

Q: What is a SHRC? When does it operate?

A: The Self-Help Resource Center is an informational resource for *pro se*, or self-represented, litigants in domestic, or family law, matters. The Self-Help Resource Center provides court-approved forms and legal and procedural information related to matters such as divorce, child custody, and name changes. We also provide simple procedural motions for other types of legal matters. The Self-Help Resource Center operates from 9 AM until 12 PM Monday through Friday. Visitors can call 504-881-1171 or email selfhelp@probono-no.org during those hours to speak to a volunteer.

Q: I need a document notarized. How and where can I get this completed?

A: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Self-Help Resource Center continues to operate on a virtual basis only. Therefore, currently, we do not have notaries available to notarize those forms which require notarization. Visitors are responsible for finding their own notary public to notarize necessary documents.

Q: What are the different types of divorces? How long do I need to wait before filing for divorce?

A: Louisiana recognizes two types of no-fault divorce under Articles 102 and 103 of the Louisiana Civil Code. However, both types of divorce require the parties to live separate and apart for the requisite period of time before a final judgment is signed. The Self-Help Resource Center provides forms for Article 103 divorces, meaning the parties must have lived separate and apart for 180 days if there are no minor children born of the marriage (i.e. children under 18 years of age) or 365 days if there are minor children born of the marriage.

Q: I have a custody agreement that I want to modify. What are the steps?

A: A custody order can be modified by either party by filing a rule to modify custody and serving it upon the other parent. All decisions related to child custody are governed by what is in the best interest of the child. The court will weigh a variety of factors in making that determination, including the abilities of each parent to meet the physical, emotional, financial, and educational needs of the child. Louisiana law presumes that it is in a child's best interest to have a relationship with both parents, though that presumption can be rebutted by evidence.

Q: Can the Self-Help Resource Center provide me an attorney to represent me in court?

A: The Self-Help Resource Center is an informational resource for self-represented litigants. The center does not provide legal advice or representation, only court-approved forms and legal and procedural information. All visitors are presumed competent to represent themselves. However, if you would like to hire an attorney, the center has legal referral resources available where you can find an attorney to provide you advice or representation.

Q: Can the Self-Help Resource Center help me file a protective or restraining order?

A: While the Self-Help Resource Center does not provide assistance with protective orders, the court does have a domestic violence coordinator who can assist with protective orders. The domestic violence coordinator is located in Room 101 on the first floor, and operates from 8 AM until 4 PM Monday through Friday.

Q: Can I file for divorce as a self-represented litigant if I have a protective order filed against my spouse?

A: Yes, you can, though the forms provided by the Self-Help Resource Center are for no-fault divorces and do not address issues of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence may be eligible for a speedier divorce and may wish to speak to an attorney who can provide legal advice or representation.

Q: If I divorced and did not initially change my name, should I fill out a motion to resume maiden name or a name change petition?

A: If your final divorce judgment was signed without an order permitting you to resume use of your maiden name, you will need to file a separate name change petition in order to legally change your name.

Q: If I have a test proving paternity, but I am not on the birth certificate, can I file a custody petition?

A: The Self-Help Resource Center can provide you with a petition to establish both paternity and custody of a child. Whether the court accepts the paternity testing results that you have already received or orders a new test is up to the discretion of the judge.

Q: Can I file for child support through the Self-Help Resource Center?

A: While the Self-Help Resource Center has a rule to modify a child support order in those instances where financial circumstances have changed, we do not provide petitions to establish child support. If you are seeking to establish child support, you should contact the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services at 1-888-LAHELP-U.