



SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA

CIVIL DIVISION



HANDBOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT THEMSELVES IN CIVIL CASES

OPEN TO ALL
TRUSTED BY ALL
JUSTICE FOR ALL

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The appendix has several documents that can help you. These documents are:

- **LawHelp flyer:** This flyer helps you connect to a website that gives you free information about your rights and where to get legal help.
- **Tips for Attending Remote Hearings:** This document gives you tips for before and during your remote hearing.
- **Civil Remote Hearing Instructions for Participants:** These instructions tell you how to connect to your remote hearing.
- **Public Access for Remote Court Hearings:** This sheet tells you the web links and phone numbers you need to connect to your court hearing.
- **Tips for Using DC Courts Remote Hearing Sites:** This flyer tells you where you can go to use a computer for free during your court hearing.
- **Civil Legal Services Reference Guide:** This guide tells you where to get free legal help.

Section 1: General Questions

This section answers the following questions:

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Why should I read this handbook?

This handbook provides basic information about what happens in civil cases in the DC Superior Court. It explains some of your basic rights and responsibilities if you represent yourself in a civil case – either as a plaintiff or as a defendant.

- For the **Civil Division's webpage**: <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/civil-division>.
- For a **live chat** feature, go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/civil-matters/requesting-over-10k/>, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
 - **If you're on your computer**: Click the rectangular blue icon on the bottom right-hand side of the screen.
 - **If you're on your phone**: Look for small text on the right that says "Chat Now Button." Click on that text.
- To get **court forms**, go to: <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms>.

Section 1: General Questions

What has changed during the pandemic?

The main change is that the court is conducting many hearings by phone or video. Some hearings are in person. The Court will tell you how you can participate in your hearing. If you're not sure whether your hearing is in person or remote, call the Clerk's Office at (202) 879-1133.

The court has also implemented a wide range of safeguards to keep everyone who comes to the courthouse safe as long as the pandemic lasts.

How do I participate remotely in hearings?

Before your hearing, the court will send instructions explaining how you can participate remotely. You can participate in one of three ways:



Option 1: Laptop or Desktop Computer. Click on the WebEx direct link provided by the court. This link takes you to the page to join the remote hearing. If you have trouble with the link, you may also go to <https://dccourts.webex.com> and type the Meeting ID the court sent you. You may also open your internet browser and copy and paste or type the link provided by the court. After you open WebEx, click on "Join Meeting."



Option 2: Smartphone, Tablet, or iPad. Download the WebEx App called "Cisco WebEx Meetings." Enter the meeting number or link provided by the court. Type your name and email address and click "join."



Option 3: Telephone. Call (202) 860-2110 or the toll-free number (844) 992-4726. Wait a moment, then enter the WebEx Meeting ID provided by the court and press #. Then press # again to enter the hearing. *Many people may find phone participation less effective than video participation.*

Get more information about remote hearings:

- **Remote hearing information:** Go to the **end of this packet** or to <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/DC-Superior-Court-Remote-Court-Participants-WebEx-Instructions.pdf>
- **Remote hearing tipsheet:** Go to the **end of this packet** or to <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/Civil%20Remote%20Hearing%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf>

Section 1: General Questions

If you have questions, call the Civil Clerk's Office at (202) 879-1133. For technical issues or questions, call the IT Division at (202) 879-1928.

What if I can't participate from my home?

Are there places I can go for my hearing? Yes. The court has set up five sites around the city where you can participate in remote hearings with a free computer and Wi-Fi. The remote sites are open Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4:00pm. Safety and security measures are in place. Information about the sites is on a sheet at the **end of this handbook** and online at: <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/Remote-Hearing-Sites-Tip-Sheet-3.pdf>.



How do I reserve a computer station? Call (202) 879-1900 or email DCCourtsRemoteSites@dcsc.gov at least 24 hours before your hearing. If you need special accommodations, such as an interpreter, call (202) 879-1900 at least 24 hours before your hearing so that the court can make the arrangements.

What should I bring with me? Please bring the following items with you:

1. Your case number and any hyperlinks the court gave you for your hearing;
2. Any documents you need for your hearing (evidence such as exhibits, receipts; photos; contracts, etc.);
3. Pen and paper for notetaking; and
4. A mask or facial covering (if you do not have a mask, one will be provided for you).

Section 1: General Questions

What kind of cases does this handbook cover?

This handbook covers cases in the Civil Division. These are cases where one party is suing another for money that's more than \$10,000, or to get the other side to do something or stop doing something. These cases involving mortgage foreclosure and collection of debts over \$10,000.



Does this handbook cover all kinds of civil cases?

No. The following types of cases are **not** covered by this handbook:

- **Claims for \$10,000 or less if you're only asking for money.** These cases go to the Small Claims Branch. This branch has different rules and procedures. Get the handbook for small claims cases at: <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/SmallClaimsHandbook.pdf>. Call **(202) 879-1120** for more information about small claims cases.
- **Eviction cases.** The Landlord and Tenant Court generally handles cases in which landlords are trying to evict tenants. If you want more information about these cases, go to: <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/civil-matters/landlord-tenant/>. For **free legal help**, call the Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network at **(202) 780-2575**.
- **Housing Conditions Cases.** If you're suing your landlord about a housing conditions case, you will bring a case in the Civil Division. However, these cases have simplified procedures. For **free legal help**, call the Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network at **(202) 780-2575**.
- **Any case outside the Civil Actions branch.** For example, this handbook does not cover family cases, domestic violence cases, criminal cases, or cases in the probate division.

Section 1: General Questions

Do I need a lawyer to represent me?

It depends. If you're an individual, you don't have to have a lawyer, but a company does need lawyers. Almost everyone is better off with a lawyer. A lawyer can advise you about what your rights are. A lawyer can help you understand the court's rules and procedures, which are often hard to understand and follow.



If you can't afford to hire a lawyer, you may be able to get one for free. To find a list of free lawyers, you can:

- Go to the list at the end of this booklet; or
- Go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/Quick-Reference-Consortium-Organizations.pdf>.

Can the court appoint a lawyer to represent me?

No. The court cannot appoint lawyers to represent people who cannot afford a lawyer in civil cases. Although the court can give you information about finding a lawyer, it is up to you to find a lawyer willing to represent you.

What do I have to do if I represent myself?

Everyone who comes to court must follow the rules of court. In general, the same rules apply to parties who don't have lawyers and parties who do have lawyers. This handbook helps you to understand those rules and what to do.

The judge can't give you legal advice. However, the judge may give basic information about how the court works and what the rules are.

What rules do I have to follow in my court case?

The rules for your court case are the Rules of Civil Procedure. These are detailed rules that apply to civil cases from start to finish. This handbook only summarizes the most important parts of the Civil Rules – the parts that come up frequently for people who do not have a lawyer.

A copy of the DC Superior Court's Rules of Civil Procedure is available online here: <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/rules>.

Section 1: General Questions

How should I behave in hearings?

Whether a hearing is in-person or remote, follow these simple rules:

- Show up on time (or, for remote hearings, a few minutes before the hearing is scheduled to start)
- Check in with the court clerk
- After you check in with the clerk, wait quietly to wait for your case to be called
- Put your device on mute until your case is called.
- Act respectfully to the judge and the other party
- Listen to the judge's questions and do your best to answer them
- Wait your turn to speak
- Don't interrupt the judge or another party when they are speaking – you will get your chance
- Do not argue with the other party in front of the judge



What should I wear when I have a hearing?

Wear clothes that you would wear to an important occasion – like a job interview.

Section 2: Getting Help

This section answers the following questions:

- Where can I get free legal help? (page 7)
- Where can I get more information about handling my case? (page 7)
- How can I get more information about what's happening in my case? (page 7)
- Can I call or write the judge if I don't know what to do? (page 7)

Where can I get free legal help?

A list of groups that can give free legal help is at the **back of this handbook**. You can get this list at: <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/Quick-Reference-Consortium-Organizations.pdf>.

Where can I get more information about handling my case?

The Superior Court website, <http://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/>, has information about specific types of civil cases and helpful forms. Look at the tabs for "Civil Division," and "Services."

How do I get information about what is happening in my case?

