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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **NEW SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANT HELP DESK COMING TO MACON COUNTY COURTHOUSE**

Every year, tens of thousands of Illinoisans struggle to navigate the legal system due to a lack of representation. While there is a constitutional guarantee to a lawyer in criminal matters, no such guarantee exists for civil matters such as divorce, guardianships or eviction. Many low-income people cannot afford to pay a lawyer and end up going to court alone. Starting in March, a help desk at the Macon County Courthouse will be available to assist these so-called pro se, or self-represented, litigants.

This help desk is a project of the Public Interest Law Initiative's Sixth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee and is funded in part by the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation. It will be in the Self-Help Center of the Macon County Courthouse twice a month from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on select Mondays and Wednesdays. During a 2-hour shift, volunteer lawyers will meet with self-represented litigants for 30-minute appointments to help them understand and navigate the legal process, fill out forms and answer questions. PILI organizes similar help desks in Peoria and Tazewell Counties and is planning to launch another one in the Champaign County Courthouse in April.

"Those who receive help from a lawyer in their civil legal matter are much more likely to achieve a favorable and just outcome in their case," said Michael G. Bergmann, PILI's Executive Director. "While appearing as a self-represented litigant is the only option for many people, we want to make sure they have the knowledge and support they need to succeed."

On March 4<sup>th</sup> from 10:30 to 1:30, PILI will be launching the help desk with a free lunch and open house to let litigants, lawyers and judges know about the program. The Decatur Bar Association is co-sponsoring the event.

Self-represented litigants who meet income requirements can attend one of the upcoming help desks on March 11<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> or consult the Self-Help Center for more upcoming dates. Lawyers who are interested in volunteering with this program can learn more at [www.pili.org/6thcircuit](http://www.pili.org/6thcircuit).

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**About PILI:** PILI's mission is to cultivate a lifelong commitment to public interest law and pro bono service within the Illinois legal community to expand the availability of legal services for people, families and communities in need. PILI envisions a legal community with a deeply rooted culture of service, where law students, lawyers and legal professionals at all stages of their careers engage in public interest law or pro bono work, and remain committed to addressing the unmet legal needs of the poor and underrepresented.

To learn more about PILI or the Sixth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee, visit our website at [www.pili.org](http://www.pili.org), or contact PILI Executive Director Michael Bergmann at 312-832-5129 or [mbergmann@pili.org](mailto:mbergmann@pili.org).