

What Happens When You Go To Small Claims Court



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The Small Claims Court has simpler rules than the regular civil court with forms and procedures designed to be more easily understood by people without legal training. However, you may still be uncertain about what will happen on the day you come to the Court. This brochure will answer questions on what happens when you come to Small Claims Court. For more information go to <http://www.jud.ct.gov/faq/smallclaims.html>.

Is there a dress code or any requirements about what I can wear to Court?

The Court is a formal setting so you should dress appropriately. For example, you should probably not wear t-shirts or jeans with holes in them, tank tops, halter tops, or revealing clothing.

Can I bring my children to Court?

Try not to bring your children to court. The day can be long for young children, and if they become noisy, it will distract people in the courtroom, interrupt the proceedings, and make it hard to hear.

What time should I come to the courthouse?

You will want to be at the courthouse at least 15 minutes before the time of your hearing, which is in the Notice of Hearing. For

example, if the time in the notice is 9:30 AM, you should be at the courthouse no later than 9:15 AM. You must enter the courthouse through a metal detector, so it may take extra time to enter the building.

Where can I park?

Some courthouses have parking, but many do not. You may need to park in a nearby lot or garage or find on-street parking. For information, please call the Clerk's Office or check the website: http://www.jud.ct.gov/directory/court_directions.htm.

What will happen when I get to the courthouse?

The courthouse doors open at 8:30 AM. Please be prepared to wait briefly in a line at the entrance. When you enter the courthouse, you will have to go through a metal detector. The metal detector is operated by the Judicial Marshals, who provide security for the courthouse.

Any metal items can set off the metal detector. You will have to empty your pockets of all metal objects before walking through the metal detector, and anything you bring with you will be scanned. If your belt has a large metal buckle or your jacket has large metal buttons or zippers, for example, you may be asked to take them off. Things that could be used as a weapon (for example, a pocket knife) will be taken from you so please do not bring them with you. ➡

How long will I be at the Court?

How long you will be at court depends on the number of cases in the court that day, how long the other hearings take, or whether you make an agreement with the other side. You should plan on being at the court for the whole day. The court staff will try to get you out as quickly as possible.

Do I need a Lawyer/Attorney?

The Small Claims Court has been set up to allow you to handle your own case from start to finish. However, attorneys are allowed in the Small Claims Court. If you decide that you want a lawyer, you will have to hire one. The court will not appoint a lawyer for you.

Where do I go once I get into the courthouse?

Once you have gone through the metal detector, look for signs saying where the Small Claims Court will be. If you don't see a sign, ask a Marshal or someone in the Clerk's Office where the Small Claims Court is.

If court has not started when you enter the courtroom, go to the clerk and show the clerk the notice you received or tell the clerk your name or the name of your case. If you come into court late, let the Magistrate or the Clerk know you are there when there is a break between cases. If you do not let them know you are in court, you may lose your case because no one knew you were there.

What is a Magistrate?

A magistrate is an attorney who is appointed to hear and decide small claims cases. Some court locations may have attorneys who have volunteered to act as hearing officers (commissioners) to assist the court in hearing small claims cases. These volunteer attorneys have been approved by the court and, if both you and the other party agree, your case may be decided by a hearing officer.

What do I need to do after I tell the clerk I am in the courtroom?

When court begins, the Magistrate will sit behind the bench and will read the list of cases to be heard that day. When you hear the name of your case, stand up and let the Magistrate know that you are there. If you do not hear the name of your case, tell the Magistrate when he or she is finished reading the list.

What are the basic rules of courtroom conduct?

Before you enter the courtroom, please:

- Turn off any cell phone, beeper, and pager you may have
- Throw away all food, drinks and gum
- Take off any hat you are wearing unless you wear it for religious reasons

When you are in the courtroom, please:

- Stay in the courtroom quietly until it is your turn to speak
- Stand when the magistrate enters or leaves the courtroom and when you are speaking with the magistrate
- Refer to the Magistrate as "Magistrate" or "your honor."
- Be sure to answer out loud when you are asked any questions.
- Do not interrupt other people when they are speaking.

What should I bring with me to court on the day of my hearing?

On the day of your hearing, unless you and the other party make an agreement, you will have a trial on that date. Before you come to court, you may want to write some notes about what you want to tell the court about your case. You will also want to have:

- Your notice of hearing;
- Any papers that support your claim, such as pictures, canceled checks, letters, paid bills, receipts, damage estimates, or agreements. Bring copies for the other party and the Magistrate.

Also, if other people saw what happened or have information that will support your claim (witnesses), bring them with you on the date of your hearing. You may want to have specific questions for those people (your witnesses). The Magistrate or hearing officer will swear in all the witnesses before anyone asks questions.

When do I find out the Magistrate's decision?

The Magistrate might give the decision from the bench. If not, the court will send you a notice telling you the decision.

What if I don't agree with the Magistrate's decision?

The Magistrate's decision is final and you cannot appeal a Small Claims Court decision.

Does the court collect my money?

No, but you may go to the Clerk's Office or the Court Service Center for help with forms and ways to collect your money.

➤ <http://www.jud.ct.gov/faq/smallclaims.html>