

“Preparing for Your Day in Civil Court” Script

Going to court can be one of life’s most important and stressful events, especially if you do not have a lawyer and you are representing yourself.

It is always a good idea to talk to a lawyer. While the clerk’s office and the court can often provide information, neither will be able to provide you with legal advice. Unlike criminal cases, you do not have a right to an attorney in civil cases, but you may qualify for free or reduced-cost legal assistance. Click on the Resources icon on the Florida Courts Help App to find legal help in your area.

If you are handling your legal issue yourself, you can get help for many kinds of cases here on the Florida Courts Help app and the help.flcourts.org website. The Florida Bar’s website at floridabar.org has court rules and other resources to assist you with handling your own case. Additionally, your local Clerk of Court’s office and website may have self-help resources, offer the ability to track your case, and provide specific information on what you may need to bring to court and what may happen at your next court date.

Here are some helpful tips as you prepare for court.

To start a case, you will need to file a complaint or similar document. The Clerk of Court will charge you a filing fee in most cases. If you don’t think you can afford the filing fee, you can ask the clerk about applying for a fee waiver. If someone has brought a case against you, then you may need to file an answer or response. It is important to prepare your paperwork and make sure you meet all deadlines. You will need to locate the correct forms and follow all of the instructions. The clerk’s office can often provide you with some direction or refer you to other local legal resources, but they cannot give you any legal advice. Be sure to keep all paperwork organized and file responses and motions on time. It might be helpful to use a calendar to keep track of all key dates, so you do not miss an important deadline. When you represent yourself in court, you are responsible for complying with all court rules and legal deadlines. Please remember that your case is governed by the laws and rules that apply in Florida, which may be different from other states.

When it’s time for you to go to court, there are several things you should know. If you have witnesses, make sure they are available in the courtroom at the time of your hearing and be certain to bring all documentation, receipts, and any other proof or evidence that you would like the judge to consider. Dress appropriately for court. Some courts have dress codes and this information can often be found on the court’s website. Be prepared for your scheduled date and arrive early. Upon entering the courthouse, you will be greeted by security. At security, you will experience screening of your person and all property that you brought with you to the courthouse, so it is important to allow extra time to go through this process. Check your local court’s website for more information on what you cannot bring with you to court. In the event of an emergency, call the court to let them know that you are running late or cannot attend. However, you should know that if you are late or do not show up for your court date, the court may delay your case or may even rule against you.

Remember these helpful tips as you prepare for your day in court. Make sure to file all required documents with the clerk, pay your filing fees, and bring your proof or evidence for your case to court. It’s also important to arrive early, dress appropriately, and be prepared to be screened by security. You should learn as much as you can before you go to court.

If possible, seek the help of a lawyer, but if you must represent yourself, be prepared. The Florida Courts Help App and help.flcourts.org are available to provide you with self-help tools and information so you are prepared for court.