

IMPORTANT: If you were given papers telling you to be at court or if you were ordered by the court to be here, you must stay in court until your case is heard or until the magistrate or the clerk tells you that you can leave. If you leave early, the court may order that you be arrested, set a bond amount for you to be held, enter orders on your case without you being in court or deny or refuse to act on the motion that you filed.

What if I cannot come to court on the date of my hearing?

If you cannot come to court on the date of your hearing, call the Clerk's Office to ask how to request another hearing date (continuance) and let your child support worker know that you cannot be at your hearing. Usually, the court must approve your request for another hearing date before your hearing date is changed.

For more information, you may go to the Judicial Branch website at:

<http://www.jud.ct.gov/childsupport/default.htm> or contact a Court Service Center or Clerk's Office. You may also call the CT Child Support Call Center at 1-800-228-5437.

The Judicial Branch of the State of Connecticut complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need a reasonable accommodation, in accordance with the ADA, contact a Judicial Branch employee or an ADA contact person listed at www.jud.ct.gov/ada/.

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What Happens When You Go To Family Support Magistrate Court



Some of the reasons why you may have to come to the Family Support Magistrate Court are:

- You have been given papers by a marshal or a child support investigator because the child's other parent is asking for a legal finding that you are the father or is asking for court-ordered child support (Paternity Petition or Support Petition);
- You or the person that you pay support to may want to change the support orders (Motion for Modification); or
- You have not made the child support payments that the court ordered you to pay or that you agreed to make, so you must come to court to explain why you have stopped paying (Application for Contempt).

No matter why you are coming to the Family Support Magistrate Court, you probably have questions about what to expect when you get here. This brochure will answer some of those questions. You can get more information from the Court Service Centers, the Clerks' Offices, and from Support Enforcement Services. You may also go to the website: www.jud.ct.gov/childsupport.

The information in this brochure does not take the place of legal advice.

What should I wear to court?

The court is a formal setting so you should dress appropriately. Please do not wear torn t-shirts, jeans with holes in them, halter-tops, shorts, or revealing clothing.

Can I bring my children to court?

Please do not bring your children to court unless you have been told to. The day can be long for young children and if they become noisy, they may 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 or papers will tell you the date and time that you must come to court. You should be at the court at least 30 minutes before that time. For example, if the notice or papers say to appear at court at 9:30 AM, you should plan to be at the courthouse no later than 9:00 AM. When you enter the courthouse, you must walk through a metal detector, so it may take extra time to enter the building.

Where can I park?

Some courthouses have parking available, but many do not. You may need to park in a nearby parking lot or garage or find on-street parking. For information, call the Clerk's Office or check on the Judicial Branch website:

http://www.jud.ct.gov/directory/court_directions.htm

When I get to the courthouse, what should I do?

The courthouse doors open at 8:30 AM. Be ready to wait in a line at the entrance. When you enter the courthouse, you must walk through a metal detector that is operated by the Judicial Marshals who provide security for the courthouse.

What happens at the metal detector?

Any metal items can set off the metal detector. You will have to empty your pockets 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 do I find the courtroom?

Once you are in the courthouse, look for the lists of cases (dockets) to be heard that day. Dockets are usually posted in a public place or hall. If you don't see your name on a list or if there are no lists posted in the hallway or lobby, please go to the Court Service Center, the Public Information Desk or the Clerk's Office and ask for help.

What if I get to court late?

If you get to court late, please check in with a Support Enforcement Officer, an Assistant Attorney General, a Clerk, or a Child Support Investigator outside the assigned courtroom to be certain that the court knows you are there. Sit in the courtroom and wait for your name to be called unless you are asked to wait somewhere else. Do not interrupt the Clerk or Family Support Magistrate while court is in session.

How long will I be at the court?

It is difficult to answer this question because it depends on the number of people in the court when your case is called (cases are not always called in order) and how long the hearings before yours take. You should plan on being at the court the whole day.