You can get information about what documents and orders have been filed in your case at <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/cases-online>. You can search for a case by case number or name. Unfortunately, this website doesn't work on your phone. You can also call the Clerk's office.

Can I call or write the judge if I don't know what to do?

No. Court rules don't let anyone (lawyers or non-lawyers) call or write a judge or the judge's staff for help. The rules also don't let court employees give legal advice to anyone. The purpose of the rule is so that everyone is treated equally and both sides get a chance to be heard before the court makes a decision. Court employees may be able to give you basic information about procedures.

If you want the judge to do something, you must file a written request called a motion and send a copy to the other side. The procedures for filing a motion are explained later in this handbook. The rules also never let judges and their staff discuss a case with only one side.

Section 3: Filing Documents

This section answers the following questions:

- How do I file documents? (page 8)
- What if I can't afford the fees to file documents? (page 9)

How do I file documents?

You can file documents in person in any of the following ways:

- **Option 1: Mail.** You can mail them to the Civil Actions Branch Clerk's Office Room 5000, Moultrie Courthouse, 500 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.
- **Option 2: In Person.** You can file documents in Room 5000, Moultrie Courthouse, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.
- **Option 3: Drop Box.** You can put the documents in the drop box in the lobby of the Moultrie Courthouse at 500 Indiana Avenue, N.W. Call the Clerk's Office a few days later to check if your documents have arrived. You can call them at (202) 879-1133 or (202) 879-1134.
- **Option 4: Electronically.** You can file the document electronically (efiling). The court encourages people who represent themselves to efile if they can. For more information about efilings and how to create a free CaseFileXpress account, go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/e-filing>, or call File & Serve Xpress at (877) 433- 4533. CaseFileXpress (CFX) offers a training video that explains its core features in addition to best practice tips. Go to: <https://www.fileandservexpress.com/dc/#DCTraining>
- **Option 5: Email (only sometimes).** You may email your documents to civilefilings@dcsc.gov **only if:**
 - You are filing a fee waiver request; **or**
 - Your situation is an emergency (and you're filing an emergency motion, e.g., for a temporary restraining order).

Section 3: Filing Documents

What if I can't afford the fees to file documents?

If you can't afford the fees, you can ask the court to waive the fees. To get a waiver of these fees, file a fee waiver form (Civil Actions Form 106A). Find this form online at <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/judge-in-chambers/in-forma-pauperis-fee-waiver>.



You may be allowed to file papers without paying fees even if you have a job. If you show that you receive Medicaid, SSI, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or other public benefits, you can get a waiver. Otherwise, you may have to fill out information about your income, assets, and expenses.

If you want to file a complaint without paying the filing fee, email the complaint and the fee waiver application to civilefiling@dcsc.gov. The form is sent to a judge for a decision. If you want a waiver of fees after you have filed, you must get the waiver from the judge assigned to your case.

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

This section answers the following questions:

- How do I sue someone? (page 10)
- Where should I file my lawsuit? (page 10)
- What forms do I have to fill out? (page 11)
- Where can I get these forms? (page 11)
- What do I write in the complaint? (page 12)
- What do I write in the summons? (page 12)
- What do I write on the case information form? (page 12)
- Do my court documents have to look a certain way? (page 13)
- How much does it cost to file new cases? (page 13)
- What happens if I need to fix something in my complaint? (page 14)
- How do I get a jury trial? (page 14)
- What is the case number? (page 14)
- Who will decide my case? (page 14)
- What is an initial order? (page 15)

How do I sue someone?

To sue someone, there are three initial steps.

- **Step 1:** Fill out the court forms.
- **Step 2:** File the papers at the court. *See Section 3: Filing Documents*
- **Step 3:** Make sure the other side gets a copy of the papers in a way allowed by the rules. *This is called "service." Learn about how to serve somebody in Section 5: How Do I Tell the Other Side I'm suing them?*

Each of these steps is discussed more below. The person who files the case is called the "plaintiff." The person who gets sued is called the "defendant."

Where should I file my lawsuit?

File your complaint in the Civil Actions Branch in Room 5000 of the Moultrie Courthouse if:

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

- You want more than \$10,000 from the defendant; **or**
- You want the court to order someone to do something (other than pay money) or not to do something. (This is called asking for “equitable relief”).

If you are seeking \$10,000 or less and only want money from the defendant, you must file your case in the Small Claims Branch. To get information about the Small Claims Branch, you can call (202) 879-1120.

What forms do I have to fill out?

The documents you need to fill out are:

1. **A complaint:** In this document, you say what you think the other side did wrong and what you want the court to do about it. *Learn more on page 12.*
2. **A summons:** This document tells the other side you’re suing them. *Learn more on page 12.*
3. **A case information sheet:** On this form, you check off what type of case you are bringing. *Learn more on page 12.*
4. **A fee waiver form (if you’re asking for one):** If you can’t afford the court fees and want the court to waive them, fill out the fee waiver form at the beginning of your case. *Learn more about fee waivers on page 9.*



Where can I get these forms?

You can get these forms in one of two ways:

- **Option 1: Online.**
 - Go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms>.
 - Next to the blue search bar, under “Choose your category” select “Civil.”
 - Next, select “Civil Actions (Requesting over \$10,000).”
 - Then, search for the name of the form in the search bar on the left.

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

- **Option 2: Go in person** to the Civil Clerk's office at 500 Indiana NW, Suite 5000, Washington DC 20001. Ask for copies of these forms.

What do I write in the complaint?

The complaint must contain a short, clear of your claim showing that you are entitled to money or that the defendant should be required to do something. You need to provide the basic facts. But you do not have to include detailed factual information. It is not enough to say only that the defendant harmed you. You can attach to your complaint a key document like a contract.

If you file in person or by mail, you'll need one copy of the complaint for the Court, plus an extra copy for each person you're suing.

If you don't have a lawyer, sign the complaint yourself. Include your address, email address, and telephone number. Your signature means that to the best of your knowledge, everything in the complaint is true and you aren't filing your complaint to harass the other party. If a judge finds that you violated this commitment, he or she may impose penalties. See Civil Rule 11.

What do I write in the summons?

A summons is the paper that gives a defendant formal notice of your case and tell the defendant to come to court and file an answer.

When you file a complaint, you must complete a separate summons for each person you're suing. If you're filing in person, the Clerk's Office will give you a blank summons form. Complete the summons, including the name and address of each defendant. Print your name, address, and telephone number in the lower left corner of the summons.

What do I write on the case information form?

In addition to the complaint, you are also required to file a Case Information Form. The Case Information Form, which you can get online, lists the different categories of civil cases – for example, breach of contract or personal injury. You should check the category that describes the type of case you are filing. The plaintiff must also include whether there are any pending related cases and whether any defendant(s) is/are being sued in their official capacity (as a government official).

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

Do my court documents have to look a certain way?

If you're filling out the forms you get from the Clerk's office or the website, make sure you fill out all of the blanks.

If you're writing documents not using the forms from the court, you need to make sure to include certain information. All of these documents must be on white paper, size 8-1/2" x 11." Here is an example of what the top of the first page should look like:

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	
Civil Division	
[Name and address of plaintiff(s)],	:
Plaintiff(s),	:
	:
	:
	:
	:
[Name and address of defendant(s)],	:
Defendant(s).	:
COMPLAINT	

How much does it cost to file a new case?

It costs \$120 to file a complaint, unless you get permission not to pay the fee because you cannot afford it (see page 9 of this handbook). You have to pay this \$120 filing fee before the clerk provides you the copy of the complaint, summons and Initial Order to serve on each defendant.

Filing fees can be paid by:

- cash

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

- credit card (American Express, Discover, Visa or MasterCard). To pay by credit card, you must have an invoice from the clerk's office.
- personal or certified check or money order payable to: "Clerk, D.C. Superior Court." To pay by personal check, you must provide a copy of your driver's license.

What happens if I need to fix something in my complaint?

You have the right to fix or add information or to include an additional claim. This is called an "amendment" to the complaint. You have the right to amend it one time without getting permission from the judge within 21 days after you serve the defendant with the complaint or after the defendant responds. Otherwise, you need to file a motion asking the judge to allow you to amend your complaint. See Civil Rule 15.

