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This is an informational handbook. This handbook is a guide for self-represented litigants. It is not legal advice and should not be considered as such. Do not cite to this handbook in your filings with the Court. The Court will not consider this handbook as legal authority. Do not contact the Clerk's Office with questions about this handbook. The Court will not answer questions about the handbook's content or how it may pertain to an individual case. Those seeking guidance concerning a federal action should consult with an attorney.

Special acknowledgement and appreciation is extended to the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York and the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, for permission to adopt portions of their pro se litigant handbooks. This handbook may serve as a form for district-specific handbooks.

This Handbook is designed to help people with filing civil lawsuits in federal court without legal representation. Proceeding without a lawyer is called proceeding "pro se," a Latin phrase meaning "for oneself." Representing yourself in a lawsuit can be complicated, time consuming, and costly. Failing to follow court procedures can mean losing your case. For these reasons, you are urged to work with a lawyer if possible.

Do not rely entirely on this Handbook. **THIS HANDBOOK IS MEANT TO BE USED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE.** This Handbook provides a summary of civil lawsuit procedures and may not cover all procedures that may apply in your case. It also does not teach you about the laws that will control your case. Make sure you read the applicable federal and local court rules and do your own research at a law library or online to understand your case. This Handbook identifies the location of resources you can access, free of charge, to do research.

The United States District Court Clerk's Office staff can answer general questions, but they cannot give you any legal advice. For example, they cannot help you decide what to do in your lawsuit,



tell you what the law means, or even advise you when documents are due.

Warning to Incarcerated or Detained Persons:

Please note that some parts of this handbook will not apply to actions filed by incarcerated or detained persons. Detained litigants are often required to comply with different statutes and Court rules. These rules may include—but are not limited to—the use of Court-approved forms where applicable and the exhaustion of administrative remedies prior to filing suit.

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