



THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL COLLEGE

Self-Represented Litigants and Sovereign Citizens Training for the Oklahoma Judiciary

July 9, 2026
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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Self-Represented Litigants and Sovereign Citizens Training for the Oklahoma Judiciary

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

07/09/2026 - 07/09/2026

HONORABLE MARK A. JUHAS

Judge Mark A. Juhas sits in a general family law assignment on the Los Angeles Superior Court. He is the immediate past chair of the California Commission on Access to Justice. For the California Judicial Council, he has been on the CJER Governing Committee and the immediate past Co-chair of the Family and Juvenile Advisory Committee; he was a member of the Elkins Family Law Task Force, Elkins Family Law Implementation Task Force and Self-Represented Litigant Task Force. He recently received a lifetime achievement award from the Family Law Section of the State Bar, a Distinguished Service Award from the California Judicial Council and the Aranda Access to Justice Award from the Judicial Council. Judge Juhas joined the faculty of The National Judicial College in 2012.

SESSION 1

SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

Honorable Mark Juhas

Learning Objectives:

After this session, you will be able to:

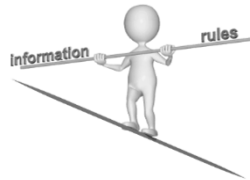
- 1) Describe methods for making SRL's more enjoyable for judges;
- 2) Summarize effective methods for handling cases involving SRL's; and
- 3) Manage SRL cases where the SRL is disrespectful, obstreperous or angry.



OKLAHOMA JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

July 2026

SRL's and Procedural Fairness



ENSURING ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN A NEUTRAL COURT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After this session you will be able to:

- Describe methods for making SRL's more enjoyable for judges;
- Summarize effective methods for handling cases involving SRL's; and
- Manage SRL cases where the SRL is disrespectful, obstreperous or angry.



HOW WE STARTED





Where we are now

WHY SELF REPRESENT?

Real or perceived expense of representation

Decreases in funding for legal services

Mismatched capacity and need

Unable to afford representation

JUDICIAL STRESS

RANK	STRESSOR
1	Importance of decisions
2	Heavy case docket
3	Unprepared attorneys
4	Self-represented litigants
5	Dealing with parties repeatedly without addressing underlying issues

TYPES OF SRL's

1. True SRL;
2. Pseudo-SRL (Sovereigns);
3. Disruptive litigant



Q: "Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement."



Committed to protecting individual and civil rights

63%

31%

Treat people with dignity and respect

59%

34%

Provide equal justice to all

47%

47%



EQUALITY

EQUITY

JUSTICE

11

OKLAHOMA CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT
RULE 2.2

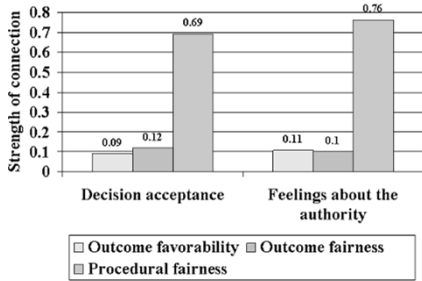
A judge shall uphold and apply the law, and shall perform all duties of judicial office fairly and impartially.



RULE 2.2
(COMMENT 4)

It is not a violation of this Rule for a judge to make reasonable accommodations to ensure pro se litigants the opportunity to have their matters fairly heard.

Why people accept decisions





**INCOME,
EDUCATION,
GENDER,
ETHNICITY**

**WE ARE ALL
THE SAME**

**WHAT
DOESN'T
MATTER**

**PROCEDURAL
FAIRNESS --

WHAT
MATTERS**

➤Key elements:

- Participation
- Neutrality/trust
- Respect
- Interest
- Understanding

TRUSTWORTHY

Listening and considering?

Trying to do what's right?

Acting in the interest of parties?

Appear to be fair?