If your contact information changes, you must tell the Court and the other side. This is done in a paper that the Court calls a "praecipe," which just means it is a notice to the Clerk.

How do I get a jury trial?

You will not get a jury trial unless you ask for it. If you are the plaintiff, you should include a demand for a jury trial in your complaint. The defendant must file a jury demand not later than 14 days after the service of the last document that raised the issue that you want a jury to decide. See Civil Rule 38(b)(1).

What is the case number?

When you file a complaint, the clerk assigns a Civil Action Number to the new case. You need to have the case number for any future filings in the case or if you want to get information about the case.

Who will decide my case?

A judge will decide your case. New cases are randomly assigned to one of the judges who handle civil cases. **The judge to whom the case is assigned handles the case from beginning to end, unless the case is reassigned to a different judge.** *For some types of cases, like debt collection and mortgage foreclosure cases, your judge might get assigned in a different way.*

Section 4: How Do I Start a Case?

What is an initial order?

Once your case has been assigned to a judge, the Clerk's Office prepares an Initial Order.

The Initial Order is a form generated by computer that includes the following information:

- when you must file proof that you served each defendant
- when the defendant must file an answer to the complaint
- the name of the judge to whom the case is assigned
- the number and location of the courtroom of the judge to whom the case is assigned
- the time and date of the initial scheduling conference

You must serve the initial order on each defendant along with the complaint and summons.

Section 5: How Do I Tell the Other Side I'm Suing Them?

This section answers the following questions:

- Do I have to tell the other side about the court case? (page 16)
- How do I serve the complaint to the other side? (page 16)
- What if I'm suing a corporation, partnership, or association? (page 17)
- What if I'm suing the government? (page 18)
- What if I can't serve the other side using one of the methods described above? (page 19)
- How long do I have to serve the complaint? (page 19)
- What should I do after I serve the defendant? (page 19)
- What happens if I don't serve the defendant? (page 19)

Do I have to tell the other side about the court case?

Yes. Your case can't go forward unless you tell the other side about it in a certain way that the law requires. This is called "serving" your complaint. The rest of this section explains how to serve your complaint.

How do I serve the complaint on the other side?

Serving the complaint, summons, and Initial Order, means that you arrange to provide a copy of these documents to each defendant.

You can't serve a defendant yourself. The person who serves this paperwork (sometimes called a "process server") can be anyone who is 18 years of age or older and who is not a party to the case. See Civil Rule 4(c)(2).



In every case, you must file an affidavit or declaration completed by the process server with information about the process server and when and how the process server served the defendant. To learn about affidavits and declarations, see *page 28*.

Unless you qualify for one of the alternative methods of service described later in this handbook, you can serve a defendant in one of these ways:

Section 5: How Do I Tell the Other Side I'm Suing Them?



Option 1: In-person service. The process server gives the papers directly to the defendant.



Option 2: Service on someone who lives with the defendant. The process server gives the papers to a person over the age of 18 living at the defendant's residence, or to an agent authorized by appointment or law to receive service of process. See Civil Rule 4(e)(2).



Option 3: Service by certified or registered mail. The process server sends a copy of the papers by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested. See Civil Rule 4(c)(4). *If you get back the "green card" signed by the defendant acknowledging receipt of the certified letter, you must file an affidavit or declaration with the green card or a copy.*



Option 4: Service by first-class mail. The process server sends a copy of the papers to the defendant by first-class mail, postage prepaid. *The process server must also include two copies of a Notice and Acknowledgment Form 1-A, available online, and a return envelope, postage prepaid, addressed to the sender. See Civil Rule 4(c)(5). You are responsible for filing the Acknowledgment Form, which must contain the defendant's signature acknowledging receipt.*

If you get a fee waiver, the court will try to serve the defendant for you. If the court isn't able to, it's your job to serve the defendant.

What if I'm suing a corporation, partnership, or association?

There are special rules for serving defendants that are organizations and not people.

To serve a corporation, partnership, or association, you must mail a copy of the complaint, summons and Initial Order to a person authorized to accept service for that corporation or association. An authorized person means an officer, managing agent, general agent, or any other agent of the corporation or association authorized by appointment or law to receive service of process. See Civil Rule 4(h)(1).

If you're serving a corporation or association registered with the D.C. government, you can find out who is designated as the authorized agent for service for a corporation, go to

Section 5: How Do I Tell the Other Side I'm Suing Them?

<https://corponline.d cra .dc.gov/Home.aspx/Landing> (you will have to create an account). You can also call or visit the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Corporations Division. Their number is (202) 442-4430.

What if I'm suing the government?

There are special rules if you're suing the government, a government agency, or someone who works for the government (for something they did as part of their job).

If you're suing the District of Columbia or one of its officers or agencies:

You can serve the District of Columbia and its officers or agencies in one of two ways:

- **Option 1: Deliver** (by special process server) a copy of the complaint, summons and Initial Order to the Mayor of the District of Columbia (or designee) and to the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. See Civil Rule 4(j)(3).
- **Option 2: Mail** (certified or registered mail, return receipt requested) a copy of the complaint, summons and Initial Order to the Mayor of the District of Columbia (or designee) and to the Attorney General for the District of Columbia. See Civil Rule 4(j)(3).

To determine the person designated by the Mayor for service of process, you should call (202) 727-7306. For the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, you should call (202) 727-6295. The address for the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia is 441 4th Street, N.W., 6th floor south, Washington, DC 20001.

If you're suing the United States government or one of its officers or agencies: The most common and easiest way to serve the United States and its officers or agencies is by sending a copy of the complaint, summons and Initial Order by **registered or certified mail** to:

1. The civil process clerk at the Office of the United States Attorney, Moultrie Courthouse, 500 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001; **and**
2. The Attorney General of the United States, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20530.

Section 5: How Do I Tell the Other Side I'm Suing Them?

Other methods of serving the United States and its officer and agencies are explained in Civil Rule 4(i)(2) and (3).

What if I can't serve the other side using one of the methods described above?

If you cannot serve the other side using the ways described in earlier answers, you may ask the court for permission to use a different method. You must file a motion explaining what methods you tried and what alternative methods you think will work. Examples include serving the other side using email or delivering the documents to the individual's workplace. For more specifics, please read Civil Rule 4(e)(3).

How long do I have to serve the complaint?

You generally have **60 days** from the date of filing to serve the complaint, unless you get an extension. See Civil Rule 4(m).



If you need more time, you can file a motion for an extension of time for service. You should file the motion **before** the original 60-day deadline passes.

What should I do after I serve the defendant?

You must file proof of service. Proof of service consists of an affidavit or declaration under penalty of perjury that provides information about how service was made. Civil Rule 4(l) describes the information you must provide. You must file proof of service with the court within 60 days after you file your complaint. For an alternative method of service, the court may specify how to submit the proof of service.

What happens if I don't serve the defendant?

If you don't serve the defendant within the allowed time, or if you don't file proof that you served the defendant, your case will be dismissed. See Civil Rule 4(m).

If your case is dismissed for these reasons, you can file a motion to reinstate the case. You generally must file the motion within 14 days after the dismissal, and unless you got a waiver of fees (as explained on page 9), you must pay a \$20 filing fee. See Civil Rule 41(b)(3).

Section 6: I've Been Sued. What Do I Do?

This section answers the following questions:

- I was sued. What documents did I get? (page 20)
- I was served with a complaint. What do I do next? (page 20)
- What happens if I don't do any of the above options? (page 21)

I was sued. What documents did I get?

If someone sued you, here are the papers you should have gotten:

- **Complaint:** This form was filled out by the other side. It tells you why the other side is suing you and what they're asking the Court to do.
- **Summons:** This form was filled out by the other side. It tells you that you've been sued and that you have to file an Answer.
- **Initial Order:** This form was filled out by the court. It tells you the deadline for filing your answer, who your judge is, and when your hearing is.

I was served with a complaint. What do I do next?

