



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Supreme Court approves expansion of innovative program to assist people unable to complete court forms

SANTA FE – Courts in three counties have successfully piloted a program to help people fill out court forms if they have difficulty reading or writing. The scribing services now may expand to more places in New Mexico under an [order by the state Supreme Court](#).

The program assists people unable to read or complete court forms because they have low literacy, a limited ability to read or write in English, or a disability that prevents them from independently filling out a form. Trained court employees or volunteers read the form aloud, write down a person's answers and read the answers back to the individual. The person then receives a completed form, which can be submitted to the court. The scribes cannot give legal advice, however.

“The scribing program further expands access to justice in New Mexico for people without a lawyer,” said Supreme Court Chief Justice C. Shannon Bacon. “It can be challenging and frustrating for people to navigate court processes that are unfamiliar to them. The assistance of a scribe to fill out a form helps people move their legal cases through the justice system.”

Courts piloted the scribing services in the Ninth Judicial District of Curry and Roosevelt counties and the Second Judicial District of Bernalillo County. Based on the pilot program's success, the Supreme Court authorized other courts to offer scribing services. Currently, the program is available only in the three pilot counties.

“I am so excited the New Mexico Supreme Court has expanded the scribing program statewide. This program provides help to anyone whether the barrier to justice is language, literacy or ‘legalese’ understanding,” Ninth Judicial District Court Chief Judge Donna J. Mowrer. “This program helps not only the litigant get access to the court, but helps the court understand the issues from the litigant's point of view.”

“The scribing program has been incredibly successful in the Second Judicial District Court. It has enabled us to better meet the needs of our community and has helped ensure that everyone

has an opportunity to present their case to a judge and navigate the court system,” said Chief Judge Marie Ward.

To help in expanding the scribing program to other judicial districts, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) has developed community outreach materials and online training modules to provide for standardized training of court staff or volunteers on scribing services. The AOC launched the pilot scribing program in 2018.

“The innovative scribing program is part of the Judiciary’s ongoing efforts to make courts more inclusive and barrier-free to all people,” said AOC Director Artie Pepin.

The AOC’s Office of the Statewide Title II ADA Coordinator was created in 2021, and it works to improve access to New Mexico courts for people with disabilities. Additionally, the AOC’s Language Access Services program coordinates interpreter and translation services for courts across the state, and it recruits, trains and qualifies interpreters to assist people with limited English proficiency.

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