REMEMBER STAFF STRESS

01

Train staff on
SRL concerns

02

Monitor staff

03

Model
interactions

04

Encourage
positive
interactions

05

Understand the
challenges staff
faces

SRL CASES

Information rarely
complete

Information rarely
well organized

Information rarely
all relevant

Information pretty
“raw”

DISABILITY

- 29% of Americans have some type of disability
- 14% have a cognition disability with serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- 6% are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing
- 5% have a vision disability with blindness or serious difficulty seeing even with glasses.

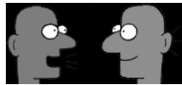


NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Body language signals	interpretation
Sitting with legs crossed & foot kicking slowly	boredom
Stroking chin	Trying to make decision
Sitting cross legged	relaxation
Tapping & drumming fingers	impatience
Standing with hands on hips	readiness, availability, self confidence, aggression
Touching & slightly rubbing nose	Rejection, doubt, lying
Sitting with hands clasped behind head	Confidence, superiority
Rubbing heads	Positive expectation
Rubbing eyes	Doubt, disbelief or tiredness
Tilting head to one side	Interest or disbelief
Biting nails	Insecurity, nervousness, frustration
Pulling or tugging at ear	indecision

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Be as clear and concise as possible both orally and in writing
- Use simple, straightforward language- NO JARGON
- Check in for understanding
- Minimize distractions in the court
- Explain why you need the information



OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

- “Could you give me a little more information about...”
- “Help me understand...”
- “Can you give me some specific details about that?”
- “Why is this important?”



LITIGANT Demeanor

Nervousness

Pace and manner
of language

Body language

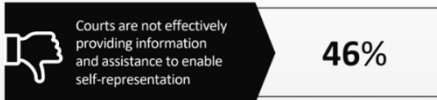
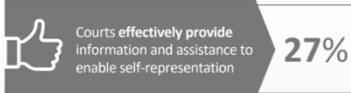
Common
knowledge may
not equal correct
knowledge

We are not as
good at
interpreting non-
verbal cues as we
think we are

Culture

25

Q: "Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view, even if neither is exactly right?"



HOW DO WE TREAT ATTORNEYS?



LEGAL INFORMATION VS. LEGAL ADVICE

> LEGAL ADVICE IS COUNSELING: > LEGAL INFORMATION IS EDUCATING:

> WHAT SHOULD THIS INDIVIDUAL DO? > WHAT INFORMATION DOES THIS INDIVIDUAL NEED TO EDUCATE THEM SO THEY CAN DECIDE WHAT THEY CAN DO

INFORMATION VS ADVICE

LEGAL INFORMATION

- > ON A FORM
- > ON THE LOCAL OR STATE COURT 'S WEBSITE
- > IN A NOLO BOOK
- > EXPLAINING THE LAW
- > DIRECTING TO RESOURCES
- > EXPLAINING LEGAL PROCESS
- > MAKING SURE FILINGS ARE FULL AND COMPLETE

LEGAL ADVICE

- > LEGAL STRATEGY
- > PREDICT OUTCOMES
- > COMMENT ON MERITS
- > ADVISE AS TO SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR PAPERS
- > OPINE AS TO HOW JUDGE WILL RULE
- > CREATING DEFENSES