After you're served with a complaint, you have **21 days** to respond. See Civil Rule 12(a)(1). This deadline starts from the day you are served with the summons. To respond, you can do one of these things:

- **Option 1: File an "Answer."** An answer is your response to a complaint
 - In your answer, you must respond to every fact and claim the other side made in their complaint. Say if you agree that fact is true, if you don't agree it's true, or if you don't have enough information to respond. If you don't respond to a fact or claim, the judge may decide that you agree with that point. See Civil Rule 8(b)(6).
 - You must file your answer with the court and give ("serve") a copy to the other side. To learn how to file, go to Section 3 of this handbook. To learn how to serve the other side, see pages 16-17.
- **Option 2: Include a "Counterclaim" In your Answer.** If you think you have a claim against the plaintiff, you may be able to file a counterclaim.
 - You should include your Counterclaim in your Answer (see Option 1 above).

Section 6: I've Been Sued. What Do I Do?

- First respond to the plaintiff's complaint. Then state your counterclaim.
- If the counterclaim involves the same facts as the complaint, you might have to make your counterclaim in this case, not in a future case. See Civil Rule 13.
- **Option 3: File a "Motion to Dismiss."**
 - Although an Answer is the simplest way to respond to a complaint, you can file a Motion to Dismiss if the other side's claims don't give them a legal reason to win the lawsuit. Motions to dismiss are discussed on page 34 of this handbook.
 - File the Motion to Dismiss with the court. Get ("serve") a copy to the other side. *If you file a motion to dismiss, you don't have to file an Answer unless the court denies the motion. If the court denies the motion, you have 14 days to file an Answer. See Civil Rule 12(a)(4).*
- **Option 4: File a Motion for Extension of Time.** If you need more time, file a motion for extension of time. Section 8 talks about how to file a motion.

What happens if I don't do anything after I get served?

If you don't file anything within the time limit, the Clerk will enter a "default" against you. A default generally means the other side will win the case. The other side may need to prove how much you owe them in order to get a default judgment.

If a default is entered against you, there are two things you can do:

- **File a motion to vacate (remove) the default.** See Civil Rule 55(c). *It's best to do this as soon as possible after you learn there was a default.* Along with your motion, include a "Verified Answer" explaining any defenses that you have to the complaint. See Civil Rule 55(c)(2). "Verified" means sworn before a notary or stated under penalty of perjury. You must pay a \$20.00 fee – unless you got a fee waiver (as explained on page 9).
- **If you get a notice of a hearing called an "ex parte proof hearing," make sure you go to this hearing.** This is very important. At this hearing, the judge will decide whether you owe the other side money and how

Section 6: I've Been Sued. What Do I Do?

much, *even if you're not there*. If you go, you can explain why you didn't respond to the complaint and ask the judge to remove the default.

Section 7: I Sued Someone. They Didn't Respond. What Do I Do?

This section answers the following questions:

- The person I sued didn't respond to my Complaint. What happens next? (page 23)
- The clerk entered a default against the other side. What do I do? (page 23)
- Do I have to prove anything else to win my case (to get a default judgment)? (page 24)

The person I sued didn't respond to my Complaint. What happens next?

If the defendant doesn't respond to your Complaint, the Clerk will enter a "default." This usually means you win your case. You may have to prove how much the other side owes you to obtain a default judgment.

The Clerk entered a default against the other side. What do I do?

To get a decision in your favor, you have 60 days to do one of two things:

Option 1: File a motion asking the judge for an order that gives you a default judgment. See Civil Rule 55(b)(2). You have 60 days to file this motion. Your motion must ask for an *ex parte* proof hearing (a hearing that doesn't require the defendant to participate). At that hearing, you must prove the amount of your damages if it is not a set amount like a debt. See Civil Rule 55-II. You need to bring proof. *Even if the other side defaulted, you still have to give them notice of this hearing. They have the right to come to it, challenge your evidence, and present evidence of their own.*

If the judge agrees with you at the *ex parte* proof hearing, the court will enter a default judgment. A default judgment gives you the same rights as a judgment entered in your favor after a trial.

- **Option 2: Ask for a "default judgment" from the Clerk.** This option is available only in limited circumstances, including that your complaint was verified and asked only for a specific sum of money. You can read about the requirements for this option in Civil Rule 55(b)(1). ***Most people will choose option 1, not option 2.***

Section 7: I Sued Someone. They Didn't Respond. What Do I Do?

Do I have to prove anything else to win my case (to get a default judgment)?

In addition to proving how much the other side owes you, **you must prove the defendant isn't in the military.**

To make this showing, you must complete a form called the "Servicemembers Civil Relief Act Declaration" verifying that the defaulting party is not in the military. Get this form online at <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/pdf-forms/ServicemembersCivilReliefActAffidavit.pdf> **or** by searching for it at <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/>. See Civil Rule 55(b)(1).

Your declaration must include proof. If you have information that proves he or she is not in the military, you can submit an affidavit explaining how you know from your personal knowledge that the defendant is not in the military. If you know the defendant's date of birth or Social Security number, you can usually get proof from a U.S. government database. You may look up whether the defendant is in the military at the following website <https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>.

Section 8: How Do I Ask the Judge to Make a Ruling?

This section answers the following questions:

- How can I ask the court to make a ruling? (page 25)
- How do I make a motion in writing? (page 25)
- Step 1: What do I need to put in my written motion? (page 25)
- Step 2: How do I file a motion? (page 27)
- Step 3: How do I serve a motion? (page 28)
- What do I do if I disagree with a motion the other side filed? (page 28)
- What if I need more time to file or oppose a motion? (page 29)
- What are “affidavits” and “declarations”? (page 29)

How do I ask the court to make a ruling?

To ask a judge to make a ruling, you generally have to make a motion. You can make a motion in one of two ways:

- **Option 1:** In writing
- **Option 2:** By asking the judge for the ruling at your hearing.

After you make a motion, the other side gets to respond. Then, the judge will make a decision.

How do I make a motion in writing?

There are three steps to make a written motion:

- **Step 1:** Write the motion.
- **Step 2:** File the motion
- **Step 3:** Serve the motion.

Each of these steps is explained below.



Step 1: What do I need to put in my written motion?

The most important part of a motion is to tell the judge what you’re asking for. There is other information you need too. **The Court has a form that helps you write a motion.** To get this form, go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/>.

Section 8: How Do I Ask the Judge to Make a Ruling?

Next to the blue search bar, under “Choose your Category,” Select Civil. Then, in the search bar, type in “Pro Se Motion.” If you have trouble, call the Civil Clerk’s Office at (202) 879-1133.

What goes at the top of my motion? At the top of your motion, you need to include all of the following information (most of which is suggested on the form):

- **The name of the court:** *For a civil case, write “Superior Court of the District of Columbia, Civil Division.”*
- **The case name and number:** *Find this information on your court papers. The case name has both sides’ names. The case number have numbers and letters and will look like this: 2021 CA 123456.*
- **The judge's name and calendar number:** *Find this information on your court papers.*
- **A title that clearly states what you’re asking the judge to order.**

For example, the top of a motion could look like this:

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA		
Civil Division		
[Name of plaintiff],	:	[Case Number]
Plaintiff	:	[Judge’s Name]
	:	[Calendar Number]
vs.	:	[Next Court Date]
	:	
[Name of Defendant],	:	
Defendant	:	
	:	
		[Title of Motion]

What goes in the main part of my motion? The main part of your motion tells the judge what you want them to do and the reason why. It should include:

- **A statement of what you’re asking the judge to do.** *For example, you could ask the judge to reschedule the hearing. Or, you could ask the judge to order the other party to do something or stop doing something.*

Section 8: How Do I Ask the Judge to Make a Ruling?

- **A statement of the reasons why the judge should do what you want.** You should include the facts that support your motion. If a specific rule or law or other legal authority supports your request, you can say that too.
- **A statement in your motion that you asked the opposing party if they would be willing agree to what you are requesting in your motion (Civil Rule 12-I(a)).** For some kinds of motions, for example, to reschedule a hearing, the other party might agree. If the other side does agree, you should call your motion a “Consent Motion” in the title. Judges usually grant consent motions, often without a hearing. *For more information, go to “Step 2: How do I file a motion?” below.*
- **Your signature.**
- **Your home address, telephone number and email address.**
- **A statement called a “certificate of service” confirming that you sent a copy to every party in the case.** *For more information, go to “Step 3: How do I serve a motion?” on page 28.*
- **A proposed order for the judge to sign**



Step 2: How do I file a motion?

