

# What Happens When You Go To Housing Court



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Going to court for any reason can be an unsettling experience. This pamphlet will give you answers to questions that you might have about what you can expect when you come to the Housing Court.

## What should I 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, shorts or revealing clothing. If you are bringing people with you to court, please remind them to dress appropriately too. The marshal may ask anyone who is not dressed appropriately to leave the courtroom.

## 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, they will distract people in the courtroom, interrupt the proceedings, and make it hard to hear the recording that is made of all court hearings.

## What time should I come to the courthouse?

The notice that you will be sent telling you the day that you should come to court will also tell you the time that you should be in court. You should be at the court at least 15 minutes before the time written in your notice. For example, if the court papers say to appear at court at 9:30 AM, you should plan to arrive at the courthouse no later than 9:15 AM. Courts have metal detectors at their entrances, 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](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 walk through a metal detector, which 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 it 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?

It is hard to answer this question because it depends on the number of cases in the court that day, how long the other hearings take, or if you make an agreement. Most cases are finished by lunch time, but 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 have to have a Lawyer?**

No, you do not have to have a lawyer. You will have to decide if you want to have a lawyer but if you decide you want one, you may hire one on your own. Since this is a civil case, the court will not appoint one for you. That only happens in criminal cases and some other cases where you could be put in jail. The Clerk's Office, the Court Service Center or the Public Information Desk can give you phone numbers for statewide legal services, which will decide if they will take your case.

### **Where do I go once I get into the courthouse?**

You should go into the courtroom and sit down. The clerk will read off a list of case names (docket call). When you hear your name, please speak out loud to tell the clerk that you are in the courtroom. The clerk will then mark your case "Ready." The clerk will then tell you to see the housing mediator. You may be asked to take a seat outside of the courtroom to wait, or you may be sent immediately to see the housing mediator.

### **What if I get to court late and I don't hear the list of cases?**

If you get to the court late, you may miss the list of cases (docket call) and you may lose your case for not coming to the trial. If you are late, please wait until the Judge takes a break (recess) and talk to the Clerk.

### **What if I don't hear my name when the Clerk reads the list of cases?**

If you do not hear your name, wait until the Judge takes a break. Then you can go up to the clerk and ask for help. You may be told to go to the Clerk's Office to check your file.

### **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:*

- Sit in the courtroom quietly until it is your turn to speak
- Stand when the Judge enters or leaves the courtroom and when you are speaking with the Judge
- Refer to the Judge as "Judge" or "Your Honor"
- Be sure to answer all questions out loud when you are asked any questions. If you nod your head, the person making the record of the proceedings will have to ask you to speak so that your answer will be recorded
- Do not interrupt other people when they are speaking.

### **What is a housing mediator?**

A housing mediator is a trained mediator who works for the court. The specialist will meet with you and the other people in your case to try to work out an agreement (also called a settlement) so you do not need to have a trial. After your case is called in court, you will be asked to wait in the lobby until a specialist calls you for mediation (a discussion with you and the other parties in the case).

### **Do I have to make an agreement?**

No, you don't have to make an agreement, and no one will ever force you to make an agreement to settle a case. But many cases do settle after people have the chance to talk with the housing mediator.

### **What if the attorney for the other side wants to talk to me?**

Attorneys often talk with the other parties in a case to try to settle it without waiting to see a housing mediator. You can make a private agreement with the attorney and bring it to the Judge for approval. If you have an attorney, you should tell the attorney to talk to your attorney. If you do not have an attorney, and at any time you feel pressured or intimidated, you can stop talking to the attorney and wait to be called by the housing mediator.

### **What happens if I make an agreement?**

If you and the other people in your case can agree, with the help of the housing mediator or by talking to each other, you will be asked if you understand the terms of the agreement and if you are willing to agree to the terms of the agreement. This is called a "canvass" and the questions are asked by the Judge, the housing mediator or the clerk. The Judge will then make a decision in your case, which is called a stipulated judgment. Once the Judge makes a decision, everyone has to follow the terms of your agreement just like a judgment after a trial.

### **What happens if I do not make an agreement?**

If you do not make an agreement, your case will be decided by the Judge. Both you and the other party may present your witnesses and tell the court your story.

Be ready to give a short summary of your side of the case to the Judge. Bring with you to court any papers or pictures that support your case. Also, if you have witnesses, bring them with you in case you have a trial. You should have specific questions for your witnesses.

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