

Divorce without debt

If your income is low, you can file for divorce in Kent County without paying a lawyer and without paying the court. This page lists the real costs, how to get them waived, where to get free help, and aid programs for single moms.

What it costs

You don't need a lawyer to get divorced in Michigan. If you handle it yourself, the court fees are the only required cost, and a fee waiver can cover them.

ITEM	NORMAL	WITH WAIVER
Filing fee, divorce with minor children	\$255	\$0
Filing fee, divorce without children	\$175	\$0
Each motion you file later	\$20	\$0
Forms from the Michigan Legal Help DIY Divorce tool	Free	Free
Printed forms packet at the Legal Assistance Center (optional)	\$20	\$20
Serving papers by certified mail (a friend or relative mails them)	Postage	Postage
Serving papers by the sheriff	Varies	County pays*
30-minute lawyer consult through the Grand Rapids Bar	\$25	\$25
Typical total with kids, doing it yourself (plus postage)	\$255	\$0

* If your fees are waived and you need the sheriff or a process server, the court orders the county to pay the service fee. You file a short affidavit explaining why you need that kind of service.

Get the fee waiver

Use form MC 20, Fee Waiver Request. The free Do-It-Yourself Fee Waiver tool fills it out for you.

- Automatic:** the clerk must approve it if you get food assistance (SNAP), Medicaid, FIP cash assistance, WIC, or SSI, or if Legal Aid represents you.
- By income:** otherwise, the judge must waive fees if your household's gross income is under 125% of the federal poverty level. The judge can also waive them for other financial hardship. The judge decides within 3 business days.

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	125% OF POVERTY	200% OF POVERTY
2 (you and 1 child)	\$27,050	\$43,280
3	\$34,150	\$54,640
4	\$41,250	\$66,000
5	\$48,350	\$77,360

Yearly gross income, based on the 2026 federal poverty guidelines. Under 125% qualifies you for the fee waiver and Legal Aid. Up to 200% qualifies you for child care help and the free collaborative divorce, and for Legal Aid if you have certain qualifying expenses.

Steps to file

To file in Kent County, you or your spouse must have lived in Michigan for the last 180 days and in Kent County for the last 10 days.

- 1 Put safety first.**
If your spouse has hurt or threatened you, talk to a domestic violence program before you file. Abuse can get worse when a relationship ends. Abuse also opens up more free legal help. See [If there is abuse](#).
- 2 Call Legal Aid of Western Michigan.**
Ask if they can give you a free lawyer: 616-774-0672.
- 3 Gather your information.**
Print the Divorce with Minor Children worksheet from [Preparing for the Do-It-Yourself Divorce](#) and fill in what you know.
- 4 Make your forms for free.**
Use the [Do-It-Yourself Divorce tool](#) and the [Do-It-Yourself Fee Waiver tool](#). If you want a person to help, walk in to the Legal Assistance Center.
- 5 File at the Kent County Courthouse.**
180 Ottawa Ave NW, Grand Rapids. Turn in your fee waiver request with your papers. Ask the Legal Assistance Center on the 5th floor where to file.
- 6 Serve your spouse.**
You can't do it yourself. A friend or relative who is 18 or older and not part of the case can hand them the papers or send them by certified mail, restricted delivery, return receipt requested. If you can't find your spouse, ask the judge for alternate service. See [How to Serve Divorce Papers](#).
- 7 Wait for the answer.**
Your spouse has 21 to 28 days to respond. If they don't, you file a Default Request and Entry and the case goes on without them.
- 8 Wait out the waiting period.**
With minor children, it's 6 months from the day you file. If waiting causes unusual hardship, the judge can shorten it, but not below 60 days. The Friend of the Court may make recommendations on custody, parenting time, and support.
- 9 Finish the divorce.**
The judge signs the Judgment of Divorce. See [Finishing Your Michigan Divorce with Minor Children](#).