Before you file a motion, you have to do a few things:

- **Step 1: Ask the other side if they will agree to what you’re asking for.** See Civil Rule 12-I(a). If you do not try to get the other parties to agree, the judge can deny the motion for that reason alone.
- **Step 2: If the motion is trying to get information from the other side (a “discovery” issue), you might have to meet to resolve the dispute before going to the judge.** See Civil Rules 26(h) and 37(a)(1)(A). Learn more about trying to get information from the other side (“Discovery”) in Section X.
- **Step 3: File the motion.** If you are filing a paper copy (and not efilng), you need to file two copies: one for the Clerk’s Office and one for the judge. See Section 3 (“How do I file documents?”) for more information about how to file.

Section 8: How Do I Ask the Judge to Make a Ruling?

- **Step 4: Pay the filing fee (unless you have a fee waiver).** The filing fee for a motion is \$20. You can pay the filing fee by:
 - Cash,
 - Money order
 - Personal check (only if you go in person to the Clerk's Office with proper ID)
 - Payments through an electronic portal, PayPort (only for certain fees). For more information, go to:
<https://www.dccourts.gov/services/online-payment>.



Step 3: How do I serve a motion?

You have two options to serve a motion on the other side:

- Mailing a copy to each party on the other side; or
- Electronic service through <https://www.fileandservexpress.com/dc/>, *but only if*:
 - The other side has a lawyer; and
 - You sign up for a CaseFileXpress efilng account. For information about how to sign up, go to: <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/e-filing/>.

What do I do if I disagree with a motion the other side filed?

If you don't agree with the other side's motion, you must file a written response explaining the reasons you disagree with the motion. This is called "opposing" the motion.

You must file and serve your opposition to a motion within 14 days after you get (are served with) the motion from the other side. See Civil Rule 12-I(e). If you get the motion by mail, you have 3 extra days to file and serve an opposition. See Civil Rule 6(d).

Your opposition must include:

- A statement of the reasons for your opposition
- A proposed order for the judge to sign

Section 8: How Do I Ask the Judge to Make a Ruling?

- A statement called a “certificate of service” confirming that you sent a copy to every party in the case

If you file a paper copy of your opposition in person at the Clerk’s Office, you must also include a copy for the judge. If filing by mail, you may mail the judge’s copy directly to the judge’s chambers.

What if I need more time to file or oppose a motion?

You can file a motion to ask the judge for more time if:

- You need more time than the rules normally allow; **or**
- You cannot meet a specific deadline set by the judge.

You can use the “Pro Se Motion” form to ask for more time. Go to www.dccourts.gov/services/forms. Search for “Pro Se Motion” in the Civil Category.

Before you prepare your motion, contact the other side and see if you can get them to agree to give you extra time. *If the other side agrees, the motion should say in the title that it is a “consent motion.” Judges usually grant consent motions.*

What are “affidavits” and “declarations”?

An **affidavit** is a written statement that you sign before a notary public after you swear or affirm that the information in the statement is true.

A **declaration** is an alternative to an affidavit. Instead of going to a notary, you can make a declaration stating under penalty of perjury that the facts stated in the document are true and correct. See Civil Rule 9-I(e).

At the end of the document, include the following statement: “I declare [or certify, verify, or state] under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on [date].” Then sign the document.

Section 9: How Do I Get Information from the Other Side?

This section answers the following questions:

- How can I find out more from the other side before trial? (page 30)
- What can I do if I think the other side's discovery requests are unreasonable? (page 30)
- What can I do if I need evidence from someone who is not a party to the case? (page 30)
- What are expert witnesses? (page 30)

How can I find out more from the other side before trial?

You have the right to get information directly from the other side about the facts and issues in the case. This is called “**discovery.**” Two types of discovery more commonly used by people without lawyers are (1) asking the other side for documents, emails, photographs, or videos and (2) sending a list of written questions for the other side to answer in writing and under oath. Civil Rules 26 – 37 explain these and other forms of discovery in detail. You can also talk to the judge at a hearing about getting information that you need before trial.

In most civil cases, the judge will set deadlines schedule for discovery (and other things) at the initial scheduling conference. See Civil Rule 16(b). For more information about the initial scheduling conference, see Section 10.

What can I do if I think the other side's discovery requests are unreasonable?

You can object to another party's discovery requests. You generally have 30 days to object, and you must object in writing. If the other party wants to pursue the request, it must (with a few exceptions) schedule a meeting with you to try to resolve the disagreement before the other party asks the judge to get involved. See Civil Rules 26(h) and 37(a).

If you are concerned about giving the other side personal or confidential information, you can ask for a protective order – a court order that allows the other side to use or disclose the information only for the case.

Section 9: How Do I Get Information from the Other Side?

What can I do if I need evidence from someone who is not a party to the case?

If you need testimony or documents from a person or organization that is not a party, and that person or organization will not cooperate voluntarily, you can subpoena a witness or the documents. Civil Rule 45 contains the rules for subpoenas.

You can get a blank subpoena online at, <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/forms-by-location?location=civilactions/> and you should complete it before serving it.

What are expert witnesses?

Expert witnesses are people with special training or experience who are allowed to give their opinions to support one side in the case. In some cases, a party may need an expert witness to prove his or her case. Any party who may want to call an expert to testify at trial has to give notice to the other side – identifying the person and stating the substance of the opinion and summarizing the grounds for the opinion. See Civil Rule 26(a)(2).

Section 10: What Happens Before the Trial?

This section answers the following questions:

- What can happen before the trial? (page 32)
- What is the Initial Scheduling Conference? (page 33)
- What if I need the judge to do something about an emergency before the trial? (page 33)
- What is a motion to dismiss? (page 34)
- What's a motion for summary judgment? (page 34)
- What is mediation? (page 35)
- What's the pretrial conference? (page 36)

What can happen before the trial?

Many things can happen before the trial. They include:

1. Initial Scheduling Conference (page 33)

The first hearing in front of the judge that is usually 90-120 days after the plaintiff files the complaint.

2. Emergency Order (page 33)

A way to ask the judge to stop the other side from doing something that could harm you and can't wait until trial.

3. Motion to Dismiss (page 34)

A formal way for the defendant to ask the judge to dismiss the case before trial.

4. Motion for Summary Judgment (page 34)

A formal way for either side to ask the judge to rule for them before trial.

5. Mediation (page 35)

A meeting with the other side and a neutral person to try to resolve the case without going to trial.

6. Pretrial Conference (page 36)

A hearing 60 days after the last mediation session where the judge schedules the trial and sets guidelines for the trial.

Section 10: What Happens Before the Trial?

What is the Initial Scheduling Conference?

The Initial Scheduling Conference is the first hearing in front of the judge.

- ***When is the Initial Scheduling Conference?***

The Initial Scheduling Conference usually happens 90 to 120 days after the plaintiff files the complaint. *The date and time of the Initial Scheduling Conference are in the Initial Order given to the plaintiff when the plaintiff files the complaint.*

- ***What happens at the Initial Scheduling Conference?***

At this conference, the judge puts the case on a schedule. The schedule usually has deadlines for completing discovery, filing motions, and going to mediation to try to resolve the case without a trial. The judge usually doesn't set a trial date until later in the case. In some types of cases, like mortgage foreclosure or debt collection, the judge may put the case on a special schedule that focuses on allowing the parties to resolve the case at mediation before setting other deadlines.

- ***Do I have to go to the Initial Scheduling Conference?***

Yes. You have to go to the Initial Scheduling Conference unless you have a lawyer. See Civil Rule 16(b).

- ***Are there special rules for the Initial Scheduling Conference?***

Some judges have additional written rules and procedures. They are available online: <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/civil-matters/general-orders-civil-cases/>. Scroll down until you see the name of the judge in your case. You also can ask the judge at the Initial Scheduling Conference for a copy of any special rules and procedures.

What if I need the judge to do something about an emergency before the trial?

If you have a problem with the other side that you think the judge needs to deal with immediately, you can ask for an emergency order. The main purpose of an emergency order is to stop the other side from doing something that cannot be undone and that would hurt you in a way that cannot be fixed at trial by money or in another way. See Civil Rule 65.

Get a form to ask for an emergency order (“**Motion for Restraining Order**”) at <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/forms>.

