

## Words you should know:

**Answer:** The defendant's written response to the lawsuit.

**Answer Date:** The day the defendant's response is due to the court.

**Application for Waiver of Fees:** A form that asks the court to waive court fees.

**Clerk's Office:** A place in the courthouse where you can get information about your lawsuit.

**Counterclaim:** When the defendant makes a legal claim against the plaintiff.

**Court Service Center:** A place in the courthouse where you can get forms, publications, and legal information.

**Defendant:** The person or business being sued.

**Writ and Notice of Suit:** The form used to start a lawsuit. It is also referred to as the *Complaint*.

**Docket Number:** The number the court gives the lawsuit for identification and tracking purposes.

**Execution:** A court order to collect money awarded in court. The plaintiff can collect money from the defendant by taking money out of their pay (*wage execution*), by putting a lien on their property (*property execution*), or by taking money from their bank account (*bank execution*).

**File, Filing:** To give the lawsuit to the court.

**Filing Fee:** The fee to file a lawsuit in Small Claims Court.

**Hearing:** When you go to court to argue your case.

**Judgment:** The Small Claims Court's final decision.

**Plaintiff:** The person who files the lawsuit.

**Reopen a lawsuit:** To ask the court to look at its decision again. The court will only do this in certain circumstances.

**Served, Service, Serve:** To give the lawsuit to the person or business you are suing.

**Settle:** When the plaintiff and the defendant resolve the lawsuit without having a hearing.

**Special Defense:** When the defendant explains how the plaintiff's claims are wrong.

## Need help?

### Statewide Legal Services

[www.slscct.org](http://www.slscct.org)

1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380

SLS provides free advice to low-income people who have legal problems in Connecticut. For some legal problems, they may send you to another legal aid program or to a volunteer attorney.



### Got a housing problem?

1-800-559-1565

[www.EvictionHelpCT.org](http://www.EvictionHelpCT.org)

### How to contact your local legal aid office:

#### New Haven Legal Assistance Association

203-946-4811

#### Greater Hartford Legal Aid

860-541-5000

#### Connecticut Legal Services

##### Bridgeport

203-336-3851

##### New Britain

860-225-8678

##### New London

860-447-0323

##### Stamford

203-348-9216

##### Waterbury

203-756-8074

##### Willimantic

860-456-1761

*This booklet was produced by Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut. It is not intended as legal advice. For advice on your situation, call Statewide Legal Services or contact a lawyer.*  
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## Representing Yourself in Small Claims Court

**Statewide Legal Services**  
1-800-453-3320

## What is small claims court?

Small claims court makes civil (non-criminal) court available to the average person without the need for a lawyer. It has special rules that make representing yourself easier and faster.

If you are being sued or want to sue someone in small claims court, read the Connecticut Judicial Branch's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*: [www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CV045.pdf](http://www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CV045.pdf).

### Who can I sue?

You can sue people and businesses. There are special rules for suing a business. Read the court's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*.

### What you CAN sue for:

In most situations, you can sue someone for up to \$5,000. Here are some reasons you might sue someone in small claims court:

- If someone damaged something you own or are responsible for, you can sue for the cost of fixing the damage.
- If you bought something that wasn't delivered and the store won't give your money back, you can sue the store for the purchase price.
- If someone borrowed something from you and didn't return it after you asked for it, you can sue for the value of the item.
- If your landlord doesn't return your security deposit after you moved, you can sue your landlord for the return of your security deposit. If you gave your landlord your new address in writing and you didn't get a response after 30 days, you may be able to sue your landlord for up to double your security deposit. For more, go to [www.ctlaw.help/security-deposits](http://www.ctlaw.help/security-deposits).
- If you had an agreement with a home improvement contractor and they damaged your property or did not provide the agreed-upon services, you can sue them for up to \$15,000.

### What you CANNOT sue for:

- Anything other than money.
- Any amount over \$5,000 (except for a suit for the return of security deposit or for damages caused by a home improvement contractor)
- Slander, libel, or harassment.

### Is there a cost to start a case?

In 2024, the filing fee is \$95. If you can't afford the fee, ask someone at the Court Service Center about a fee waiver. Also see the legal aid booklet on fee waivers: [www.ctlaw.help/fees](http://www.ctlaw.help/fees).

### What forms do I need to file a small claims court lawsuit?

If you are filing a small claims lawsuit, you will need to fill out several forms. You can get them online at [www.CTLaw.Help/small-claims](http://www.CTLaw.Help/small-claims), on the court website at [www.jud.ct.gov/webforms](http://www.jud.ct.gov/webforms), or at most courthouses. If you need help, talk to someone at a Court Service Center.

**Important:** If you make a mistake filling out your paperwork, the clerk's office may return the papers to you and you'll have to start over. Read the court's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*: [www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CV045.pdf](http://www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CV045.pdf).

### What happens at the hearing?

You and the other party will tell your story to a judge, a magistrate, or a Small Claims Commissioner and they will decide who wins. Bring to court any papers or witnesses that are important to your case.

### If I don't like the decision, can I appeal?

You can't appeal a small claims court decision, but you may be able to *reopen* a small claims court decision within four months. Talk to someone at a Court Service Center or call Statewide Legal Services.

### If I win, how do I get my money?

You are responsible for collecting any money that the person you are suing (known as the

defendant) owes you. If the defendant doesn't pay, you can go through the court to collect the money. Read the court's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*.

### How long do I have to collect the money?

You have 10 years from the date of the judgment to collect the money.

## I am being sued in small claims court. What should I do?

Read the *Instructions to Defendant* that came with the lawsuit and Section 2 of the booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*.

It is important that you do not ignore the lawsuit. If you do nothing, the court could rule against you and the person who is suing you, known as the *plaintiff*, might be able to take some of your income or assets.

**Note:** Some income and assets are protected by law and can't be taken from you. See *Debt Collection*: [www.ctlaw.help/debt-collection](http://www.ctlaw.help/debt-collection).

### Can I offer to settle the lawsuit?

Either side can offer to settle at any time. *Settling* means that you and the other party have come to an agreement without going to court. To settle, the person suing you must receive the payment from you before the hearing date. If the money is not received, the hearing will be held.

### What if I don't pay the judgment?

If you don't pay the judgment, the plaintiff can ask the court for an order called an execution to collect the money from you. Some types of income and assets are protected by law. The plaintiff has 10 years to collect the judgment. Read *How Small Claims Court Works*, Section 6.

For more info, go to:

[www.CTLaw.Help/smallclaims](http://www.CTLaw.Help/smallclaims)

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