

EARLY SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE PROJECT OVERVIEW

The United States District Court, District of Minnesota, implemented an Early Settlement Conference Project (“ESCP”) to provide *pro se* litigants who receive a Court referral with an opportunity to talk with a volunteer attorney about the settlement conference process. The ESCP works as follows:

1. The Referral

If the Court refers a case to the ESCP, the Court will enter an Order of Referral and will inform the *Pro Se* Project Coordinator of the referral.¹

2. Participation

- a. The *Pro Se* Project Coordinator will attempt to connect with the *pro se* litigant to determine whether the litigant wishes to participate in the ESCP. The *pro se* litigant’s participation in the ESCP is voluntary.
- b. The *Pro Se* Project Coordinator will notify the referring Judge’s chambers of the *pro se* litigant’s decision. If the *pro se* litigant chooses to participate in the ESCP, the *Pro Se* Project Coordinator will attempt to locate a lawyer willing to volunteer to talk with the *pro se* litigant about the settlement conference process.
- c. If a volunteer lawyer agrees to assist the *pro se* litigant with the settlement conference process, the *Pro Se* Project Coordinator will notify the referring Judge’s chambers.

¹ The *Pro Se* Project is a program the Minnesota Chapter of the Federal Bar Association runs. The *Pro Se* Project tries to connect unrepresented individuals who receive a Court referral to the program with volunteer lawyers who may agree to donate time to talk about the unrepresented individuals’ cases.

- d. The volunteer attorney, or Special Settlement Conference Counsel, will meet with the *pro se* litigant, explain the ESCP, and ask the *pro se* litigant to sign a Declaration of the *Pro Se* Party. The Special Settlement Conference Counsel will file the Declaration and a Notice of Limited Appearance with the Court.
- e. Once the Declaration and Notice of Limited Appearance are filed, the referring Judge's chambers will schedule a settlement conference.
- f. If the *Pro Se* Project Coordinator is unable to locate a volunteer attorney to assist the *pro se* litigant, the *Pro Se* Project Coordinator will notify the referring Judge's chambers.

3. The Settlement Conference

Special Settlement Conference Counsel's assistance is *limited* to helping the *pro se* litigant with the settlement conference process.

4. After the Settlement Conference Concludes

- a. If the case settles, the Court will handle the case as any other settled case.
- b. If the case does not settle, the Court will enter an Order removing the case from the ESCP and relieving Special Settlement Conference Counsel from any further participation in the case.