Section 10: What Happens Before the Trial?

What is a motion to dismiss?

A motion to dismiss is a formal way for the defendant to ask the judge to dismiss the case before trial.

- ***When should I file a motion to dismiss?***

You can file a motion to dismiss if you're the defendant and you think the other side's claims don't give them a legal basis to win even if all the facts they say are true. See Civil Rule 12(b)(6).

You can also move to dismiss the case on other grounds – for example, because the judge does not have authority to hear the case or because the plaintiff didn't serve you properly. See Civil Rule 12(b).

- ***Can I file a motion to dismiss if I think the other side's claims are false?***

No. What facts are true or false gets decided at trial. If you disagree about what facts are true, that's an issue for trial, not something that can be decided in a motion to dismiss.

- ***Can the plaintiff ever file a motion to dismiss?***

If the defendant counter-sues the plaintiff (files a counterclaim), the plaintiff can move to dismiss the counterclaim.

What's a motion for summary judgment?

A motion for summary judgment is a way you can ask the judge to rule for you before a trial. See Civil Rule 56.

- ***Who can file a motion for summary judgment?***

Either side can file a motion for summary judgment.

- ***When do I file a motion for summary judgment?***

Motions for summary judgment are usually filed after the parties have completed the discovery process.

- ***How do I file a motion for summary judgment?***

In addition to writing a motion explaining why the judge should rule for you before trial, you must submit affidavits or other materials that establish that there is no genuine dispute of fact to be resolved at trial and that the

Section 10: What Happens Before the Trial?

judge or jury would have to return a verdict for that party at trial based on the undisputed facts. *Learn about affidavits on page 28.* If the party seeking summary judgment submits such evidence, the other side must submit evidence that would permit a judge or jury to rule in its favor.

- ***When happens if I do not respond to a summary judgment motion?***

If you do not respond within 14 days, the judge may grant the motion. You may be required to provide a declaration or affidavit summarizing evidence that would enable to you to win at trial.

What is mediation?

Mediation is your chance to have a neutral person who works for the court help you to try to resolve your case without a trial. Mediation is free.

- ***What happens at mediation?***

In mediation, an experienced mediator helps you and the other side communicate your positions on issues and explore possible solutions or settlements.

- ***When is mediation?***

In some types of cases (for example, in foreclosure and debt collection cases), there is an opportunity for an early mediation. More often, a mediation session is scheduled after all discovery is complete and the judge has decided any motions that could resolve the case. A specific date for the session will be scheduled by the judge at the Initial Scheduling Conference or later by the court's Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division.

- ***Can I ask for arbitration instead of mediation?***

Yes. At the Initial Scheduling Conference, the parties have the option to ask for arbitration. In **arbitration**, the arbitrator issues a written ruling for one side or the other after a hearing. If the parties select non-binding arbitration you can ask for a trial after mediation. In binding arbitration, the arbitrator's award is final and you can't ask for a trial after.

- During the public health emergency, all mediations are conducted by video or over the telephone.

Section 10: What Happens Before the Trial?

For more information about mediation, contact the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division at (202) 879-1549.

What is the pretrial conference?

The judge holds a pretrial conference when a case is ready for trial and efforts to resolve it through mediation have failed.

- ***When is the pretrial conference?***

If the parties do not reach a settlement in mediation, they select a date for the pretrial conference in the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division. In most cases, the pretrial conference is scheduled approximately 60 days after the last mediation session.

- ***How do I prepare for a pretrial conference?***

You have to meet with the other side a month before the pretrial conference, and both sides have to file a joint pretrial statement a week before the pretrial conference. Civil Rule 16 tells you more about what you have to do.

- ***What happens at the pretrial conference?***

At the pretrial conference, the judge schedules the trial – usually two to six months after the pretrial conference. The judge also sets guidelines for the trial. The judge may also try to help the parties reach a settlement.

- ***Do I have to go to the pretrial conference?***

Yes. Each party must attend in person, unless the judge excuses them. If you do not attend, the judge may dismiss the case or enter a default. See Civil Rule 16-II.

Section 11: What Happens at the Trial?

This section answers the following questions:

- What happens at trial? (page 37)
- What should I do to prepare for trial? (page 37)
- What counts as evidence? (page 38)
- How does the jury get picked? (page 38)

What happens at the trial?

Opening Arguments	Present Your Case	Closing Arguments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain what you want the judge or jury to do and summarize the evidence you plan to show. The other side will do the same thing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The plaintiff goes first. The defendant goes second.• Show evidence to convince the judge to rule for you.• Bring witnesses You get to ask them questions. Then, the other side gets to ask them questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain why the judge or jury should rule for you. The other side will do the same thing.

What should I do to prepare for trial?

This checklist may help you prepare:

- ✓ Have you prepared your opening statement?
 - Do you have a clear explanation of your case?
 - Are you ready to address all the factors the court must consider in your type of case?
- ✓ Do you have all the documents you plan to show as evidence at trial?
- ✓ If the trial is a jury trial, have you made sure all of the witnesses you need at trial will be at the courthouse?
 - Have you prepared questions for each of your witnesses?
 - Have you met with each of your witnesses?
 - Have you prepared questions for all of the other side's witnesses?
- ✓ Have you prepared your closing argument?

Section 11: What Happens at the Trial?

What counts as evidence?

Evidence includes all of the things you tell or show the judge or jury to prove your case at trial. The kind of evidence you need depends on the kind of case. Ask yourself: what information will convince the judge or jury to do what I am asking?

Usually, a witness can testify only about what the witness saw or heard with his or her own eyes and ears. You can also use documents, emails, text messages, and photographs as evidence.

The judge decides what evidence can be considered. The judge uses rules of evidence to decide that question. A party can object to another party's question to a witness or to a document the other party wants the judge or jury to consider.

The judge is not allowed to give either party legal advice about how to get specific evidence admitted or excluded.

The rules of evidence used in the Superior Court are not collected in one official book. However, with some exceptions, the Superior Court's rules are the same as the Federal Rules of Evidence, which are available online at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre>.

How does the jury get picked?

The basic rules for jury selection are in Civil Rules 47 and 48. Individual judges generally have additional rules and procedures for jury selection. Juries in civil cases usually have 7 or 8 jurors, and they must all agree on the verdict.

Section 12: What Happens After the Trial?

This section answers the following questions:

- How do I collect money the losing party is supposed to pay? (page 39)
- What can I do if I lose at trial? (page 39)

How do I collect money the losing party is supposed to pay?

If you won the trial, it's up to you to collect money that the judge ordered the losing side pay you.

If you want to get money from the employer or bank of the losing party, you may apply for a **writ of attachment**. (You can find this form online at www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/.)

If you do not know whether the losing party has any money or property, you can ask for discovery or an oral examination to find out what assets the defendant has. See Rule 69-l.

What can I do if I lose at trial?

If you lost the case, you can appeal to the Court of Appeals. To start the appeal, you must file a Notice of Appeal within 30 days after the docketing date of the judgment order. Get the Notice of Appeal form online at www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/.

If you lost the case and your judge was a **magistrate judge**, you can't go straight to the Court of Appeals. Instead, you have to file a motion for review. Get this form (called "Motion for Review of Magistrate Judge's Order") online at www.dccourts.gov/services/forms/. Civil Rule 73(b). The motion for review must be filed 14 days after entry of the decision you are challenging.

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- » Referrals to free legal services programs
- » Information about your civil legal rights
- » Self-help court forms and interactive interviews
- » Links to social services and government agencies



LawHelp.org/DC/ced

LawHelp.org/DC/ced provides **FREE** information for small business and nonprofits in legal subject areas including:

- » **IRS Compliance**
- » **Contracts**
- » **Risk Management**
- » **Start-up Information**
- » **Commercial Leases**
- » **Intellectual Property**

Go to **www.LawHelp.org/DC/ced** to find:

- » Legal alerts on law changes
- » In-depth resource manuals on specific legal topics
- » Event calendars for trainings and brief advice clinics
- » On-demand webinars



Tips for Attending Remote Hearings-Civil Division

Courtrooms are closed because of the COVID-19 or coronavirus pandemic. Your court hearing may be held remotely. This means that you will participate by phone or by video conference instead of coming to the courthouse. Here are some tips on how to prepare.

