

Free legal clinics set for Sept. 9 and Sept. 17 in Hattiesburg

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Two free legal clinics are scheduled for Sept. 9 and Sept. 17 in Hattiesburg to help low income people with child support collection and record expungement.

Volunteer lawyers will provide free legal assistance with child support collection and expungement on Sept. 9 from 1 to 5 p.m. at Christian Services at 301 E. Second Street in Hattiesburg. Other areas of legal services also may be addressed. Persons seeking services should register in advance by contacting Christian Services at 601-582-5683, or by registering online at www.thrivehattiesburg.org. The clinic is provided by the Hattiesburg Area Young Lawyers Association, Leadership Pine Belt and Christian Services.

Expungements will be the focus of a Sept. 17 legal clinic scheduled for 10 a.m. at the Jackie Dole Sherrill Community Center at 220 West Front Street in Hattiesburg. People seeking services at the expungement clinic must call the Mississippi Association for Justice by Sept. 10 to find out if they qualify for free legal assistance. The number is 601-948-8631. The clinic is sponsored by the Mississippi Association for Justice and the Access to Justice Commission.

The child support collection clinic is a new monthly program in Hattiesburg. The clinic held in August served 34 people, said HAYLA Immediate Past President Matthew Shoemaker of Hattiesburg. Fourteen attorneys provided free legal services.

“We are aware of the needs that exist around the state and excited about the prospect of doing our part to serve that need,” Shoemaker said.

People seeking assistance with child support collections through the clinic need to already have a court order calling for child support. Volunteer attorneys will explain the forms, provide general information and answer questions. The attorneys are not obligated to accompany clinic participants to court and file documents for them. The expectation is that individuals will be able to represent themselves in court, although some volunteer attorneys may be willing to provide pro bono representation.

The expungement clinic set for Sept. 17 is intended to help people who have low-level non-violent convictions, or who have old arrests that did not result in convictions. State law limits the charges that can be considered for expungement. Attorneys at the clinic will determine if a person’s record qualifies for expungement and help with paperwork.

With a criminal record, “people are unable to get jobs, get credit, rent an apartment, stuff like that,” said attorney Dan Kitchens of Crystal Springs, who has donated his time for years to help people get ahead. “It lets folks get back on their feet and get on with their lives and that’s what we want.”

Tiffany M. Graves, executive director, said, “The Mississippi Access to Justice Commission is pleased to co-sponsor the clinic to help people who cannot afford attorneys get access to expungement services. We are grateful to the attorneys who have volunteered to help local residents begin the process of restoring their lives. The clinic will provide a tremendous service to low-income individuals who have been unable to move forward with their lives because of their pasts.”

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