Aging Safely
Online Forms
Toolkit

A Guide for Legal Nonprofits Serving Older Adults

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CENTER FOR
ELDER LAW
& JUSTICE

About this Toolkit

This Toolkit was developed by Pro Bono Net with assistance from the Center for Elder Law & Justice to provide a roadmap for how nonprofit legal aid and elder justice groups can successfully adopt new online legal forms, powered by LawHelp Interactive, designed for use by seniors, or providers or caregivers assisting them, to help address and protect against common forms of abuse and financial exploitation. It contains information about why these forms were developed, where to find them, and how organizations serving older adults can use them in various modes of service delivery. To view a companion webinar series for this Toolkit, visit AgingSafely.us

For more information, contact:

Claudia Johnson
LawHelp Interactive Program Manager
Pro Bono Net
cjohnson@probono.net

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1. Common Terms

Below are a few terms you will hear us use in this toolkit:

- Pro Bono Net (PBN) a national nonprofit that works to bring the power of the law to all by building cutting edge digital tools and strengthening collaboration in the civil justice sector to tackle justice problems. LawHelp Interactive (LHI) is a program of Pro Bono Net. Through LHI, nonprofit legal aid programs, elder justice group, courts and community partners can create and host accurate, easy to use free legal forms that vulnerable individuals can readily use to help themselves. These forms can also be used by legal aid advocates, pro bono attorneys, and courts seeking to work more efficiently and more effectively deliver legal services. Visit probono.net and LawHelpInteractive.org for more information.

- The Center for Elder Law & Justice (CELJ) is a civil legal services agency in Buffalo, New York, serving nine Western New York counties. Since 1978, CELJ has provided comprehensive free legal services to the community's seniors, people with disabilities and the low-income population. CELJ's services help people maintain the essentials of life- access to health care, securing safe and affordable housing, protective services to remain free from violence, and access to sufficient income to improve their overall quality of life. CELJ was PBN's lead partner on this project. Visit elderjusticeny.org for more information.

- The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) is one of the six components within the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice. Established in 1988 through an amendment to the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984, OVC is charged by Congress with administering the Crime Victims Fund (the Fund). Through OVC, the Fund supports a broad array of programs and services that focus on helping victims in the immediate aftermath of crime and continuing to support them as they rebuild their lives. Millions of dollars are invested annually in victim compensation and assistance in every U.S. state and territory, as well as for training, technical assistance, and other capacity-building programs designed to enhance service providers' ability to support victims of crime in communities across the Nation. Visit [ovc.gov](ovc.gov) for more information.

- Nonprofit civil legal aid organizations help connect Americans, including older adults, to a range of services -- such as assistance and representation, court-based services, and access to web-based information and forms -- to effectively navigate the justice system.

2. About LawHelp Interactive

The online forms created under this project were created using LawHelp Interactive, a program of Pro Bono Net.

Why are online forms a critical form of legal support for older adults? Today when a person without a lawyer faces a legal problem, they must overcome many barriers to resolving it. This often involves preparing and completing legal documents and court forms. LawHelp Interactive (LHI) works to create a world where online legal forms are easy to find and easy to use. We believe those without lawyers or with limited access to legal help have a right to present their issues clearly and completely. LHI offers accurate, easy to use forms that vulnerable individuals can readily use to help themselves. These forms can also be used by nonprofit legal aid organizations and their partners to help people address their legal needs.
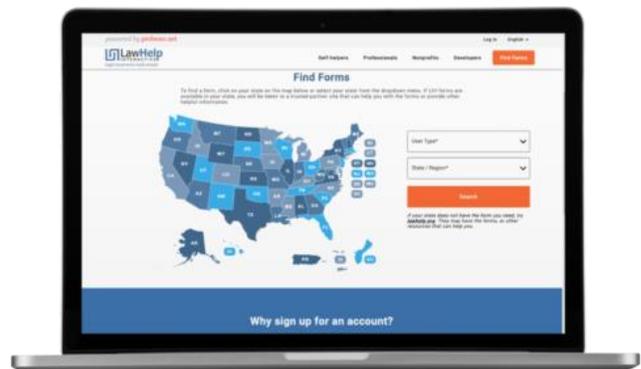
LawHelpInteractive.org currently hosts more than 5,000 free legal forms created by nonprofit legal aid advocates, pro bono programs, court systems and others to make the process of creating legal documents easier and faster, and to help ensure our justice system works for people of all income levels and backgrounds.

