

## **What You Need to Know Before Going to Court- HELP4TN** **Blog**

When you receive notice from court that you are being sued, or if you are suing someone else, going to court can be intimidating. You can use this guide to learn more about what to expect in court.

### **Show up!**

Your court date and time will be printed on the paperwork you received from court. Or, maybe the clerk called to tell you your court date. You have to make sure you are in court for your hearing. If you do not show up, the judge can rule in favor of the other party. This is called a default judgment. Even if the other side says they are going to drop the case or come to an agreement with you, you should still show up to court.

When you are in court, make sure you follow all the rules of your courthouse. Many do not allow cell phones or electronic devices or weapons of any kind. You typically have to go through a security line to get in the courthouse.

### **Be better than on time – be early**

You should plan to be in court well before your hearing time, just in case. You need to account for travel time to court, parking, and getting in through security. Then, it may take you a few minutes to find your court room. If you aren't in the courtroom when your case is called, you may lose the opportunity to present your case.

### **Bring documents and witnesses with you**

If you are going to be offering evidence at your case, make sure you have a few copies of the document. Also, you can't simply bring letters from witnesses. They need to appear and testify in court. More information about offering evidence at trial can be found in the Tennessee Rules of Evidence, although these rules may not apply in every case. Most courts also have local rules

that you have to follow, as well as any Rules of Procedure that might apply. If you are going to an appellate court there are also Rules of Court.

## **Address the judge and court with respect**

When it is your turn to present your case, make sure you always call the judge “Your Honor.” For example, do not say “Yes sir” instead say “Yes Your Honor.” Always tell the truth and treat everyone working at the courthouse with respect.

## **Present your best self**

It may seem silly to worry about your clothes when you go to court. However, most courthouses have a dress code that you should follow. Most lawyers will wear a suit, but it is ok if you don’t own a suit. For an example of court dress code you can look here.

## **Check with the clerk for costs**

Before you leave the court building, check with the court clerk to see if you owe any costs for the court case. Even if you win or if the court is dismissed, you should check to make sure.

Learn more about preparing for court and representing yourself on our [Going to Court page](#).

HELP4TN Blog posts are written by TALS staff attorneys. This blog is not legal advice, but it is legal information to help you learn about your rights. If you have questions about this blog or about your legal situation, you can talk to a lawyer for free at 1-844-HELP4TN (1-844-435-7486).

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