INFORMATION VS ADVICE

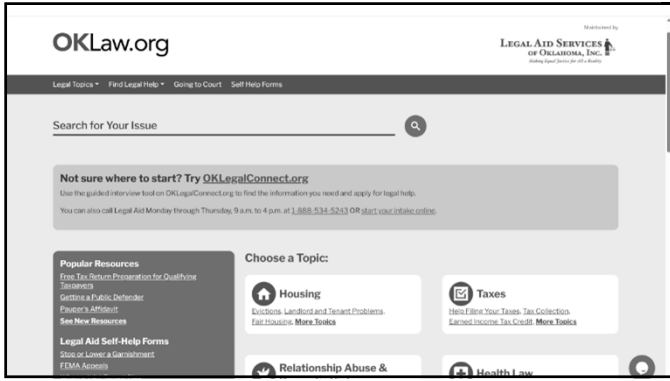
LEGAL INFORMATION

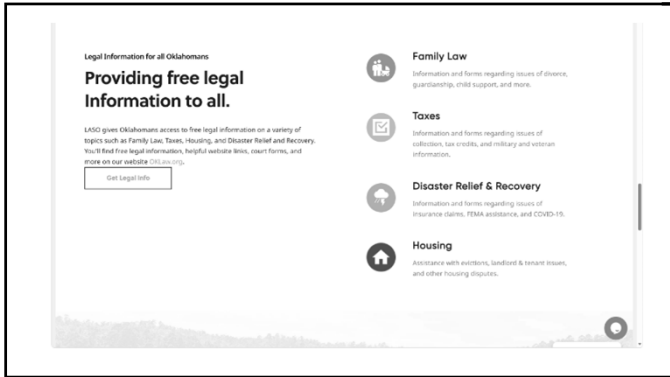
- > EXPLAINING HOW TO APPEAL
- > EXPLAINING HOW TO COMPLAIN ABOUT COURT
- > HANDING OUT COPIES OF FORMS, STATUTES, RULES
- > INFORMING ABOUT INTERPERTER SERVICES
- > ASSISTING IN USING COURT TECHNOLOGY

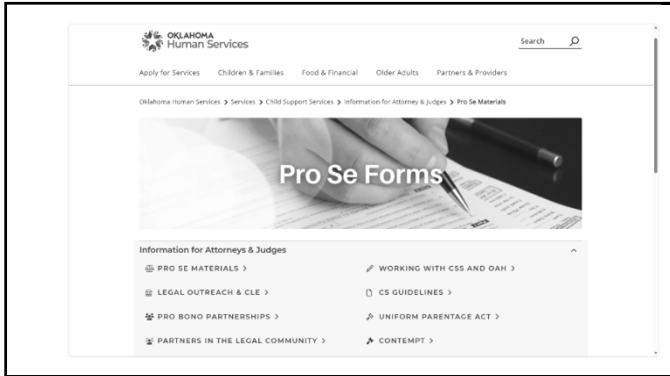
LEGAL ADVICE

- > DRAFTING ARGUMENTS
- > SUGGESTING WHAT A PARTY "SHOULD DO"