All you need to use LawHelpInteractive.org is access to the Internet from a computer you trust. The forms are created through an online guided interview that allows you to print out or email a completed form that matches your situation. An average of 55,000 free legal documents are created using LawHelpInteractive.org each month.

3. About the Forms Created Under this Project

Under this project, we developed three sets of forms designed for use for free by older adults, or providers or caregivers assisting them, to help mitigate and protect against common forms of abuse and financial exploitation. The forms were reviewed by legal

experts from nonprofit legal aid organizations serving older adults and can be used in any state.

This Toolkit provides background on three sets of forms, how they were selected, where to find them, and tips on how senior-serving organizations can incorporate them into their services.

How Were These Forms Selected?

These forms were selected based on input from subject matter experts at the Center for Elder Law & Justice, Pro Bono Net's partner on this project, and feedback from a questionnaire Pro Bono Net sent to senior-serving legal advocates across the country in September 2018. The questionnaire was designed to help us identify areas of need for online forms that can help protect older adults against common types of elder abuse and financial exploitation, and that advocates can readily use in their services to clients. We received more than 80 responses to this questionnaire. Most respondents were experts who handle more than 20 elder law cases per year.

We prioritized several other criteria in selecting the final forms to develop:

- Forms that can be used in every state
- Forms that are simple to use and avoid overly complex procedures or legal areas with many local requirements
- Forms that nonprofit legal aid providers can make available on their statewide legal aid websites for use by seniors or advocates assisting them
- Forms that we can sustain and continue enhancing after the project term

Based on this feedback, we selected three areas to focus on:

- Domestic violence
- Safety planning
- Consumer law, specifically, identity theft and financial exploitation

In total, we developed eight interactive forms, described in more detail below. To help ensure the forms and their accompanying instructions can be used by people of various educational levels, the text used in the forms was translated into plain language by a firm specializing in creating readable legal forms and court documents.

We also used different interface designs when creating the forms, based on the complexity of the form and likely use cases.
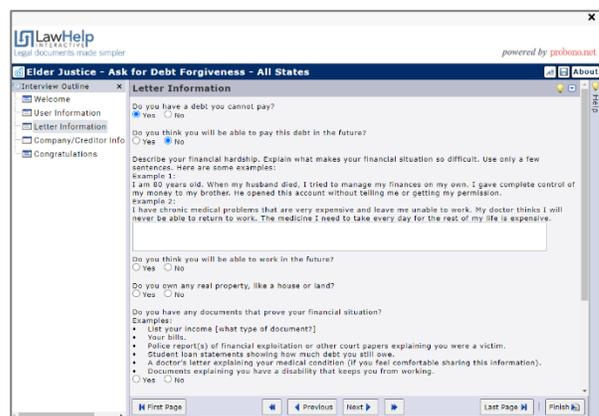
We created two different versions of the consumer law forms so programs can choose which to use based on their service model and client community. One version uses an avatar-based interface, known as A2J Author 6, that guides the user though the interview along a visual path to the courthouse.

Example of the A2J Author 6 interface

The alternate version uses the HotDocs interface, which is more streamlined and often used for longer forms, or forms designed for advocates or other repeat users of the forms.

The other two forms, a cover sheet for interstate enforcement of a protection order and a safety planning tool for the elderly, were created using the HotDocs interface to facilitate use and easy editing by advocates working with older adults.

Example of the HotDocs interface

Where Can These Forms Be Used?

The forms can be used in any state, from any location where the older adult or an advocate assisting them has Internet access.