Free and low-cost legal help

Legal Aid of Western Michigan

Free lawyers for people with low income. For divorce, they take cases for domestic violence survivors and some special money or property situations. They also defend custody for parents.

Qualify	Income at or below 125% of poverty, or up to 200% with certain expenses. Countable assets under \$15,000.
Phone	616-774-0672 or 800-442-2777, Mon to Fri, 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4:30 p.m.
Apply online	michiganlegalhelp.org/guide-to-legal-help
Office	25 Division Ave S, Suite 300, Grand Rapids

Legal Assistance Center

Free walk-in help inside the courthouse for people handling their own case. Staff look at your situation and explain your options and the steps.

Where	Kent County Courthouse, 5th floor, 180 Ottawa Ave NW, Suite 5100, Grand Rapids
Hours	Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wed 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. No appointment needed.
Phone	616-632-6000
Cost	Help is free. Divorce forms packet is \$20, cash only. Checklists and most other forms are free.

Michigan Legal Help

Free statewide website with plain-language guides and tools that build your court forms from your answers.

Forms Do-It-Yourself Divorce and Do-It-Yourself Fee Waiver

Guides Introduction to Divorce with Minor Children, Fee Waivers in Court Cases

Free collaborative divorce (Pro Bono Project)

Legal Aid and the Collaborative Divorce Professionals of West Michigan give each spouse a trained attorney plus a divorce coach, for free.

Qualify Kent County, income at or below 200% of poverty, and one or both spouses have alleged domestic abuse during the marriage.

Phone Legal Aid 616-774-0672 or Johnsen & Wikander, P.C. 616-233-9160

Grand Rapids Bar Association Lawyer Referral

A \$25 fee gets you a 30-minute meeting with a lawyer. Use it to ask about one tricky issue, like the house, debts, or custody. After 30 minutes, the lawyer's normal rate applies.

Phone 616-855-0273

Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan

Divorce and parenting mediation, so you and your spouse can work out an agreement without fighting it out in court. Low-cost and free services are available.

Phone 616-774-0121

Custody, parenting time, and child support

Kent County Friend of the Court

Investigates and makes recommendations on custody, parenting time, and child support. Helps parents settle disputes and enforces orders after the divorce.

Phone 616-632-6888. Case information line, 24 hours: 877-543-2660

Office 82 Ionia Ave NW, Suite 200, Grand Rapids

Read first

Custody and Parenting Time and Child Support in a Nutshell on Michigan Legal Help.

If there is abuse

These lines are free and confidential. They can help with a safety plan, shelter, keeping your address private, and a Personal Protection Order (PPO).

YWCA West Central Michigan

24 hours 616-454-9922

Safe Haven Ministries

24 hours 616-452-6664

Kent County PPO Office

Phone 616-632-5071. No appointment needed.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

24 hours 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788

Read Domestic Violence and Divorce before you file.

Help for single moms

Getting SNAP, Medicaid, FIP, WIC, or SSI also makes your court fee waiver automatic.

MI Bridges

Apply online for food assistance, cash assistance, health care, child care help, and emergency help with rent, heat, and utilities.

Kent County office 616-248-1000

WIC

Food, nutrition help, and breastfeeding support for pregnant women, new moms, babies, and children under 5.

211 (Heart of West Michigan United Way)

Free 24/7 helpline that connects you to local help with rent, utilities, food, and more.

Phone Dial 211, or 1-800-887-1107

Child care help (CDC)

Pays for child care while you work or go to school. For children under 13, with income up to 200% of poverty. Apply through MI Bridges.

Free preschool (Kent ISD)

GSRP is free for every child who turns 4 by December 1, with no income limit. Head Start is also free for families that meet its income guidelines.

Phone 616-447-2409

Community Action Partnership of Kent County

Food assistance, help with utility shutoffs, and help with back rent.

Phone 616-336-4000

This is general information, not legal advice. Fees, hours, and programs change, so call before you go. Checked September 25, 2026.