

MASSACHUSETTS TRIAL COURT

Principles and Goals for Revising and Creating Forms and Printed Self-Help Materials for External Court Users

The Chief Justice of the Trial Court and Court Administrator have adopted the following principles and goals that apply to all Trial Court Departments and Divisions regarding forms and self-help materials for external court users:

- I. Each Trial Court Department shall simplify and standardize forms and self-help materials for external court users with priority given to those forms and self-help materials most commonly used by unrepresented litigants.
- II. All forms created and distributed by the Executive Office of the Trial Court and the Trial Court Departments for external court users shall:
 - include “plain language” which keeps the intended readers in mind;
 - employ the Massachusetts Trial Court “Readability Guidelines for Printed Self-Help Materials and Forms” (current recommendation is a 5th grade reading level in English) for language, organization and design;
 - give clear and simple directions about how to use the form, how to complete the form, what to do with the form, and what to do next;
 - be translated into Spanish and other languages widely used in the Trial Courts;
 - include a field to request an interpreter and in what language(s), including American Sign Language;
 - indicate that interpreter services are available at no cost;
 - be available in print and electronic formats; and
 - be posted on the Internet sites for the Trial Court Departments in fillable and savable PDF format, if widely used forms such as Petitions and Complaints.
- III. Where statutory jurisdiction is shared by multiple Trial Court Departments, working with the Trial Court Forms Administrator and Interdepartmental Forms Management Team, these departments will create one set of forms for the cause of action, for example but not limited to, c.209A Abuse Prevention, debt collection, and summary process.