How Do I Access the Forms?

The forms can be accessed on the agingsafely.us website, under the Resources for Older Adults tab. The version of the consumer law forms we created for use by advocates can be accessed under the Resources for Advocates tab.

The forms can be used on any device type, including desktop computers, tablets and mobile devices. They must be used free of charge, for non-commercial purpose.

The forms can be completed without having to sign in or register for an account on LawHelpInteractive.org. Users can optionally create an account to save their forms, come back later if they need more time to complete them, or to change their answers.

At the end of the session, a document is generated that users can download to save to their computer, email, or print. If they have created an account, they can save their answers and return later to update them or regenerate the document.

At the end of each form, users will see a link to a user feedback survey. This survey was created by Pro Bono Net to get feedback to help us improve these forms over time.

Technical Requirements for Using the Forms

To use the Aging Safely forms, users will need a stable Internet connection. The forms can be used on any device type, including desktop computers, tablets and mobile devices, through one of the following browsers:

- Chrome
- Internet Explorer 11
- Safari

Microsoft Edge is not currently compatible with these online interviews.

To edit and print documents assembled through LawHelpInteractive.org, the user will need to have Microsoft Word or another compatible program that can handle .rtf or .docx files.

To view and print assembled PDF forms, they need to have a current version of Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available as a free download from Adobe.

Tip: While anyone can use the Aging Safely forms anonymously, without registering for a user account on LawHelpInteractive.org, users are encouraged to create an account on LHI to save their work as they go. LHI does not automatically save in-progress forms. To ensure users do not lose their work in the event of an Internet connectivity issue, we recommend but do not require that users create an account and save their work.

Individuals who register for LawHelpInteractive.org using a Self-Help user account will be able to save their answer file for six months from the last use. Advocate user accounts will retain the answer file for one year from the last use.

Safety and Privacy Considerations

LawHelpInteractive.org has a robust, plain language privacy policy and terms of use. We encourage you to review them before using the site.

There are other simple steps that seniors can take to protect their safety and privacy when using online resources, whether from a home, mobile or public Wi-Fi connection. Below are three good resources with information about safe surfing and avoiding scams:

- Online Security Tips and Resources from the FTC:
  https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/online-security

- Scam and Identity Theft Resources from the FTC:
  https://www.consumer.gov/scams
  https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/scam-alerts

- Technology Safety & Privacy: A Toolkit for Survivors from NNEDV
  https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors

4. Overview of Each Aging Safely Form

You can find links to all of the forms described below on the agingsafely.us website and linked below.

Cover Sheet for Interstate Enforcement of a Protection Order

We developed a cover sheet for interstate enforcement of a protection order for seniors who already have a domestic violence protection order and might be travelling out of state. This form is based on the *Project Passport* form developed by the National Center for State Courts, which aims to improve recognition of orders of protection across states/tribes through a cover sheet with common data elements. The cover sheet letter informs law enforcement and other agencies that the order is valid and enforceable across all states.

The cover sheet does not require filing in another state. It can be added on top of a protection order to show law enforcement that your protection order is valid in the new state. The cover sheet is not in itself an order of protection. The individual completing the cover sheet needs to have a valid order from their local court.

The cover sheet will take approximately 10 minutes or less to complete. The senior should have their DV order available when completing it, because they will need information from the restraining order to create the cover sheet.

Who can use this program?

You can use this program if:

- You have a valid protection order,
- You are a legal services provider or a pro bono lawyer, or
- You are an advocate for a client with a valid protection order.

When can it be used?

It is a good idea to use this cover sheet if you or a person you are assisting:

- Have a protection order now, and
- Plan on traveling or moving to another state, for example:

  - If a person is planning to move and wants to make sure the order they have is enforced while they are in transit to or in their new location
  - A protected person is going on vacation and is afraid the restrained person might be nearby.