Do I have to have a lawyer?

You do not have to have a lawyer, but you may decide that you want one. The court may appoint a lawyer for you if you are a defendant in a paternity action (an action to determine if you are the father of a child) or in a contempt hearing (if you have not obeyed a court order and face the possibility of time in jail). The Clerk's Office or Court Service Center can give you the phone number for Statewide Legal Services if you need it. You may also check the Statewide Legal Services website www.slsct.org.

Finally, if you cannot afford, or do not want, a lawyer for your whole case, you may be able to hire a lawyer to work on only part of your case, such as a specific event or a specific court proceeding. This is called limited scope representation.

Who are some people I might see or talk to in Family Support Magistrate Court and what do they do?

The following people may be at the court:

- Family Support Magistrates, who are not judges, but do some things that judges can do. They can set, modify and enforce child and spousal support orders and hear paternity cases.
- Clerks, who assist the magistrate during court and make a record of the court order in the court file.
- Support Enforcement Officers, who supervise child support payments and bring parents to court to enforce child support orders. They may also file legal papers to change or modify child support orders. They do not represent either parent.
- Assistant Attorneys General, who represent the state's interest in making sure that children are supported by their parents. They do not represent either parent.
- Child Support Investigators, who give information and support to the Assistant Attorney General and the Family Support Magistrate in paternity and support matters.

What are the basic rules of courtroom conduct?

Before you enter the courtroom, please:

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

When you are in the courtroom, please:

- Sit 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 Family Support Magistrate as "Magistrate" or "your honor"
- Be sure to answer all questions out loud. 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 if I don't speak English well?

You may be able to get help. As soon as you know that you will need help for a hearing, please contact the clerk. Phone numbers for the clerks may be found online at: http://www.jud.ct.gov/directory/court_directions.htm. You may also think about asking someone who speaks English and can interpret for you to come to court with you.

If I have a disability and need assistance or special equipment to take part in the court hearing, what should I do?

If you have a disability and need assistance or special equipment to take part in the court hearing, please contact the Americans with Disabilities Act contact person for the courthouse where your hearing will be. Contact information can be found online at: <http://www.jud.ct.gov/ADA/contact.htm>

Do I need to bring any paperwork with me to court for my court hearing?

Yes, you should bring the following paperwork with you:

- Any document that refers to why you are in court that day

- A completed financial affidavit form. If your gross annual income is less than \$75,000 and your total net assets are less than \$75,000, you must use the JD-FM-6-SHORT form. If your gross annual income is more than \$75,000 or your total net assets are more than \$75,000, or if both are more than \$75,000, you must use the JD-FM-6-LONG form. You can get the correct form from the Clerk's Office, a Court Service Center, or a Support Enforcement Office. You can also get these forms on the Judicial Branch Website at <http://jud.ct.gov/webforms/forms/fm006-short.pdf> or <http://jud.ct.gov/webforms/forms/fm006-long.pdf>.
- Copies of your pay stubs for the last 13 weeks
- A copy of your latest tax return
- If you are collecting Social Security Disability or Retirement, Supplemental Social Security Income or Veteran's Benefits, information on the amount of your benefit and any amount your children are receiving, how long the benefit has been paid and the amount of any lump sum payments
- If you are receiving unemployment compensation benefits or worker's compensation benefits, proof of the amount of your benefit and any lump sum payments
- If you are not able to work because of a disability, bring current doctor's reports
- If you are unemployed, but looking for work, proof of the job applications you have filed

Do I need to bring money with me when I come to court?

If you are coming to court because you have not made your child support payments, you can bring money to court to catch up on your missed payments and show the court that you are trying to follow the court order and support your child. If you were ordered to make payments for child support or expenses related to child support, and you have not made those payments, the magistrate can find you in contempt and you may be jailed, so bring whatever payments are possible. ➔

➤ <http://www.jud.ct.gov/childsupport>