How do I know if I have a remote hearing?



The Court will contact you to tell you that your hearing is remote. They may contact you by sending you an email, letter in the mail, or by calling you.

How do I take part in a remote hearing?

The Court will give you step-by-step instructions on how to take part in the remote hearing. If you lose your written notice, call the Civil Division for instructions at:



(202) 879-1148

Is there anything that I should do before the day of the hearing?

- Let the court know immediately if you cannot join a hearing because you do not have a phone or computer.
- You may want to contact an attorney for legal help.



Small Claims Resource Center at
(202) 849-3608

- You can also find the list of legal services providers at dccourts.gov/coronavirus by clicking on the link that says "List of Legal Service Providers for Those Without an Attorney."
- Evidence: If you want to use photos, video or documents, let the judge know as soon as possible.
- Witnesses: Tell the judge as soon as possible if you want a witness to testify.
- Accommodations & Language Access: Let the court know if you need an interpreter or other accommodation for your hearing.



Tips for the Hearing

- Join the hearing a few minutes early!
- Charge your computer or phone and make sure you have enough minutes to join the call. Find a private and quiet space. If possible, be alone in a room during the hearing. Try to limit distractions as much as possible. If others are in the room with you, ask if they can be quiet during the hearing.
- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Mute all sounds on your phone or computer.
- Say your name before you speak so the record is clear. Be prepared to identify your role in the hearing (e.g., plaintiff, defendant, witness, etc.).
- Speak slowly and clearly so everyone hears what you are saying.
- Pause before speaking in case there is a lag. Use a headset or headphones, if you can. This will free up your hands and sound better.
- Try not to talk over anyone else. Only one person can speak at a time. If you talk while someone else is talking, the judge will not be able to hear you.
- Have all your documents for the hearing in front of you.
- Have a pen and paper to take notes.
- If you are not ready for your hearing or want to speak with an attorney, you can ask the judge to postpone your hearing for another date.
- If your sound or video freezes during the hearing, use the chat feature or call the Clerk's Office to let them know that you are having technical issues.



Special Tips for Video Hearings

(Click here for more information)

- Download the court's hearing software, WebEx, in advance and do a test run! The Court will provide you with a WebEx link in advance of the hearing.
- Set up the camera at eye level. If you are using your phone, prop it up so you can look at it without holding it.
- Look at the camera when you speak and avoid moving around on the video.
- Wear what you would normally wear to court.
- Sit in a well-lit room with no bright lights behind you.
- If possible, find a blank wall to sit in front of. Remember the judge will be able to see everything on your screen, so pick a location that is not distracting.



Civil Remote Hearing Instructions for Participants

The following instructions are for participants who are scheduled to have cases heard before a Civil Judge in a **Remote Courtroom**

When connecting to the WebEx System, there are several options to connect to the court hearing remotely. Please follow the instructions below:

Option 1: (AUDIO ONLY/Dial-in by Phone):

Toll 1 (844) 992-4726 or (202) 860-2110, enter the Meeting ID from the attachment followed by #, press # again to enter session.

- *Please call in no sooner than 5 minutes before your scheduled hearing time. Once you have joined the session, please place your phone on mute until directed otherwise. If you should happen to get disconnected from the call, please call back in using the phone number and access number provided and the courtroom clerk will mute your call until the appropriate time.*

If you select **Option 2** or **Option 3** use the **Audio Alternative**

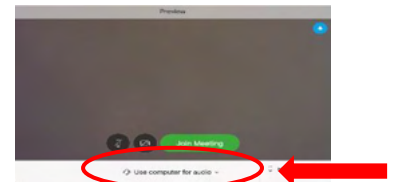
Option 2: (LAPTOP/DESKTOP USERS 1):

Open Web Browser in Google Chrome and copy and paste following address from the next page:
<https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/XXXXXXXXXX>

Option 3: (LAPTOP/DESKTOP USERS 2):

Open Web Browser in Google Chrome and copy and paste following address:
<https://dccourts.webex.com> Select **Join**, enter the Meeting ID from the next page

AUDIO ALTERNATIVE: Instead of automatically using **USE COMPUTER FOR AUDIO**, select **CALL-IN** and follow the **CALL-IN** prompt window. Use a cell phone or desk phone. You will be heard clearer if you **do not** place your phone on SPEAKER. It is very important that you enter the **ACCESS ID#** so that your audio is matched with your video.



Option 4: (Ipad/SMARTPHONE/TABLET):

- Go to App Store, Download WebEx App (Cisco WebEx Meetings)
- Sign into the App with your Name and Email Address
- Select Join Meeting
- Enter address from the next page: <https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/XXXXXXXXXX>
- Click join and make sure your microphone is muted and your video is unmuted (if you need to be seen). If you only need to speak and do not need to be seen, use the audio only option.
- When you are ready click "Join Meeting". If the host has not yet started the meeting, you will be placed in the lobby until the meeting begins.

For Technical Questions or Issues Call: (202) 879-1928, Option 2

Superior Court of the District of Columbia
Public Access for Remote Court Hearings
(Effective August 24, 2020)

The current telephone numbers for all remote hearings are: 202-860-2110 (local) or 844-992-4726 (toll free). After dialing the number, enter the WebEx Meeting ID as shown below for the courtroom.

Please click a WebEx Direct URL link below to join the hearing online.

Audio and video recording; taking pictures of remote hearings; and sharing the live or recorded remote hearing by rebroadcasting, live-streaming or otherwise are not allowed

Courtroom	Types of Hearings Scheduled in Courtroom	Public Access via WebEx	
		WebEx Direct URL	WebEx Meeting ID
100	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb100	129 846 4145
205	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb205	129 814 7399
212	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb212	129 440 9070
214	Foreclosure Hearings	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb214	129 942 2620
219	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb219	129 315 2924
221	Civil 1 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb221	129 493 5162
318	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb318	129 801 7169

	including Bench Trials		
320	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences;	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb320	129 226 9879
400	Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials Judge in Chambers Matters including Temporary Restraining Orders, Preliminary Injunctions and Name Changes	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb400	129 339 7379
415	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb415	129 314 3475
516	Civil 2 Scheduling Conferences; Status, Motion and Evidentiary Hearings including Bench Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb516	129 776 4396
517		https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb517	129 911 6415
518		https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb518	129 685 3445
519		https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctb519	129 705 0412
JM-4		https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctbjm4	129 797 7557
A-47		https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctba47	129 906 2065
B-52	Debt Collection	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctbb52	129 793 4102
B-53	Landlord and Tenant Matters	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctbb53	129 913 3728
B-109	Landlord and Tenant Matters	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctbb109	129 127 9276
B-119	Small Claims Hearings and Trials	https://dccourts.webex.com/meet/ctbb119	129 230 4882



District of Columbia Courts

Tips for using DC Courts Remote Hearing Sites



The DC Courts have **remote hearing sites** available in various locations in the community to help persons who may not have computer devices or internet service at home to participate in scheduled remote hearings. The Courts are committed to enhancing access to justice for all. There are five remote access sites throughout the community which will operate: **Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm.**

The remote site locations are:

Remote Site -1

Balance and Restorative Justice Center
1215 Capitol Street SW
Washington, DC 20003

Remote Site - 2

Balance and Restorative Justice Center
118 Q Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Remote Site - 3

Balance and Restorative Justice Center
1110 V Street, SE
Washington, DC 20020

Remote Site - 4

Balance and Restorative Justice Center
920 Rhode Island Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20018

Remote Site - 5

Reeves Center
2000 14th Street, NW, 2nd Floor – Community Room
Washington, DC 20009



If you want to use a remote site location for your hearing, call **202-879-1900** or email DCCourtsRemoteSites@dcsc.gov **at least 24 hours before your hearing to reserve a remote access computer station.** If you require special accommodations such as an interpreter for your hearing, please call **202-879-1900** **at least 24 hours in advance of your hearing so the Courts can make arrangements.**

You should bring the following items when you come to your scheduled site location

1. Your **case number** and any **hyperlinks** provided by the Courts for your scheduled hearing.
2. Any documents you need for the hearing (evidence), including exhibits, receipts, photos, contracts, etc.
3. Materials for notetaking, including pen and paper.
4. A facial covering will be required for entry into the remote hearing location; if you do not have a facial covering one will be provided.

