



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT *District of Rhode Island*

How to Start a Civil Lawsuit without an Attorney

To file a civil complaint, a plaintiff must submit the following documents to the Clerk's Office:

1. **Complaint**
2. **Civil Cover Sheet**
3. **Summons**
4. **\$400.00 filing fee or a completed Application to Proceed in Forma Pauperis (IFP)**

All of the forms that you need to start a civil lawsuit are available on the Court's website at www.rid.uscourts.gov. All forms may also be obtained at the Clerk's Office between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 4:30 P.M.

Complaint

A complaint is a written document that begins a lawsuit in which the plaintiff sets out claims against the defendant(s).

- Your complaint must be typed or printed legibly in English on 8 ½ x 11 inch plain white paper, double spaced, using one side of the page only, and must contain your original signature.
- Please do not staple your documents.
- Keep in mind that all original documents filed with the Court will not be returned to you.
- If you would like a copy of your complaint that has been receive stamped with the case number, please bring an extra copy to the Clerk's Office when filing.

Civil Cover Sheet

The civil cover sheet asks information about your case. A civil cover sheet must be filed with each civil complaint and is used for administrative purposes by the Court. The civil cover sheet is available on the Court's website.

Summons

The summons must be filed with your civil complaint. A summons directs a defendant to serve an answer on the plaintiff within a certain amount of time. The summons must be signed and dated by the Clerk's Office to be effective. The Clerk's Office will only issue a summons if the \$400.00 filing fee is paid or an order allowing the plaintiff's Application to Proceed in Forma Pauperis (IFP) is entered. A summons form is available on the Court's website. The summons caption (or case title) must match the case title provided on the complaint.

Please note that you may not serve the summons and complaint on the named defendants yourself. Most litigants hire a professional process server; however, it is not necessary to hire a professional. Any person who is at least 18-years-old and not a party to the lawsuit may serve a summons and a complaint. See: Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(c)(2).

Filing Fee

In order to initiate a civil case, the Clerk's Office must collect a \$400.00 filing fee. The Clerk's Office accepts cash or checks made payable to: Clerk, U.S. District Court. The filing fee may only be waived if a judge grants an Application to Proceed in Forma Pauperis.

To proceed without paying the filing fee, you must submit an Application to Proceed in Forma Pauperis with your complaint. This form is available on the Court's website. A Magistrate Judge will review your request, and you will be notified of the Judge's decision. If the Judge grants your request, you will be considered as proceeding In Forma Pauperis or IFP.

Permission to proceed IFP entitles a plaintiff to file an action without paying filing fees or costs of service of the complaint upon the defendant(s). Proceeding IFP *does not* waive subsequent costs or fees, including costs for copies.

If you have additional questions, visit the Clerk's Office during normal business hours or contact us at the number below. Please note: we will be happy to provide you with general instructions concerning court rules and procedures; however, we are prohibited from interpreting those rules and procedures or the law, evaluating facts, calculating time deadlines, or otherwise providing legal advice.

United States District Court
District of Rhode Island
One Exchange Terrace
Providence, Rhode Island 02903
Hours: Monday through Friday
9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.
Telephone: (401) 752-7200