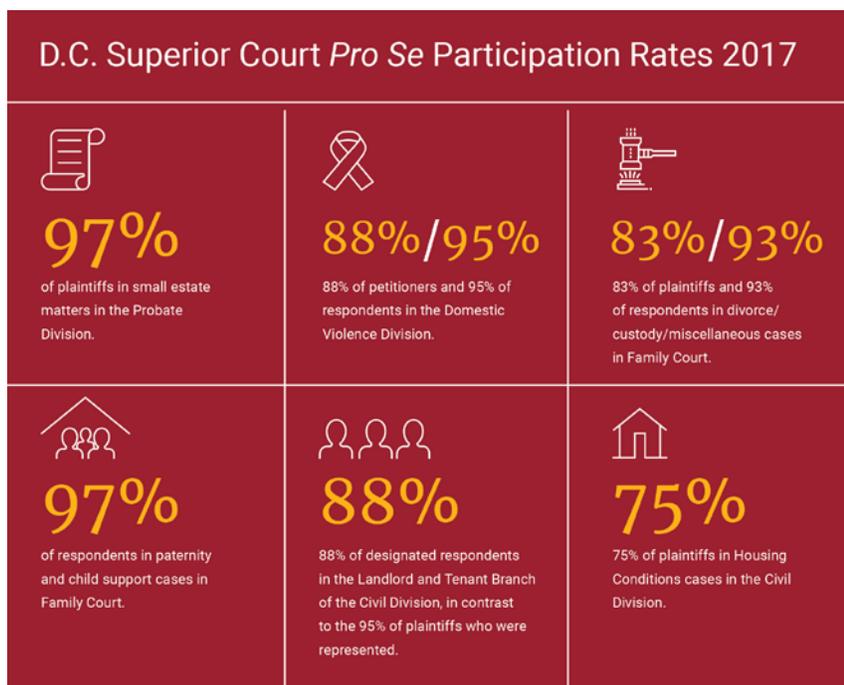


Delivering Justice: Addressing Civil Legal Needs in the District of Columbia

Rates of Representation and Self-Help Needs in D.C. Courts and the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings

Despite the fact that more low-income D.C. residents receive civil legal services now than ever before, a significant percentage still are unrepresented. This comes at a great cost, as unrepresented individuals are less likely to experience positive outcomes than those with legal assistance.

Though it is impossible to calculate the total number of low- and moderate-income District residents who face legal problems without the help of an attorney, court *pro se* rates provide an important insight into the scope of this problem. Depending on case type, *pro se* participation in 2017 ranged from 50%-90% in the D.C. Court of Appeals and from 75-97% in the D.C. Superior Court in certain civil justice areas (as shown below). Similarly, parties are unrepresented in the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings at comparably high rates. For example, no party was represented in 88% of student discipline appeals, 86% of appeals related to public benefits determinations, and 91% of disputes concerning unemployment compensation benefits. These high rates of unrepresented litigants in both D.C. Courts and the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings reflect the ongoing access to justice crisis in D.C.



The need for legal assistance is also reflected by the high volume of litigants who visit court-based resource centers. These self-help centers are located throughout the court system and are focused on particular areas of court practice. They offer same day assistance – though not full legal representation – to unrepresented customers who are navigating the court system without an attorney. They are managed and supervised either by the court or legal services providers, sometimes with the support of *pro bono* volunteers.

Customers, who typically are served regardless of income, may be referred to a legal services organization, or receive help completing court forms and pleadings. Customers often visit the centers more than once during the life of a case if they are unable to obtain counsel. As seen in the following data from 2018, the volume of activity at these crucial centers is significant.

- 8,601 – The number of individuals served at the Family Court Self-Help Center in areas like custody, visitation, divorce, and child support.*
- 4,116 – The number of individuals (3,445 tenants and 661 landlords) served at the Landlord Tenant Resource Center.*
- 659 – The number of individuals served at the Probate Resource Center (now the Probate Self-Help Center) .**
- 533 – The number of individuals served at the Small Claims Resource Center.**
- 406 – The number of individuals served at the Consumer Law Resource Center in areas like debt collection, contractor disputes, automotive repair disputes, utility disputes, and issues involving violations of the Consumer Protection Procedures Act.**

*These court-based services were offered Monday through Friday.

**These court-based services were offered only on limited days and times of the week.