

**Hear it From the Judge**

*Judge Randall J. Slieter*

*www.judgeslieter.com*

*8th Judicial District Judge*

*Olivia, MN*

## **What to do When Appearing in Court – Part 1**

It is good news that most of our citizens do not need to appear before a Judge. However, there are over two million Minnesota court cases filed annually and, thus, odds are good that you may need to appear before a Judge. There are many situations in which citizens may appear before a Judge and may often do so without an attorney. Examples of these common situations include: conciliation court, traffic court, estate proceedings, family matters, and other cases as a witness.

Though it is not recommended you appear in any court proceeding without an attorney, the economic realities for many individuals cause such a result. The following are some suggestions for your appearance and, hopefully, most of these will seem obvious to you. Though these suggestions are not prerequisites to a successful result in your case, they are intended as an explanation of courtroom decorum.

**1. Appear on time.** The Court calendars are full and though, as at a doctor's office, the schedule may fall behind, it is advisable that you are present early. You can always bring something enjoyable to read!

**2. Dress appropriately.** It is surprising to me the lack of thought given to appropriate attire by some who appear in court. For instance, I have had many individuals appearing on an alcohol related charge wearing a beer company T-shirt! Though this will not affect the decision in your case, I do not recommend it. It will be good that you dress similar to a formal event you may be attending.

**3. Provide care for your young children.** Though it can be difficult, it is best that you not bring young children to your court proceeding. Separate from the obvious possibility that young children may disrupt the proceedings, it is typically not the type of experience that children ought to observe, especially if the case involves parents, siblings, or others they know. Certainly we invite you to bring your children to visit the courtroom and observe court proceedings – unrelated

to your own proceedings – for educational reasons and for age appropriate children.

**4. No food or drinks.** Do not bring food , gum, or drinks into the courtroom. Most courtrooms prohibit such items.

**5. Turn cell phones off.** Most courtrooms either have a policy of excluding cell phones or, at minimum, require you demonstrate they are turned off. The reasons are the same as you might expect in church or a movie theatre!

**6. Speak clearly.** This suggestion is as critical as it may seem obvious. Just as with any type of public speaking you do, you will be most effective if your words are firm and clear. It is helpful to practice your comments before you come to the court hearing and it is certainly helpful to have notes to prompt your recollection.

Part II of What to do When Appearing in Court will appear next month!