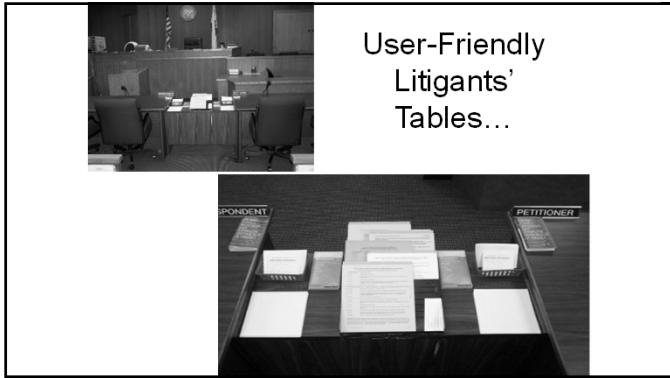












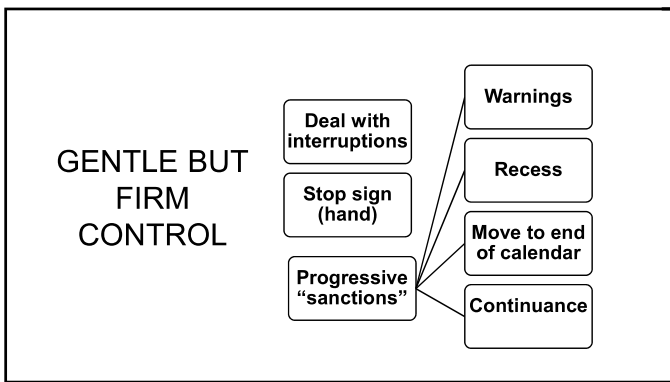


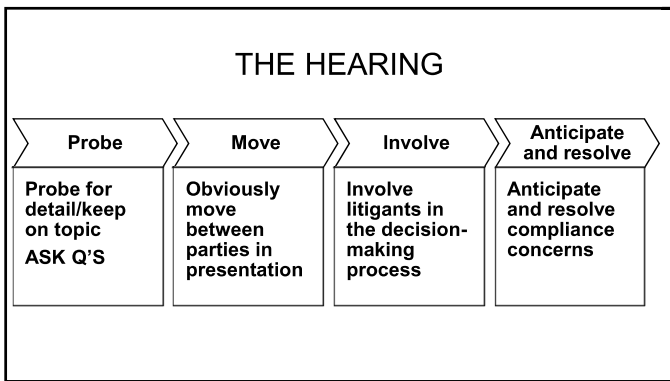
START THE HEARING	
Review	Review cases before taking bench
Clarify	Clarify the hearing's purpose/frame the hearing
Confirm	Confirm the parties' goals and positions- briefly review pleadings with them
Explain	Explain the process- including you will ask questions

THE VALUE
OF
FORMALITY

RULES

1. YOU CAN....
2. YOU CAN'T...
3. YOU CAN....
4. YOU CAN'T







ENGENDERING CONFIDENCE

1

Be active in the hearing

2

Show (gently) you heard and understand

3

If SRL is repetitive, repeat his point and ask to move to a new point

4

Take the time to obviously look at and read documents/photos

EVIDENTIARY RULES



> Generally proper to inquire about evidence, admit (or not) and give it the weight you believe it deserves

- Self-authenticating
- You can exclude sua sponte
- Weight v. admissibility
- Credibility is in your discretion

ONE APPROACH



THE RULING

“Anything else before I rule”?

Announce from the bench

- Push back OR Buy-in
- Clarification-understanding
- Compliance
 - Details workable?
 - Clarity of obligations/ expectations

Summarize terms and reasons for ruling

Comment on evidence

43

NEXT STEPS

Expectations of next steps in the case

Manage litigant expectations for compliance

Advise as to how to modify/ change order

What is long term plan for resolution

ONE SIDE REPRESENTED



ONE SIDE REPRESENTED

Setting the stage critical

How evidence/objections managed

Judge ask Q's and guide the SRL

ONE SIDE REPRESENTED

Judge may modify order of proof or method of presentation- allowed in all cases

DISRUPTIVE LITIGANT

01

Keep as positive as possible

02

Draw on a broader authority

03

The rest of the room

04

Allow graceful exit ... *if possible*



Explain	Clarify	Confirm
Explain process early in a way that will make sense to the participants	Clarify the context & purpose of the hearing	Confirm the parties' goals & positions

Be	Be clear as to legal standards; obviously follow them
Explain	Explain procedure & key rules of behavior
Use	Use plain language
Provide	Provide opportunities for questions and feedback

OVERALL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Be active during hearing › Minimize barriers to listening and to appropriate interaction › Model the behaviors you want to see › Understand your decision fatigue point



RESOURCES

- Self-help centers
- Small claims advisors
- SRL calendars
- Courtroom mediators
- Law school clinics
- Law libraries
- Volunteer Attorney Programs
- Local Bar Association Programs
- Legal Services Programs

“Decide
you must,
how to
serve them
best”



SESSION 2

SOVEREIGN CITIZENS

Honorable Mark Juhas

Learning Objectives:

After this session, you will be able to:

- 1) Develop a philosophy for addressing sovereign citizens;
2. Re-examine practical courtroom handling of difficult litigants; and
3. Improve techniques to effectively and address such litigants.

**Sovereign Citizens
(and a few other difficult litigants)**



Oklahoma Judicial
Conference

July 9, 2026

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TYPES OF SRL's

1. True SRL;
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Sovereign Citizen



CORE BELIEF

The American government is illegitimate, and you can opt out

CORE BELIEF

The relationship between a person and the government is contractual and the contract can be unilaterally rejected.

