

Settlement Assistance Program for Pro Se Litigants

The Settlement Assistance Program (SAP) is a court-wide program that provides pro se litigants the benefit of a free attorney at settlement conferences with District or Magistrate Judges.

In the SAP, attorneys who are members of the bar of the Court volunteer to be appointed to provide free legal assistance to pro se parties to prepare them to settle their cases. Once appointed, the volunteer attorney's duties include conferring with the party; evaluating the case and advising the party as to its strengths *and* weaknesses; discussing the damages permitted by law and the consequences of settling; preparing a letter demanding specific relief; negotiating with opposing counsel; and, representing the party at the settlement conference conducted by District Judges or Magistrate Judges of the Court. The volunteer attorney would also draft or review the settlement agreement and corresponding motion to dismiss with prejudice, if appropriate. The volunteer will not have to participate in motion practice or discovery, and the volunteer's duties will not extend to any other part of the litigation.

Training opportunities for volunteer attorneys are held periodically at the District Court. Counsel who both complete the training program and are appointed as Settlement Assistance Program counsel will receive one training unit for purposes of admission to the District Court's Trial Bar. See Local Rule 83.11. Pro se parties must complete a Limited Appointment of Settlement Assistance Program Counsel Form that advises them of the limitations of the representation in order to obtain judicial approval of the appointment. Additionally, once appointed, the volunteer attorney must file a **Limited Attorney Appearance Form as Settlement Assistance Program Counsel** with the court. If a settlement is not reached after diligent efforts, Settlement Assistance Program counsel will be given leave to withdraw from the appointment on a motion seeking to withdraw, upon notice to the client and opposing counsel.

For questions about participating in the program, please contact J Cunyon Gordon at the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law at 312-630-9744 or cgordon@clccrul.org.