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## WebWatch—Legal Self-Help

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## WEBWATCH

Running down the center of the homepage are the FindLaw Resources, the site's main offering. These include links to cases and codes, general legal subjects, federal and state resources, legal references, foreign and international resources, and community message boards on legal topics. The links to state laws are especially important since these often govern the most common legal problems. At Find a Lawyer, consumers can search a particular state, zip code, or select from over 75 practice areas. While the **ABA LawInfo.org** also links users to various lawyer directories, **FindLaw** provides the simplest navigation.

The public should find **FindLaw** highly accessible; its subject categories are arranged hierarchically, reminiscent of Yahoo's homepage. The entire site is searchable via LawCrawler, a search engine specifically designed for legal resources. Advertising is not too overwhelming. Westlaw claims it is constantly updating the site.

**The Bottom Line: FindLaw for the Public** is a comprehensive site for searching for anything legal, including a lawyer, but without **Nolo Law Centers'**

consistent attention to making legalese understandable. **FindLaw** is unique in providing extensive links to primary materials, such as cases and codes.

### ■ ALLLAW.COM'S LEGAL TOPIC INDEX WEB ADDRESS

[www.alllaw.com/topics](http://www.alllaw.com/topics)

**Date Visited:** 05/6/02

**Developer/Provider:** AllLaw.com

The **Legal Topic Index** is actually a part of **Alllaw.com**, an online directory of legal-related information and services. The site covers 14 broad topics, on the left-hand side of the page, with more specific topics listed toward the bottom. Among the topics are bankruptcy and business, divorce, taxes, health, and estate planning. These contain signed articles, forms, and links to external resources.

#### Reviewers Needed

Librarians with experience evaluating and analyzing web sites—and solid knowledge of a specific academic or popular subject—are invited to write for Web-Watch. For information, contact Brian Kenney <bkenney@cahners.com>.

The site also offers a search engine for finding lawyers and calculators to assist in determining both child support and penalties for drinking and driving violations. There are pop-up ads for nonlaw products.

While the public will often find the free information helpful, it should be assessed carefully. The site has a disclaimer stating it hasn't reviewed all the information, which is submitted mostly by practicing attorneys, and it makes no claims about quality. The coverage is not exhaustive. Because the site uses a three-column format, the layout can be cluttered.

**The Bottom Line: AllLaw.Com** can best be used as a backup, helping consumers research a specific area of law not often found in the sites listed above. The sources and quality vary.

#### Alternate Sites

■ **FreeAdvice.com**  
[www.freeadvice.com](http://www.freeadvice.com)

■ **LawGuru.com**  
[www.lawguru.com](http://www.lawguru.com)

**FreeAdvice.com** and **LawGuru.com** both offer legal advice from lawyers, for a fee and free, respectively. Both have

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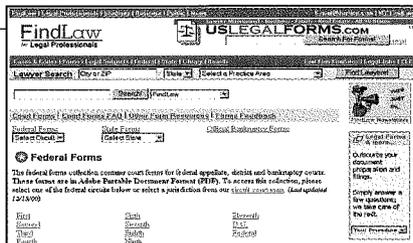
## WEBWATCH

caveats stating that their services are not a substitute for retaining legal counsel. **FreeAdvice.com** offers a one-week membership, for \$9.95, that lets users ask a lawyer a question—via one of the scheduled live chat sessions—and receive an immediate response. **LawGuru.com** is a free advice service that is dependent on whether an attorney in the network handles that particular area of law in the user's state. At **FreeAdvice.com**, the lawyers may not be licensed in a specific state.

### ■ The California Courts Self Help Law Center

[www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp)

Some state governments provide online legal information; the best is the **California Courts Self Help Law Center**. It is designed to help consumers locate legal assistance, learn about the state's law and court systems, and, in some situations, forgo the use of lawyers. The site provides information on such topics as California family law, traffic information, and juvenile law. Most useful are the instructions on the court system and procedures. It also provides general



resources helpful to those out of state, including a page of links on how to secure free or low-cost legal help.

### ■ FindLaw-Forms [forms.findlaw.com](http://forms.findlaw.com)

Most legal web sites list some legal forms, ranging from simple wills and employment contracts to complex licensing agreements. To help consumers locate forms without browsing many sites, **FindLaw-Forms** uses a search engine that collects forms from the Internet and adds them to its database of almost 8000 state and federal court forms. Forms are in PDF format and are grouped into federal and state sections.

### ■ DivorceNet [www.divorcenet.com](http://www.divorcenet.com)

Divorce is one of the most frequently searched topics, and **DivorceNet** is one of the most comprehensive family law sites available. It provides a state-by-state re-

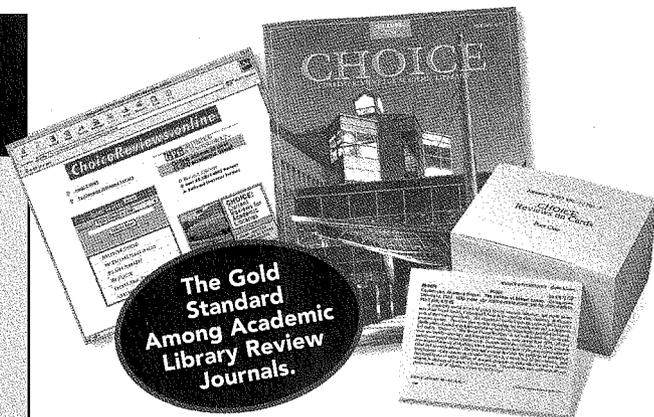
source center for divorce law. These pages offer summaries of each state's divorce laws, often with links to full-text statutes; listings of family lawyers and support services; articles on divorce law; child support calculators; and resource links. Answer desks allow consumers to e-mail questions on law, relationships, taxes, and psychology. There are over 20 discussions devoted to matters such as domestic violence and child support; state-specific discussion boards; and a live chat room. Child Support Network, a company that helps parents who are owed court-ordered child support, sponsors the site, which has ads for in-depth publications.

### ■ Electronic Credit Repair Kit [mix6.com/credit](http://mix6.com/credit)

This guide helps consumers remove errors from credit reports. The site includes sample letters that can be used to get action from credit bureaus, credit reporting agencies, and debt collectors and how to begin fixing an unfairly damaged credit history. The provider is a private individual, Michael Kielsky, and the page is supported by commercial ads for credit services; still, the content is valuable.

## 4 DIFFERENT WAYS TO PURCHASE MATERIALS FOR YOUR COLLEGE LIBRARY

- 1 **Read CHOICE Magazine** for hundreds of brief, critical, expert reviews of new books each month. Every issue features essays, special features and lists of forthcoming titles.
- 2 **Use CHOICE Reviews on Cards.** You'll get a complete set of reviews and *nothing but the reviews!* Each pack is easily divided for quick reference and portability.
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