WHO ARE SOVEREIGN CITIZENS?

Some unemployed; some not- all walks of life

Generally middle-aged white males

Don't recognize state ability to regulate (DMV)

Some violent —some not

Some armed – some not



SOVEREIGN CITIZENS

- Sovereigns are not incompetent
- Sovereigns do not lack capacity
- Sovereigns have strongly held political beliefs

NAMES

Freemen on the land

Flesh and blood human being

Natural man

Free person

Sovereign man

A natural person

MOORS OR MUURS



- More organized than others
- Name: "El" or "Bey"
- Primarily African-American
- Descended from original North Americans
- Own all the land

LADONIA



**IT IS ONLY
NOTIONALLY A
“MOVEMENT”**

- Not well studied in the literature
- 300,00-500,000+ and growing
- International in scope

**IT IS ONLY
NOTIONALLY
A
“MOVEMENT”**

- There is no hierarchy,
- No set texts defining it,
- No formal goals for it to achieve, and
- Loosely affiliated groups that train, help each other with paperwork, socialize and talk about ideology

**IT IS ONLY
NOTIONALLY
A
“MOVEMENT”**

- LOTS of YouTube videos
- “Gurus” spread the ideology
- “Gurus” teach workshops
- Sell materials, pleadings

**ORIGINS/BELIEFS
OF THE
“MOVEMENT”**

- Generally, a merger of Posse Comitatus, Patriot movement, multiple Aryan Nation factions and tax protestors in mid to late 20th century
- There is also a dash of common-law courts

RECLAIM SOVEREIGNTY

Renounce U.S. citizenship and sever all ties with federal government by destroying state identification, refusing to pay taxes and rejecting various registration and title requirements



14TH AMENDMENT

- “Original form of government created by founding generation
- Illegally replaced by reconstruction and the great depression
- 14th amendment forced or tricked people to renounce their sovereign state citizenship and accept U.S. citizenship
- The U.S. is a corporation- judges are agents of the corp.

REDEMPTION THEORY

- In 1933 all citizens were pledged as collateral for national debt as a result of the loss of moving away from the gold standard.
- All citizens have 2 identities: a real “private” person (sovereign citizen) and a fictional “public” person (the strawman)
- Government can only exercise authority over the strawman

If a court flies a military or an admiralty flag (i.e., an American flag with gold fringe), the court holds no jurisdiction over them.



**THE BOTTOM
LINE**

Judges know about the hidden government takeover and deny the sovereign citizens legal rights out of treasonous loyalty to hidden and malevolent government forces

Money making

- Sell information to avoid paying taxes,
- Sell materials, such as CDs or DVDs.
- Sell fraudulent documents— drivers' licenses, passports, diplomat identification, vehicle registrations, concealed firearms permits, law enforcement credentials, and insurance forms
- "Consultant services" to prepare sovereign-citizen paperwork.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

- DANGEROUS
- CAN ESCALATE QUICKLY



Criminal activity

Mail, bank, mortgage, and wire fraud;

Money laundering;

Tax violations;

Illegal firearms sales and purchases;

Illegal insurance companies;

Selling false diplomatic identification cards.

