

What is Illinois Free Legal Answers?

Illinois Free Legal Answers is a virtual legal clinic where low-income Illinois residents can submit a question online to ask a lawyer for help with a legal issue. A project of the American Bar Association, Free Legal Answers was created to increase access to advice and information about non-criminal legal matters for those who cannot afford legal assistance. It is now active in 41 jurisdictions within the United States, including Illinois. In Illinois, the Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI) is the state administrator for the site. Learn more at www.pili.org/pro-bono/legal-answers.

How does one ask a question on Illinois Free Legal Answers?

Anyone who wishes to ask a question about a civil legal issue on the site must sign up as a user and meet certain basic eligibility criteria. They should visit <https://il.freelegalanswers.org/> and click "Get Started."

What are the eligibility criteria for Illinois Free Legal Answers?

Users are limited to asking 3 different legal questions per year. A user must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- have household income below 300% of the federal poverty line during the pandemic (usually 250%);
- not be incarcerated; and
- be at least 18 years old.

Typically, users cannot have more than \$10,000 in assets, but this has been waived during the pandemic.

What are the areas of law in which users can post questions?

Illinois Free Legal Answers is intended only for civil legal matters. The legal categories are:

Family/Divorce/Custody
Housing or Property Owned
Debts & Purchases
Work, Employment and Unemployment
Worker's Comp
Wills/Inheritance
Benefits
Health Care
Medicaid/Medicare/Affordable Care Act

Consumer Protection
Personal Injury
Expungement
Special Education
School Discipline
Immigration
Civil/Constitutional Rights
Emancipation and Delinquency

How does Illinois Free Legal Answers work?

Once a user posts a question, it is in a queue to be answered by a volunteer-lawyer. A user can indicate if there is time sensitivity to the question so that it will get prioritized in the queue. Volunteer-lawyers choose which question to answer, so there is no guarantee that a question will be answered. Once a lawyer answers a question, the user will receive an email that their question has been answered. The lawyer has the choice either to answer the question and then close it out in the system, or to answer the question and to allow the user to ask a follow up question or to provide additional information. The system is asynchronous – it is not a live interaction between the user and the lawyer.

Who are the lawyers answering the questions?

The site relies on volunteer lawyers to answer the questions. A volunteer-lawyer must be licensed and in good standing.

How is Illinois Free Legal Answers Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis?

We understand that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many court help desks, legal clinics and legal aid offices are currently closed around the state. To try and help the situation, PILI has set up the COVID-19 Illinois Free Legal Answers Task Force. Volunteers who have signed up for the COVID-19 Illinois Free Legal Answers Task Force have indicated that they are available to answer questions from low-income clients during this time of crisis. If agencies are experiencing a greater demand for help than they can respond to, they can provide Illinois Free Legal Answers as a resource to qualifying clients.

Who do we contact if you have questions?

If you have any questions, please reach out to Brent Page (bpage@pili.org, 312-832-5128). We would also welcome any feedback you have to be sure we are best addressing the need during this time. Please only direct clients to <https://il.freelegalanswers.org/>. Please do not direct them to PILI's website or to individual members of PILI's staff.