***Safety and security measures are in place at the remote sites.**

Contact information to schedule your remote access computer station:

Call: **202-879-1900**

Email: DCCourtsRemoteSites@dcsc.gov

Organizations are listed by topic area. Centralized numbers (if available) are included in each section and are

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES REFERENCE GUIDE – CONTACT INFORMATION

listed together at the end of the document. Otherwise, organizations are listed by name. Some phone lines may be voicemail only but are being checked.

Appeals

- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161

Child Support

- Child Support Resource Center Hotline (staffed by Bread for the City & Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia) (8:30-12:30 Monday-Friday) – 202-791-3996
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577

Consumer Law (security deposits, home improvement/contractor disputes, auto repair disputes, scams/unfair trade practices)

- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center Consumer Law Resource Center](#) – 202-780-2574
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Tzedek DC](#) (scams/unfair trade practices) – 202-274-7386

Custody

- [Family Law Assistance Network \(“FLAN”\)](#) (joint project of D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Aid, & D.C. Affordable Law Firm) – 202-844-5428
- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [Children’s Law Center](#) (Non-parent caregivers of children only) – 202-467-4900
- [DC KinCare Alliance](#) (Non-parent caregivers of children only) – 202-505-5803
- [D.C. Volunteer Lawyers Project](#) – 202-425-7573
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577

Debt Collection/Credit

- DC Debt Collection Defense Hotline – 202-851-3387 (joint project of Legal Aid & Tzedek DC, in collaboration w/ Catholic Charities Legal Network, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, & Neighborhood Legal Services Program)

Disability/Individuals with Disabilities

- [Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services](#) – 202-547-4747
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) (public benefits, health insurance) – 202-661-5962
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities](#) – 202-448-1450

Discrimination

- [First Shift Justice Project](#) – 202-241-0897
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs](#) – 202-319-1000
- [Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services](#) (LGBTQ or HIV only) – 202-939-7630

Domestic Violence & Related Family Matters (Petitioners/Survivors)

- Emergencies: Call 911 or DC Victim Hotline at 1-844-4HELPDC

- [Victim Legal Network of D.C.](#) (coordinated service line) – 202-629-1788
- Joint Law School Clinic Helpline (George Washington Univ. Law School, Georgetown Law Center, Catholic Univ. Columbus School of Law) – 202-603-9760, 202-603-5870
- [Ayuda](#) – 202-387-4848
- [Bread for the City](#) – 202-386-7616
- [Break the Cycle](#) (Age 24 and younger) – 202-849-6282
- [D.C. Volunteer Lawyers Project](#) – 202-425-7573
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Network of Victim Recovery of D.C.](#) – 202-742-1727

Domestic Violence (Respondents)

- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Rising for Justice](#) – 202-638-4798

Education

- [Advocates for Justice in Education](#) – 202-678-8060
- [Children's Law Center](#) – 202-467-4900

Elders

- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120

Eviction/Landlord & Tenant (Tenants)

- [Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network](#) (joint project of Bread for the City, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Neighborhood Legal Services Program, & Rising for Justice) – 202-780-2575

Eviction/Landlord & Tenant (Tenants & Small Landlords)

- [Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network](#) (joint project of Bread for the City, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Neighborhood Legal Services Program, & Rising for Justice) – 202-780-2575
- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [Christian Legal Aid of D.C.](#) – 202-710-0592

Foreclosure

- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- DC Foreclosure Prevention Hotline (access to free housing counseling & referrals to lawyers, including free legal services organizations) – 202-265-CALL(2255)

Homelessness

- [Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless](#) – 202-328-5500

Housing Conditions/Civil

- [Children's Law Center](#) – 202-467-4900
- [Christian Legal Aid of D.C.](#) – 202-710-0592

- [Landlord Tenant Resource Center \(D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center\)](#) – 202-780-2575
- [Legal Aid Society for the District of Columbia](#) Tenant Hotline – 202-851-3388
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Rising for Justice](#) – 202-638-4798

Housing/Subsidized Housing Issues

- [Bread for the City](#) – 202-386-7616
- [Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network](#) – 202-780-2575
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) Tenant Hotline – 202-851-3388
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Rising for Justice](#) – 202-638-4798
- [Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless](#) – 202-328-5500

Immigration

- [Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center](#) – 202-395-3572
- [Ayuda](#) – 202-387-4848
- [CARECEN](#) – 202-328-9799
- [Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services](#) – 202-772-4352
- [DC Affordable Law Firm](#) (Income Restrictions) – 202-844-5430
- [D.C. Volunteer Lawyers Project](#) – 202-425-7573
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Rising for Justice](#) – 202-638-4798
- [Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services](#) (LGBTQ or HIV only) – 202-939-7630

Policing

- [Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs](#) – 202-319-1000

Probate/Estate Planning

- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [Christian Legal Aid of D.C.](#) – 202-710-0592
- [DC Affordable Law Firm](#) (Income Restrictions) – 202-844-5430
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) (Wills, Advance Directives) – 202-832-6577
- [Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services](#) (LGBTQ or HIV only) – 202-939-7630

Public Benefits/Health Insurance and Health Care Access

- [Bread for the City](#) – 202-386-7616
- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [DC KinCare Alliance](#) (Non-parent caregivers of children only) – 202-505-5803
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Legal Counsel for the Elderly](#) (60+ only) – 202-434-2120
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services](#) – 202-939-7630

Record Sealing

- [Christian Legal Aid of D.C.](#) – 202-710-0592

- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Neighborhood Legal Services Program](#) – 202-832-6577
- [Rising for Justice](#) – 202-638-4798

Small Claims

- DC Debt Collection Defense Hotline (joint project of Legal Aid & Tzedek DC, in collaboration w/ Catholic Charities Legal Network, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, & Neighborhood Legal Services Program) – 202-851-3387
- Small Claims Resource Center Hotline (project of Neighborhood Legal Services Program) (for general questions about small claims court proceedings for both plaintiffs and defendants) – 202-849-3608

Unemployment/Worker's Rights

- [Catholic Charities Legal Network](#) – 202-350-4305
- [Claimant Advocacy Program](#) – 202-974-8150
- [First Shift Justice Project](#) – 202-241-0897
- [Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia](#) – 202-628-1161
- [Washington Lawyers' Committee Workers Rights Clinic](#) – 202-319-1000

Victims of Crime

- [Victim Legal Network of D.C.](#) (coordinated service line) – 202-629-1788
- [Amara Legal Center](#) – 240-257-6492
- [Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center](#) – 202-395-3572
- [Ayuda](#) – 202-387-4848
- [Network of Victim Recovery of D.C.](#) – 202-742-1727
- [Tzedek DC](#) (Financial Crimes Only) – 202-274-7386

OTHER LEGAL INFORMATION

- [D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center's Advice & Referral Clinic](#): Information about the status and availability of the clinic is available at <https://www.dcbar.org/pro-bono/free-legalhelp/help-for-individuals/advice-referral-clinic>
- [D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center Legal Information Help Line](#) – 202-626-3499 (Recorded listing of legal services providers, by topic, in English, Spanish, Amharic, and French)
- **Legal Information and Legal Services Provider Directory –**
www.Lawhelp.org/DC
- [DC REFERS](#) - Online directory of lawyers offering reduced-fee services to people of modest means – www.dcrefers.org
- **Summary of Resource Centers and Centralized Intake/Hotlines:**
 - Child Support Resource Center Hotline (8:30-12:30 M-F) – 202-791-3996 ○ [D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center Consumer Law Resource Center](#) – 202-780-2574
 - DC Debt Collection Defense Hotline – 202-851-3387

- DC Foreclosure Prevention Hotline (access to free housing counseling & referrals to lawyers, including free legal services organizations) – 202-265-CALL(2255)
- [Family Law Assistance Network \("FLAN"\)](#) – 202-844-5428
- [Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network/ Resource Center](#) – 202-780-2575 ○ Small Claims Resource Center Hotline – 202-849-3608 (for general questions about small claims court proceedings for both plaintiffs and defendants) ○ [Victim Legal Network of D.C.](#) (coordinated service line) – 202-629-1788