



Preparing for Court

This guide is for people who already have a legal dispute that is being decided by a court or at an agency hearing and do not have an attorney.

At least 1 week before your court date, contact the court if you need:

- An interpreter
- Wheelchair access

Get organized

- Make sure you have all the documents you need for your court case.
- Bring original documents. (Have copies available in case you need them.) For records from a government office or agency, get certified copies from that agency or government office.
- Decide what you want out of the case – this will help you evaluate any possibilities of settling your case without a trial.
- Prepare a page of notes to read from with all the points you want to make so you don't forget anything. Be ready with dates, names, addresses, and dollar amounts.
- If you do not have a lawyer, visit the court's *pro se office* or the *pro se clerk* for information about how to prepare for your case. *Pro se* means that you do not have a lawyer and that you are representing yourself in court. Courts cannot give legal advice about your particular case, but they can give information that may help you prepare for court.

About this Guide

This guide was created by the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York in partnership with the New York LawHelp Consortium and Pro Bono Net, with support from the Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant program.

To read all of the guides in this series, visit NYLawHelp.org or LawHelp.org.

Be on time

- Get to the courthouse 30 minutes early to go through the security check and to find the right courtroom.
- When you find your courtroom, tell your name to the clerk or the court officer.

When you enter the courtroom

- Turn off your cell phone.
- Take off your hat.
- Throw away your chewing gum.

Show respect for the Judge

- Look at the Judge when he or she is asking you a question.
- Speak loud enough for the Judge to hear you.
- Do not interrupt the Judge.
- Wait until the Judge finishes the question before you give your answer.

Speaking in court

- Be ready to state your name.
- After you state your name, you will be asked to raise your right hand and swear to tell the truth.
- You must speak your answer out loud. Do not just nod or shake your head.
- If one of the lawyers says "objection" after you have been asked a question, stop talking. Then wait for the Judge to tell you if you can answer the question.
- If you do not understand something, say "I don't understand" and ask the Judge to repeat the question.

Additional Information

Some courts have a person to contact if you do not speak English well. Some courts have a person to contact if you are disabled. Some courts have child care help. Go to the court's website or call or visit the court in advance to find out any services that may help.

For More Information

Looking for more information on this topic? Visit LawHelp.org and select your state to find other self-help resources and information about free and low-cost legal aid providers in your area.

Disclaimer

This guide was prepared for general information purposes only. The information it contains is not legal advice. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation. Also, the law may vary from state to state. Some information in this guide may not be correct for your state. To find local resources, visit LawHelp.org and select your state.