San Mateo adds the local court's addresses and Web address into the system, so that users can select the proper court. A statistical component of the program tracks the number of users by court and by forms used. The participating courts split the annual maintenance costs—for Web hosting, entering changes made to Judicial Council forms, and administration of EZLegalFile (including limited technical support).

### Developing Easy-to-Use Forms

Court staff from San Mateo and a software developer initially created the interactive forms. Then, a literacy consultant reviewed the text of each program (the questions, instructions, and educational components) to make sure that users with no more than fourth-grade reading skills could understand it—most questions are in yes/no or multiple-choice form. Next, the programs were sent to the EZLegalFile court partners, members of the bar association, [Bay Area Legal Aid](#), the Legal Aid Society, and other legal service agencies for testing and comments.

formation. The San Mateo court personnel work with the software developer to create new interactive form programs and add new courts to the EZLegalFile Service Bureau.

In 2005, 38 courts in California offered EZLegalFile to their communities, at little cost to the courts and no cost to the users. Users in the jurisdiction of the San Mateo court now can also send their completed forms to court electronically; the forms are filed, and the user is notified. This new service will be offered to EZLegalFile partners in late 2005. To give more online help, EZLegalFile also has a link to the [California Courts Online Self-Help Center](#).

## Impacts

- By April 2005, more than 150,000 litigants throughout California had completed forms using EZLegalFile.
- Self-represented parties have round-the-clock access from any location to an Internet-based service that helps them complete the required Judicial Council forms properly and legibly.
- The program has reduced court processing time because forms are complete, correct, and readable. EZLegalFile makes the uniform use of Judicial Council forms easier.
- The bureau has given courts throughout the state cost-effective access to innovative and reliable software and server hardware. More courts continue to join the program.

## Comments From Users

“I love the automated service. It was so easy.”

“These forms and the process in which they are produced are absolutely wonderful.”

### San Mateo Superior Court's Interactive Electronic Forms Program



**Free help completing court forms!  
Get help with:**

**DIVORCE • FAMILY LAW  
SMALL CLAIMS  
EVICTIONS  
GUARDIANSHIPS**

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