To get started, click here: Protection Order Cover Sheet - All States

Tip: *The cover sheet can also be shared with a Power of Attorney holder for the protected person in case the person needs to be transferred to a different state.*

Safety Planning Tool for Older Adults

We created a Safety Planning Tool to help older adults prepare a free, customized safety plan if they or a loved one are in an unsafe situation.

Individuals can use this interview if they are:

- An older adult (over 55), and
- Are suffering from or afraid of physical, emotional, or financial abuse, or
- A friend, family member, or non-legal advocate helping an older adult.

This interview asks questions about the individual's living situation, family and friends who are safe and can help, important documents and phone numbers, and other information. It uses the answers provided to recommend safety steps and to create a personalized safely plan that can be printed or saved.

The interview will take at least 20 minutes to complete, so we encourage users to sign up for an account on LawHelpInteractive.org so they can save their answers and continue working on the plan later, if needed.

> To get started, click here: [Personalized Safety Planning Tool for Seniors](#)

Tip: *We recommend that the plan be updated regularly, for example every three months, based on the at-risk senior's circumstances.*

Identity Theft and Financial Abuse Prevention Forms

We created a set of consumer law forms that can be used as standalone letters or work together as a package to help older adults who have been victims of financial exploitation or identify theft.

These forms include:

- Letter to a creditor to request debt forgiveness when a bill is owed
- Letter to a creditor to dispute a charge from a bank or company
- Letter to a credit bureau to dispute an item on a credit report

These forms were created using two different interfaces so programs can choose which ones to use based on their client community needs and service model. Both versions produce the same documents and instructions at the end of the interview:

- An avatar-based interface, using the **A2J Author 6** software, guides the user though the interview along a visual path to the courthouse. We recommend this version for older adults completing these forms on their own.

- The versions using the **HotDocs** interface are designed primarily for advocates helping individuals complete these forms. This version may be faster for advocates to complete and offer advocates more flexibility in editing the answers.

You can choose to link to either or both versions from your own statewide legal aid website or victim legal resource website.

Examples of Issues These Forms Can Help With

These forms can be used when the following issues exist as a result of a financial exploitation, identity theft or scams targeted to seniors:

- To ask a creditor to forgive or reduce a debt, for example when an elderly individual's only source of income is Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and they have been a victim of financial exploitation that has resulted in financial hardship.
- To challenge an item on a credit report issued a credit reporting agency, and to ask them to review the report and clear the record
- To challenge a transaction on a bank or credit card statement, and to document a problem before the debtor sends it to a credit collection agency

To view the full instructions associated with each form, visit the Consumer Law Forms section of Resources for Older Adults on AgingSafely.us.

To go directly to the versions for older adults, click here:

- Letter to a creditor to request debt forgiveness when a bill is owed
- Letter to a creditor to dispute a charge from a bank or company
- Letter to a credit bureau to dispute an item on a credit report

To go directly to the versions for advocates, click here:

- Letter to a creditor to request debt forgiveness when a bill is owed
- Letter to a creditor to dispute a charge from a bank or company
- Letter to a credit bureau to dispute an item on a credit report

Tip: The senior and the advocate assisting them should keep a copy of the letters after they have sent them to the appropriate agency. The senior also has the option of reporting the matter to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. For more information about this process, visit: https://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint/process/

If the creditor continues with their collection efforts, the senior or the advocate assisting them should contact their state's Attorney General's office and local legal aid program. To find your Attorney General's information, visit: https://www.naag.org

5. Potential Service Delivery and Partnership Models

The AgingSafely forms can be used by legal non-profits and other organizations working with seniors facing abuse, neglect or financial exploitation. Examples of potential service models using these forms include:

- **Walk-in or appointment-based models** in which the senior receives assistance completing the forms in a legal aid office or other setting with a robust Internet connection and printing capability. The services could be provided one-on-one, at a self-help desk, or in a group clinic setting.
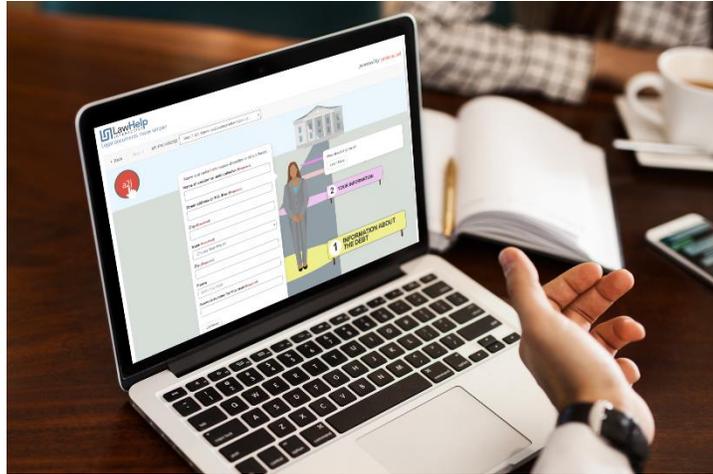
- **Remote or virtual services** in which a senior receives assistance over the phone or via a video conference. Agencies working with seniors can set up an appointment to help the senior complete and print the form on their own, or an advocate can assist the senior in completing the forms and either email or mail a printed copy to them afterwards.

  *Tip: For additional resources and considerations for designing remote services, visit **Strategies for Providing Remote Legal Services to Older Adults**, an on-demand training from the National Center for Law & Elder Rights held on March 25, 2020 and accessible at https://ncler.acl.gov/Legal-Training.aspx.*

Since the Aging Safely forms are information-only, and do not constitute legal advice and counsel, legal and non-legal advocates alike can widely use them in services to seniors. Examples of additional use cases and service models include:

- Outreach workshops or clinics hosted in partnership with community-based organizations offering services to seniors such as libraries, financial literacy organizations, credit unions, senior centers, or community health care providers. Pro Bono volunteers, law students and other professionals could assist the senior in completing and printing the forms in these settings.

- At court or legal aid self-help centers for individuals at risk of financial exploitation, abuse or neglect.
- In law school clinics serving older adults.
- In hotline-based services, for example where links to the forms are emailed to a senior after they have completed the intake process. The senior can then complete the forms on their own after the call.
- In safety planning support provided by DV shelters and counselors, victim advocates, law enforcement, or advocates working with DV nonprofits.
- In service models using the Legal Risk Detector, if an issue related to consumer debt, financial exploitation or abuse is identified during the screening interview

Tip: Programs are encouraged to offer help printing the forms, when possible, for older adults who do not have access to printing at home or from other safe locations.

6. Where to Find Forms for Related Issues

Nonprofit legal aid organizations, courts and other subject matter experts in 47 states have created online forms using LawHelp Interactive. Each state has a different collection of forms in different areas of law. To find what forms are available in your state, the best starting point is your state's statewide legal aid website. Links to sites in all 50 states and most US territories are accessible here: https://www.lawhelp.org/find-help.

Some legal aid programs and courts have also created forms designed for advocate-only use, for example to use in clinics or advocate-assistance models that help seniors in areas such as consumer debt, wills, powers of attorney and medical issues. To find forms designed for professionals, visit LawHelpInteractive.org and search by form type and state. StatesideLegal.org also has a large collection of forms for military members, veterans and their families.

7. Additional Resources and Information

For additional information about this project, a [companion webinar series](#) for this Toolkit, and to keep abreast of new resources developed by PBN please visit our project website, [agingsafely.us](#). To learn whether there are legal aid organizations or courts developing online forms for seniors in your state, or for information about how to start a new online forms project, please contact Claudia Johnson, LawHelp Interactive Program Manager at Pro Bono Net: cjohnson@probono.net.

We also welcome your feedback on this Toolkit, and how we can improve it in the future.

Acknowledgements

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We also extend our thanks to our LawHelp Interactive online forms development partners at **Capstone Practice Systems,** our plain language translation partners at **Transcend,** and our AgingSafely.us graphic design partner **Ideal Design Company.**

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