

## **Tips For Pro Se Litigants**

There is a lot to learn in representing yourself in federal court, but here are some key pointers:

- 1. Read everything you get from the Court and the other side right away**, including the papers you get from the Clerk's Office when you file. It is very important that you know what is going on in your case and what deadlines have been set.
- 2. Meet every deadline.** If you do not know exactly how to do something, try to get help and do your best. It is more important to file/submit required documents and responses on time, than to do everything perfectly. You can lose your case if you miss deadlines. If you need more time to do something, ask the Court in writing for more time as soon as you know that you will need more time it and before the deadline has passed.
- 3. Use your own words and be as clear as possible.** You do not need to try to sound like a lawyer. In the documents you file with the Court, be specific about the facts that are important to the lawsuit. When you cite a case that you believe supports your position, explain to the Court why that case applies or is similar to your case.
- 4. Always keep all of your paperwork and stay organized.** Keep paper or electronic copies of everything you send to and/or file with the Court. Also, keep everything you receive from the Court, the other side, or anyone else relating to your case. When you file a paper in the Clerk's Office, bring at least the original and two copies so that you can keep a stamped copy for yourself. Know where your papers are located so that you can use them to work on your case.
- 5. Have someone else read your papers before you submit/file them.** Be sure that person understands what you wrote; if not, rewrite your papers to try to explain yourself more clearly. The judge may not hear you explain yourself in person and may rely only on your papers when making decisions about your case.
- 6. Be sure the Court always has your correct address and phone number.** If your contact information changes, contact the Clerk's Office in writing immediately. Always include your case number and signature on any paperwork that you submit to the Court.
- 7. Omit certain personal identifying information from documents submitted to the Court for filing.** All documents filed with the Court will be available to the public on the Internet. Protect your privacy and that of other individuals you refer to in your documents by not including in documents you send to the Court any of the following: social security and taxpayer identification numbers, names of minor children, dates of birth, and financial account numbers. If your lawsuit involves a minor, you must identify them by their initials only.
- 8. Check the Court's website.** The Court's website has information under the tab "Representing Yourself" that may be helpful. [www.msnd.uscourts.gov](http://www.msnd.uscourts.gov)