

PUBLIC INTEREST CLEARINGHOUSE

California's Catalyst for Justice

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April 14, 2009

Paul Kramer, State Bar Board Governor
California Energy Committee
M/S 9
1516 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

James Aguirre
Richardson & Fair
2601 S Figueroa St 1st FL
Los Angeles, CA 90007

Re: LawHelpCA.org and the State Bar Attorney Search Website

Dear Mr. Aguirre and Mr. Kramer:

I am writing to provide you both with information about California's existing statewide legal referral and resource website, LawHelpCA.org. During a conversation with Julia Wilson about the State Bar's "Find a Lawyer" project at the March 20 meeting of the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services (SCDLS), Mr. Aguirre requested additional information regarding the intersection between the State Bar's attorney search website and the existing referrals and resources on LawHelpCA.org. Ms. Wilson, who is Executive Director of both PIC and LAAC, has requested that I respond to you both directly with additional information about LawHelpCA.org.

LawHelpCA.org is a project of the Public Interest Clearinghouse that connects Californians to self-help legal resources and free and low-cost legal services. Staff works closely with the State Bar of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, and IOLTA-funded legal services programs to maintain comprehensive and updated information. The website was introduced to the California legal services community in late 2003, and launched to the public at the annual Legal Services Stakeholders' meeting in August of 2004. Throughout the website's history, the Public Interest Clearinghouse has employed a full-time staff member dedicated to updating the website, adding new resources, and training the legal services community and staff at community-based organizations how to best use the website to serve low-income client populations.

The database of referrals on LawHelpCA.org contains over 450 profiles for legal services organizations, court-based programs, and State Bar-certified lawyer referral services throughout the state. Profiles include intake methods, eligibility requirements, and services provided. Through this searchable database, eligible clients are connected to free and low-cost legal help in their area.

LawHelpCA.org also contains a library of self-help resources. Currently there are over 1,900 plain-language documents that are accessible to Californians of low literacy levels. The majority of documents are fact sheets, "know your rights" publications, frequently asked questions, and "how to" guides. Information is also available in 30 languages.

Over the years, an increasing number of users have been accessing the website. In 2008, LawHelpCA.org received 1,767,656 total hits by 201,185 unique visitors. The website currently receives financial support from the State Bar of California and legal services providers throughout the state. Organizations receiving Equal Access Fund grants from the State Bar are required to update their profiles on LawHelpCA.org every year.

Enclosed are copies of the LawHelpCA.org user brochure in both English and Spanish. Also, attached is a print out of proposed changes to the current draft of the website. Unfortunately, the links to LawHelpCA.org on the current draft are misleading and confusing for low-income Californians. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like further information about LawHelpCA.org and how we can work together to serve vulnerable Californians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Kim", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Linda Kim
Associate Director

cc: Stuart Forsyth, ECLA, via email
Legal Aid Association of California, via email

Using a State Bar Certified Lawyer Referral Service

- Attorneys are pre-screened for minimum qualifications
- Attorneys provide ½ hour free consultation
- Attorneys must carry malpractice insurance
- Modest administrative fee charged

Select your County



Using Legal Aid Services



- Lawyers who specialize in the problems facing the elderly, low-income individuals, and/or persons with disabilities.
- Free or low-cost services

Click here for LawHelpCA.org



Using a State Bar Certified Lawyer Referral Service

- Attorneys are pre-screened for minimum qualifications
- Attorneys provide 1/2 hour free consultation
- Attorneys must carry malpractice insurance
- Modest administrative fee charged

Select your County



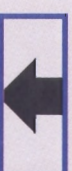
Using Legal Aid Services



- Lawyers who specialize in the problems facing the elderly, low-income individuals, and/or persons with disabilities.
- Free or low-cost services

[Click here for LawHelpCA.org](http://LawHelpCA.org)

If the above sources do not meet your needs, you can search the State Bar Member Records by Attorney Name, Bar Id, Language Spoken, Area of Practice and other criteria



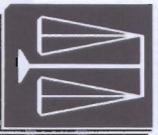
About

www.LawHelpCalifornia.org

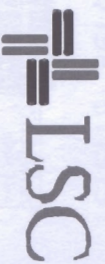
Our mission is to provide the public with free, easy online access to basic legal information and legal referrals. LawHelpCalifornia is a project of the Public Interest Clearinghouse, in partnership with the courts, bar associations, and legal services organizations throughout the state.

