

LHI/HotDocs Overview

Background

LHI/HotDocs is an on-line service that provides guided interviews for use by court staff, legal aid agencies, and litigants to complete court filing documents. It is now used by 13 counties, with 4 additional counties coming on-board summer 2016. In 2015, LHI/HotDocs was used to generate approximately 56,000 form sets in the areas of family law, probate, domestic violence, and civil harassment.

Judicial Council staff, in collaboration with court self-help centers, develop HotDocs programs. Judicial Council partners with Pro Bono Net to provide access to the programs on LawHelpInteractive.org (LHI), a site designed to provide legal assistance to low-income litigants.

Compared to completing paper or online forms, the guided interview experience has several advantages for self-represented litigants, including the following:

- **Customized Interview:** The user's responses to questions are used to customize the interview to the litigant's situation. For example, litigants without children will not be asked if they want custody and visitation orders.
- **Reduced Data Entry:** Redundant data entry, such as caption information, children's names, and other court cases, is eliminated.
- **Profile Data:** HotDocs supports the creation of "profile data" that can be accessed in multiple interviews. This means that users only need to enter their basic person and case information one time and can then reuse that data for subsequent interviews. For example, when using HotDocs for a default judgment, there is no need to re-enter information that was used to complete the petition and declarations program.
- **Computations:** The program will determine whether the petitioner qualifies for a fee waiver based on income of all household members and will sum expenses to provide a total for the Income and Expense Declaration.
- **Support for Remote Assistance:** LHI provides two methods for litigants who are working remotely to obtain assistance from the self-help center. Answer files may be shared with self-help center staff or self-help centers may use LHI Connect; both are described below.

Statewide Programs

Statewide programs are available for the following areas of law:

Program	Description
Divorce Starter Kit	Adapted from San Bernardino Superior Court, this program allows litigants to enter basic information remotely so that when they visit the self-help center, they are better prepared to complete their filing.
Dissolution Petition and Declarations (Divorce Parts 1 and 2)	Developed for a workshop setting, fully populates the petition and declarations of disclosure.
Dissolution Foreign Service (Spanish forms)	Based on the Dissolution Petition and Declarations program, this program allows staff to use an existing answer file to translate responses to Spanish. The program generates the Judicial Council Spanish forms, which can be used for foreign service.
Request for Domestic Violence Restraining Order	This program has been developed for litigants to use on their own. It can also be used by self-help center staff.
Guardianship	Developed for legal aid and self-help center use, this program covers all aspects of the initial guardianship filing.

Additional statewide programs will be released by fall 2016:

- Dissolution Default Judgment (Divorce Part 3)
- Dissolution Response
- Paternity Foreign Service (Spanish forms)
- Limited Conservatorship

Most HotDocs programs have been developed to be used in a self-help center setting. This means that there may be some fields that are not populated, because self-help center staff traditionally assist litigants with certain portions of the filings.

The exception is the Request for Domestic Violence Restraining Order, which can be used by litigants who are working remotely.

Filing

At this time, most users print and file their documents on paper. In some counties, there is the ability to deliver documents to the court electronically. Additional information on electronic filing with LHI will be available in fall 2016.

Cost

There is no cost to self-represented litigants or self-help centers to use the LHI site. The Judicial Council contracts with Pro Bono Net to provide access to LHI and has developer licenses used to create and maintain the HotDocs programs.

Technology Requirements

A high speed Internet connection and an up-to-date (or reasonably modern) browser are the only technical requirements. While it is recommended to use the most current browser version, Firefox (version 21 and later), Internet Explorer (9 and above), Chrome (version 27 and later) and Safari (version 7 and later) can all be used to access LHI. LHI is currently in the process of optimizing their site for mobile.

Links

LawHelp Interactive	https://lawhelpinteractive.org/	Hosted by Pro Bono Net, LHI provides staff and litigants with access to all HotDocs content developed by Judicial Council or other branch staff.
California Courts Equal Access Partner Site/LawHelp Interactive Programs	http://www.courts.ca.gov/partners/116.htm	Provides access to statewide and local HotDocs Programs, descriptions of programs, and HotDocs/LHI Instructions.
LawHelp Interactive Resource Center	http://www.probono.net/dasupport/gettingstarted/	Resources for the LHI Community.

Getting Started

1. Review “Guide to Using LawHelp Interactive (LHI).”
2. Determine the areas of law in which you want to use HotDocs/LHI.
3. If you are assisting litigants with dissolution and paternity, you will want to become familiar with Manage Saved Answers so that data entered during the petition and declarations interview can be used for the default judgment. While some litigants will be able to take advantage of this feature on their own, it is highly recommended that you provide them with “How to Access and Work with Saved Answer Files” to help them understand the process.
4. Decide whether staff, litigants, or both will access the programs.
5. Register for staff accounts. For detailed information, please see “How to Register for Court Employee and Advocate Accounts.”
6. Access HotDocs programs on the California Courts Equal Access site using the link above.

7. Test the programs you want to use to determine whether they meet your needs. If you need minor changes to the program, contact Judicial Council staff. Please be sure to check the courthouse information for your county. Contact Judicial Council staff if changes or updates are needed.
8. Determine whether there are local form requirements. If so, these will need to be completed outside of the program.
9. Distribute “How to Register for a “Self-Helper” LHI Account” as needed to your litigants.

Instructions

A complete list of instructions is below, along with a description of intended users.

Name	Users
Guide to Using LawHelp Interactive (LHI)	Staff
How to Register for Employee and Advocate LHI Account	Staff
How to Register for a “Self-Helper” LHI Account	Staff and litigants
How to Access and Work with Saved Answers	Staff and litigants
How to Use the Foreign Service Programs	Staff

Ongoing

1. Judicial Council staff will provide regular updates regarding legislative changes to statute and changes to forms and rules that affect the program. You may be asked to test the program if there are significant substantive changes.
2. Judicial Council staff monitor LHI E-mail Lists and forward critical messages about system availability to branch users. To join the Judicial Council distribution list, please email Karen.cannata@jud.ca.gov.
3. If your program contains local forms and those forms change, please notify Judicial Council staff as soon as possible to coordinate the work to update the program.
4. As part of the LHI community, you will have opportunities to participate in training and webinars with LHI staff to learn more about HotDocs and other LHI programs that can help streamline your work. You can register for an account with the LawHelp Interactive Resource Center at the following link: <http://www.probono.net/dasupport/gettingstarted/>. Under Getting Started, select Connect with the Community to join the LawHelp Interactive Announcement E-mail List.

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