

Purpose

The Legal Paraprofessionals Pilot Project is a statewide pilot project that allows approved Minnesota legal paraprofessionals to represent and advise clients in select housing and family matters with oversight by a licensed Minnesota attorney. The Pilot Project is intended to increase access to civil legal representation in case types where one or both parties typically appear without legal representation.

The goal of the pilot is to gauge whether the availability and use of the expanded role of a legal paraprofessional will increase access to civil legal services for otherwise unrepresented parties and decrease the congestion of court calendars. The results of the pilot project will provide data and experience that will tell the Minnesota Judicial Branch whether implementing enhanced legal paraprofessional services will resolve long-term disparities in representation in civil legal case types.

Background

In 2019, the Minnesota Supreme Court established the Implementation Committee for the Proposed Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project, which was charged with evaluating areas of civil legal need, and defining the structure and rules for a pilot project. The Pilot Project is an outgrowth of the recommendations made by the 2017 Minnesota State Bar Association's Alternative Legal Models Task Force and is in line with a recent American Bar Association recommendation.

In September 2020, the Supreme Court issued an order adopting Court Supervised Practice Rule amendments authorizing the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project, effective March 1, 2021, in two areas of civil law: landlord-tenant disputes and certain family disputes. In subsequent Court orders, the Court has expanded and modified the pilot project.

The Court ordered the appointment of a Standing Committee that will oversee the pilot project, including reviewing applications for pilot participation submitted by legal paraprofessionals and supervising attorneys, evaluating the progress and outcomes of the pilot, and preparing an interim and final report for the Court.

Anticipated Benefits

Expanding the role of legal paraprofessionals will provide representation to low- to moderate-income Minnesotans, reduce court congestion, and provide more timely resolution for all involved. Additionally, participating legal paraprofessionals in rural areas of the state may help increase access to quality representation in areas where there may be a shortage of attorneys.

The expanded role of legal paraprofessionals will create new opportunities and career paths for individuals who are entering into this field or who have worked as a legal paraprofessional for years. The option for additional staff to serve clients allows law firms to broaden their practice or diversify how they currently serve clients, and helps address the unmet need for clients who lack representation or financial resources to hire an attorney.

Learn More

For more information about the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project, visit www.mncourts.gov/LPPP.