This brochure is generously funded by:

**Public Interest
Clearinghouse**



FOUNDATION
of the STATE BAR
of CALIFORNIA



For more copies of this brochure, please email admin@LawHelpCA.org. We regret that we cannot answer individual requests for legal assistance.

LawHelpCalifornia.org



**A Guide to
California's
Free Website
for Legal Help**

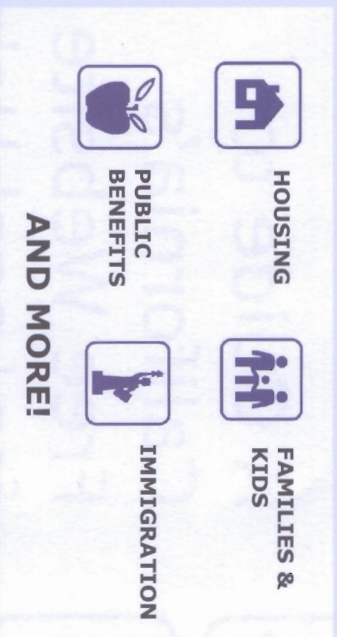
Free online legal self-help resources and referrals to legal aid and court services, sliding scale legal programs, and lawyer referral services.

LawHelpCalifornia.org

Getting Started...

www.LawHelpCalifornia.org

1. Visit www.LawHelpCalifornia.org.
Click on the picture that best matches your legal question.



2. Click on the sub-topic that best matches your specific question.

HOUSING

- Foreclosure Prevention
- Homelessness
- Homeownership
- Housing Discrimination
- Landlord and Tenant Issues
- Predatory Lending
- Public Housing and Subsidized Housing (Section 8)

3. Type in your zip code, city, or county for local results.

Enter your zip code:

Or, type in your city:

Or, select a county:

4. Referrals to legal aid organizations, court-based programs and lawyer referral services will appear.

Find a Lawyer or Court Program

FOR SELF-HELP RESOURCES, CLICK ON THE YELLOW TAB ABOVE

Click here for descriptions of Civil Legal Aids, Court Programs, and Lawyer Referral Services.

There are **27** resources

For self-help resources, click the other tab.

"The Unified Voice of Legal Services"



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Los Angeles, CA 90007

Re: LawHelpCA.org and the State Bar Attorney Search Website

Dear Mr. Kramer and Mr. Aguirre:

I am writing on behalf of the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) and its legal services member organizations to express our strong support for including prominent links to LawHelpCA.org on the State Bar Attorney Search website, and to request that the State Bar not attempt to create a separate database of statewide resources for low-income clients.

LAAC is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 for the purpose of ensuring the effective delivery of legal services to low-income people throughout California. LAAC is the statewide membership organization for legal services programs. Our 2009 membership represents over 70 legal services nonprofits, as well as many individual attorneys working at such programs.

Our members provide high-quality legal services to our state's most vulnerable populations. These services to low-income and other underrepresented individuals form an essential safety net in California and often ensure that the programs' clients have access to life's basic necessities, such as food, safe and affordable housing, freedom from violence, health care, employment, economic self-sufficiency, and access to the legal system.

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www.CALegalAdvocates.org

LAAC and its member organizations are concerned that the current draft of the State Bar Attorney Search website does not include a link to LawHelpCA.org, but rather appears to incorporate another database of legal aid services. Legal services programs throughout California pay voluntary dues to support LawHelpCA.org. Moreover, these programs are required by their Equal Access Fund grants to update their information on LawHelpCA.org, and they spend significant time and resources doing so. Legal services organizations simply do not have the resources to keep their information up-to-date on two separate statewide databases.

Because of these concerns, LAAC and its member programs support the Public Interest Clearinghouse's proposed changes to the current draft of the Attorney Search website.

I would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions or provide any additional information that would be helpful.

Sincerely yours,



Julia R. Wilson
Executive Director