WEAPONS AGAINST JUDGES

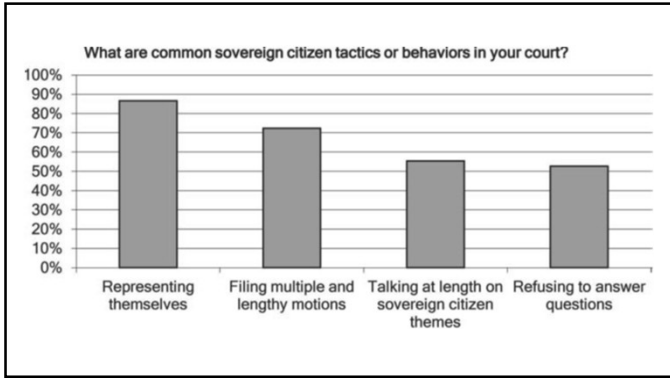


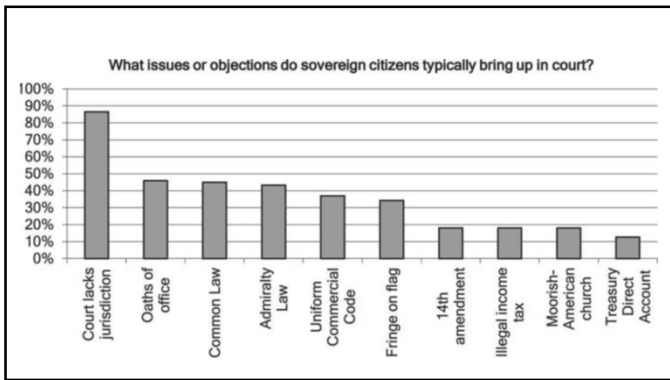
- File liens against property
- Change utility names
- File fraudulent deeds
- Fraudulent UCC filings
- Conviction in common law court

SOVEREIGNS IN COURT

- The court is a forum:
 - To protest the judicial system
 - To protest against Federalism
 - To preserve their claimed rights
 - To strategically befuddle judge and opposing counsel to promulgate countercultural ideologies









Filings

Standard motions: "Plea to Jurisdiction"; "Motion to Suppress"; "Motion for Discovery"; "Motion to Dismiss";
Novel motions: "Notice, Grace and Demand by Declaration"; "Declaration for Notice with surety Act and Bond"; "Appearance Brief"; "Administrative Notice"

Common References

References to the Bible, The Constitution of the United States, U.C.C., U.S. Supreme Court decisions, or treaties with foreign governments
Personal names spelled in all capital letters or interspersed with colons (e.g., JOHN SMITH or Smith: John)
Signatures followed by the words "under duress," "Sovereign Living Soul" (SLS), or a copyright symbol (©)
Personal seals, stamps, or thumb prints in red ink
The words "accepted for value"

I, me, Pauline from the house of Bauer challenge the courts jurisdiction over me, a living woman, one of we the people, creator of Government. My status is clearly defined in my Notice of Special Appearance, that has already been filed. As a Free living Soul, Sui Juris, Jus Soli, an ambassador of Christ, Attorney in fact, I demand that this be a Constitutional Court of Record, that there will be no Presumptions, assumptions, no tacit agreements, no waiver of rights, no subversion of rights, no hearsay, no lawyering, or attornment from the bench. I do not plead with the court, I do not plead guilty, I do not plead not guilty, I declare my innocence. I am counting on you to be a honorable man, and I must ask you: are claiming your authority over me from your oath of office? Are you claiming to derive your authority over me from the doctrine of PARENS PATRIAE? Are you claiming to derive your authority over me from THE UNITED STATES, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, statute(s),







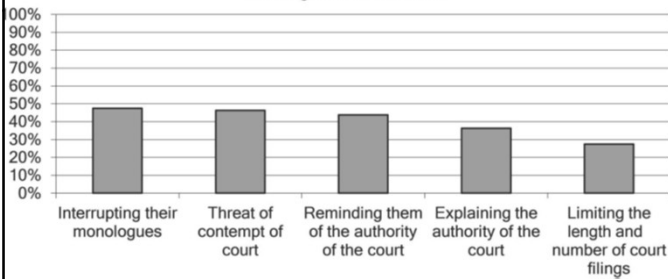
AND THE JUDICIAL RESPONSE IS.....?



Don't Engage



What interventions have you found to be the most effective in managing sovereign citizens in court?



