

Representing Yourself in **Small Claims Court**



July 2026

**Do you have a legal problem?
Call our hotline:**

Statewide Legal Services
1-800-559-1565

What is small claims court?

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

If you are being sued or thinking about suing someone in small claims court, read the Connecticut Judicial Branch's booklet: *How Small Claims Court Works*. You can get the booklet at most courthouses or online at www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CV045.pdf.

Do I need a lawyer to sue someone in small claims court?

No. You can hire a lawyer, but you don't have to.

Who can I sue?

You can sue people and businesses. There are special rules for suing a business. Read Section 1 of the court's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*.

What can I sue someone 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 information, see our *Security Deposits* information at 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.

You **cannot** sue someone in small claims court 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); or
- slander, libel, or harassment.

Is there a cost to start a case in small claims court?

The small claims 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.

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

If you are filing a small claims lawsuit, you will need these forms:

- *Small Claims Writ and Notice of Suit* (#JD-CV-40)
- *Instructions to Defendant* (#JD-CV-121)
- *How to Serve a Small Claims Writ and Notice of Suit* (#JD-CV-122)
- *Statement of Service – (Delivery) Small Claims* (#JD-CV-123)
- If you have very low income, you can ask for court fees to be waived by filling out an *Application for Waiver of Fees* (#JD-CV-120).

You can get the forms at most courthouses or online at www.jud.ct.gov/webforms. If you need help, talk to someone at a Court Service Center.

Important: Do not file or answer a small claims lawsuit until you read the court's booklet, *How Small Claims Court Works*. 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 the process over.

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 section 6 in the pamphlet, *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 pamphlet, *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. For more, see *Debt Collection*: 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 the court's pamphlet, *How Small Claims Court Works*, Section 6.

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 that is 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 the defendant's pay (a *wage execution*), by putting a lien on the defendant's property (a *property execution*), or by taking money out of the defendant's bank account (a *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.

Hearing Date: The date the court picks to hold a hearing.

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.

How to Get Help from Legal Aid

If you are under age 60, call:

Statewide Legal Services

www.slsct.org

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

SLS provides free advice to low-income people who have legal problems in Connecticut.



Are you age 60 or over? If yes, free legal assistance is available.
If you have a debt collection or other consumer problem, please call:

Consumer Law Project for Elders

1-800-296-1467



Need help with a housing problem?

If you are facing eviction or losing your housing subsidy, you may have the right to a free lawyer. Call 1-800-559-1565 or go to www.EvictionHelpCT.org.

Contact your local legal aid office:

Connecticut Legal Services

www.ctlegal.org

Bridgeport

203-336-3851

1000 Lafayette Blvd.

New Britain

860-225-8678

16 Main St.

New London

860-447-0323

125 Eugene O'Neill Dr.

Stamford

203-348-9216

255 Bank St., 3rd Floor

Waterbury

203-756-8074

255 Bank St., 3rd Floor

Willimantic

860-456-1761

1125 Main St.

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

www.ghla.org

999 Asylum Ave., Hartford

860-541-5000

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

www.nhlegal.org

205 Orange St., New Haven

203-946-4811

Do you know your rights?

Go to www.CTLawHelp.org for free legal information.



For more information, go to www.CTLaw.Help/smallclaims

This booklet was produced by Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut. The information in this booklet is based on laws in Connecticut as of 7/2026. This information is not intended as legal advice. For advice on your situation, call Statewide Legal Services or contact a lawyer.