

Finding Maryland Legal Forms

Legal matters involve a high volume of paperwork. Generally, legal paperwork follows an organized, and sometimes standardized, structure. Many people believe there is a ready-made form for every legal need, but that is not always the case. Availability of actual forms varies by topic and jurisdiction. Some actions have court-issued forms; others require templates from reliable sources or self-drafted documents.

At the reference desk, forms are commonly requested for civil matters like divorce, wills, expungement, and starting a business. They are also commonly requested for any action in a court proceeding, such as a motion or certificate of service.

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Types and Purpose of Forms

Legal forms fall into two main categories:

Standardized forms

Issued by a court of government agency, these are fill-in-the blank documents with instructions. A standardized form looks the same for everyone using it.

- Examples:
 - DC-PO-001: Petition for Peace Order (issued by the state court system)
 - VR-449A: Affidavit in Lieu of Title (issued by the Motor Vehicle Administration)

Unrestricted forms

These follow general guidelines and court rules but the content is written by the user. An unrestricted form can look very different for each person constructing it.

- Examples:
 - Wills (customized to the individual's needs)
 - Residential leases (must meet legal requirements but vary in content)

To locate information, also consider whether the document is *filed in a court* or *used outside court*:

- Filed in a court proceeding: motions, complaints, petitions
- Filed in a courthouse but outside of a court proceeding: property deeds
- Not filed: leases, powers of attorney

Note that though leases, powers of attorney, and other legal documents are not all filed in a court, they may be filed as evidence if there is a court matter involving those documents.

Finding Forms – What to Ask

When someone asks for a form, clarify by asking:

- **Where?** What state or jurisdiction?
- **Which court?** In Maryland, District Court actions are more likely to have a standard court form; Circuit Court actions are more likely to need drafting. Pinpointing the court can also help determine an appropriate referral if the person needs assistance drafting or filling in a form.
- **What type of legal issue?** Is the topic family, landlord-tenant, consumer, criminal, etc.
- **What is the goal?** Legal actions usually require more than one document to accomplish a goal. A query for one form may in actuality involve more than one. For example, a request for a form for divorce may need to include forms for a complaint, settlement agreement, and custody documents.

What Can You Offer – or Not?

The contents of legal documents and filings can impact the outcome of a situation. Thus, providing specific information for someone to put in a filing or form can be considered legal advice. In fact, identifying the “right” form for someone to use can also be legal advice.

Be cautious, as you would with any legal information question.

- If they provide a specific form number, you can provide that form, in the same way you can provide a cited Rule or Code section.
- If they provide general information, you can point someone to a reliable site or book of forms and let them review and choose.

Example pitfalls:

- A generic lease form may lack required legal language or coverage of special circumstances.
- Suggesting the wrong court form can result in a rejected filing.
- Neglecting to identify the appropriate court or jurisdiction can result in the case being closed for lack of jurisdiction.

When in doubt, guide users to official and reliable sources and let them decide.

Finding Forms – Where to Look

Official Sources

If there is a court- or government-provided form, this is what should be used.

- **Maryland Court Forms.** Many can be completed online through [*Guide & File*](#).

- **Maryland Rules of Procedure**. Rule text often includes descriptions of required content and formatting for documents. In addition, there are some sample forms appended in the Rules.
- **Maryland Code**. Some statutory sections include form templates. For example, there is a *Petition for Probate* at Estates & Trusts, sec. 5-206; there is a Financial Power of Attorney form at Estates & Trusts, sec. 17-202.
- **Agency websites**, for non-court forms like business incorporation or consumer complaints.
- **COMAR** which may provide filing procedures or content requirements.
- **Federal agencies**, if the matter involves federal law. This includes federal courts, which may provide forms for some basic actions.

Secondary Sources

Legal books and databases can provide templates and samples of documents. They usually cite to any statutory language, procedural rule, or other reasoning behind the suggested construction of a document. The added context and explanations can be helpful to someone drafting from scratch.

Examples of texts that include templates and sample forms:

- Maryland Litigation Forms and Analysis (Thomson Reuters)
- A Lawyer's Guide to Elder Law with Forms (ABA)
- The Adoption Law Handbook (Jennifer Fairfax, ABA)

Many more titles are available at a public law library.

TIP: EXPLORE THE ONLINE CATALOGS PROVIDED BY LOCAL LAW LIBRARIES TO GET A SENSE OF THE TOPICAL COVERAGE THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO YOU AND YOUR PATRONS.

Beware of Unofficial Sources

Be cautious of websites that are not a court or government law-making body. They may be selling forms that are free elsewhere or offering samples that don't apply to Maryland or the specific court. Remember to evaluate websites using the guidelines provided in the Frontlines training.

Help Completing Forms

Completing a form or drafting a full legal document can be an intimidating and scary prospect. There are services that can help with many basic civil matters, including identifying the appropriate form for an action, reviewing completed forms for accuracy, and supporting the drafting of filings.

- [Maryland Court Help Centers](#)
- [PLL Legal Services Directory](#)

- [PLL Legal Clinic Calendar](#)
- Lawyer in the Library programs

Tips for Staff

- Always check the court's website first.
- Keep a quick-reference sheet of go-to resources for common requests.
- Know your limits – when in doubt, refer to a qualified legal service.

Resources for Further Discovery

- [Find Court and Legal Forms](#). People's Law Library of Maryland.
- [Maryland Law Resources: Legal Forms](#). University of Maryland, University Libraries.