Plan Ahead

- Differentiate between SRL types in rules and policies
- Set on different days/not on the same calendar
- Spread around courtrooms

Plan Ahead

- Additional security?
- Additional time?
- Set on different days/calendars
- Limits on filings
- Pick your battles

REACTIONS/RESPONSES

- Monetary sanctions;
- Evidence sanctions;
- Aggressive case management;
- Pre-filing injunction
 - Must be narrowly tailored;
 - Allow person to file legit lawsuits;
 - Used sparingly
 - Include affidavit of novel claim

RULING

- QUICK
- Concise
- Patient
- As few details as needed
- Alert your staff
- Get off the bench



Remember procedural fairness

Naja v. Zahar

"[t]hough pro se] litigants cannot, of course, be expected to frame legal issues with the clarity and precision ideally evident in the work of those trained in law, neither can district courts be required to conjure up and decide issues never fairly presented to them."

Naja v. Zahar

- Admonish plaintiffs of frivolous nature of the action;
- Court can issue a pre-filing injunction;
- Recognize a pre-filing injunction is a "drastic remedy";
- Warn plaintiff that further filings may result in sanctions, including pre-filing injunction.



People of Illinois vs. Cortez Jermain Brown

- Brown filed a summary dismissal of his conviction
- Pleading was 166 pages long + 343 page appendix
- Filed 1/19/21
- Dismissed 1/21/21 (w/o referral to contents)
- Brown claims two-day dismissal rebuts presumption that the T/Ct properly considered the petition

People of Illinois vs. Cortez Jermain Brown





What we have explained so far establishes that, despite their length, such claims as defendant's first claim are quickly recognizable as part of a family of claims sharing a meritless legal theory. The time it takes to assess such claims bears no direct relationship to their length, the number of citations, or the degree of detail in the argument.

People of Illinois vs. Cortez Jermain Brown

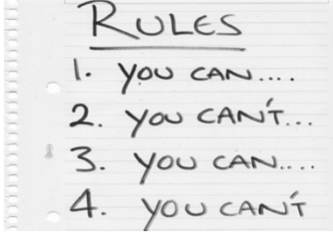
Notably, defendant does not—and, really, cannot—claim that the trial court could not have reviewed the petition at all, but only that it could not have reviewed all claims in sufficient depth. Provided that some review was possible, we deem it inappropriate to decide what amount of time would be necessary for a sufficiently complete review. Any such attempt on our part would unreasonably limit the flexibility of trial courts in dealing with lengthy but clearly nonmeritorious claims.



DISRUPTIVE LITIGANT

 <p>How disruptive are they?</p>	 <p>How might their behavior affect others?</p>
 <p>If they aren't abusive, is it an option to allow them to vent? (if so, how long?)</p>	 <p>What should you do to determine if there are cognitive issues?</p>

The Value of Formality





Disruptive Litigant- Generally

Provide structure and direction (ground rules, process overview, small steps)

Give them something constructive to do (take notes, etc.)

Active listening- repeat back- but don't embellish- be aware of your body language- be calm, gentle gestures

Disruptive Litigant- Generally

If possible, build a rapport

Lower your voice, calm measured words, slow pace

Validate/acknowledge their feelings-- not their actions

Don't take it personally

Don't judge

Disruptive Litigant -Generally

01

Keep as positive as possible

02

Draw on a broader authority

03

Remember the rest of the room

04

Allow graceful exit ... if possible

05

Set limits



Gentle, but Firm Control

- Deal with interruptions
- Stop sign (hand)
- Progressive "sanctions"
 - Warnings
 - Recess
 - Move to end of calendar
 - Continuance

COMMON STRATEGIES

- Don't escalate
- Maintain respectful control/promote civility and predictability
- Clear expectations

Courtroom management

- Be prepared
 - Review pleadings in advance
 - Have a strategy
- Be professional
 - Polite—hearing recorded or virtual?
 - Complaints against judicial officers



STRATEGIES

- > “I’m sorry, we are out of time”
- > “I have to leave enough time for other folks in the courtroom”
- > “ I need to think about this a bit before I make a decision on your case”

**Maintain
Perspective**

There simply
may not be a
good solution

Mark Juhas

majuhas@lacourt.ca.gov



