

Six free family law clinics scheduled for July in north Mississippi

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Six free family law clinics are scheduled during July in Chancery Courts in Lee, Union, Alcorn, Tishomingo, Itawamba and Monroe counties. Low income people may be provided with free legal assistance with adoptions, child support modification, custody, conservatorships, guardianships, irreconcilable differences divorces, emancipations and name changes.

The schedule is:

July 5, Lee County Guardianship Clinic, Lee County Chancery Court, Tupelo;
July 6, Union County Family Law Clinic, Union County Chancery Court, New Albany;
July 18, Alcorn County Family Law Clinic, Alcorn County Courthouse, Corinth;
July 19, Tishomingo County Family Law Clinic, Tishomingo County Courthouse, Iuka;
July 22, Itawamba County Guardianship Clinic, Itawamba County Courthouse, Fulton;
July 27, Monroe County Family Law Clinic, Monroe County Courthouse, Aberdeen.

The free legal clinics are intended to help low income people who are seeking to represent themselves in court without hiring a lawyer. At least one clinic is held annually in each of the eight counties of the First Chancery District. Corinth and Tupelo hold several free legal clinics each year. The clinics are a collaborative effort between the chancery courts, local bar associations and the Pro Bono Initiative of the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Corinth attorney Phil Hinton said that nine local lawyers have volunteered to work at the July 18 clinic. "These are lawyers who do want to give back to the community," he said.

Local attorneys will assist applicants in preparing documents. The attorneys will explain the proceedings, provide legal information and answer questions. The attorneys are not obligated to file documents and accompany clinic participants to the courtroom. The expectation is that individuals will be given adequate information to be able to represent themselves in court.

"The idea is that an attorney will prepare all of the documents that the person will need, will give them verbal instructions or maybe written ones, and then the client should finalize this themselves," Hinton said.

Legal clinics scheduled for Tupelo on July 5 and Fulton on July 22 will focus on obtaining guardianships for grandparents and other relatives so that children may enroll in school and receive medical benefits.

Lee County Bar Association President Stephen Spencer said, "We have focused the July clinic on guardianships the last two years primarily because of the issue in Mississippi with grandparents and other family members raising children. My wife is a school counselor and is constantly faced with grandparents and others trying to enroll children in school without the proper paperwork. I can only imagine the issues they encounter with medical providers."

Hinton said that he expects to also deal with guardianships at the Corinth clinic, although other issues can be addressed. Establishing a guardianship is a simple procedure, but without it, children could be delayed in school enrollment.

Spencer said, "We just hope to play a small role in donating some time to help alleviate some of these issues."

The free legal clinics benefit the courts and people in need of services. The clinics "are enabling them and empowering them to represent themselves," said Senior Chancellor Jacqueline Mask of Tupelo. "They are prepared and dressed appropriately and are ready for court."

People seeking free legal services must be screened in advance to determine eligibility. Contact the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project at 601-960-9577, or submit an online clinic intake form from this link: <http://www.mvlp.net/%20pro-se-legal-clinic-intake-form%20/>.

