



How to Sue for Up To \$3,000 in Small Claims Court Motor Vehicle Case

Small Claims Complaint and Summons Motor Vehicle Cases Only

Who Should Use This Packet?

This packet must be used only if your case involves a motor vehicle accident and you want to file a complaint in Small Claims Court. You can use this packet if a person or company owes you up to \$3,000 from a motor vehicle accident and you want to ask the court to order them to pay.

Note: If you believe you are entitled to more than \$3,000 but you still wish to sue in Small Claims, you give up your right to recover damages over \$3,000. The additional money cannot be claimed later in a separate lawsuit. You must be at least 18 to file your claim. If you are under 18, your parent or guardian has to file the claim for you.

Note: These materials have been prepared by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts for use by self-represented litigants. The guides, instructions, and forms will be periodically updated as necessary to reflect current New Jersey statutes and court rules. The most recent version of the [forms](#) will be available at the county courthouse or on the Judiciary's Internet site njcourts.gov. However, you are ultimately responsible for the content of your court papers.

Completed forms are to be submitted to the county where you are filing your case. A list of [Special Civil Part Offices](#) is provided at the customer counter and at njcourts.gov.

Things to Think About Before You Represent Yourself in Court

Try to Get a Lawyer

The Small Claims Section is a court in which you may sue someone (the defendant) to collect a small amount of money that you believe is owed to you. Because procedures in Small Claims are simpler than in other sections of the court, people usually can file and present their cases relatively quickly and inexpensively, and often without an attorney.

What You Should Expect If You Represent Yourself

While you have the right to represent yourself in court, you should not expect special treatment, help or attention from the court. The following is a list of some things court staff can and cannot do for you. Please read it carefully before asking court staff for help.

- We *can* explain and answer questions about how the court works.
- We *can* tell you what the requirements are to have your case considered by the court.
- We *can* give you some information from your case file.
- We *can* provide you with samples of court forms that are available.
- We *can* provide you with guidance on how to fill out forms.
- We *can* usually answer questions about court deadlines.
- We *cannot* give you legal advice. Only your lawyer can give you legal advice.
- We *cannot* tell you whether or not you should bring your case to court.
- We *cannot* give you an opinion about what will happen if you bring your case to court.
- We *cannot* recommend a lawyer, but we can provide you with the telephone number of a local lawyer referral service.
- We *cannot* talk to the judge for you about what will happen in your case.
- We *cannot* let you talk to the judge outside of court.
- We *cannot* change an order issued by a judge.

Keep Copies of All Papers

Make and keep copies of all completed forms and documents related to your case.

Definitions of Words Used in This Packet

Breach of Contract: A *breach of contract* is a failure to perform a promise which is a part of a written or oral contract.

Certification: A *certification* is a written statement made to the court when you file papers with the court, swearing that the information contained in the papers is true to the best of your knowledge.

Complaint: A *complaint* is a document in which you briefly tell the court the facts in your case and the relief you want the court to grant.

Default: When the defendant does not appear in court to respond to the complaint or does not file an answer, a judge may order in your favor. This is called a *default*. Also, if you do not show up in court, the court may dismiss your case.

Defendant: The *defendant* is the party who is being sued.

File: To *file* means to give the appropriate forms and fee to the court to begin the court's consideration of your request.

Motion: A *motion* is a written request in which you ask the court to issue an order, or to change an order it has already issued.

Order: An *order* is a signed paper from the judge telling someone they must do something.

Party: A *party* is a person, business, governmental agency, etc., involved in a court action.

Plaintiff: The *plaintiff* is the party who starts the lawsuit.

Return Date: This is the date the plaintiff and defendant are told to appear in court.

Service of Process: *Service of Process* is the official delivery of the papers to the other party.

Summons: A *summons* is the paper that notifies the defendant that he or she is being sued and briefly explains the steps they need to take once they have received this notice.

Tort: A *tort* is an injury inflicted on a person or property independent of a contract.

The numbered steps listed below tell you what forms you will need to fill out and what to do with them. Each form should be typed or printed clearly on 8 ½ “x 11” white paper only. Forms may not be filed on a different size or color paper.

Steps for Filing Your Small Claims Complaint and Summons

STEP 1: Fill out the *Small Claims Complaint* (Form A).

The *Small Claims Complaint* tells the court and the defendant the facts of the case and the things you want the defendant to do.

STEP 2: Fill out the top of the *Small Claims Summons* (Form B).

The *Small Claims Summons* is delivered by the court to the defendant in the case (the person or company being sued). It puts the defendant on notice that you have filed a complaint against him or her. It also informs the defendant of the steps he or she must take to dispute the claim. Attach page 2 of the summons form (Form B) and the filing fee to the complaint before mailing or delivering your papers to the court. Page 1 of the summons is a pre-printed form that the court will attach when it delivers the summons to the defendant.

STEP 3: Be sure that the papers can get to the defendant.

It is very important that you provide the court with the defendant’s correct address. After you file your papers with the court, the court will then mail or deliver the papers to the defendant using the address you gave the court. If the address is correct and the defendant is served with the papers, then the court will notify both sides of a court date.

If the defendant cannot be found at the address you provided, the court will notify you that the trial has been cancelled for that reason. You must then provide the court with another address and pay a reservice fee within 60 days of the date you filed the complaint or the case will be dismissed. It will be reinstated automatically if you can provide a valid address within one year.

STEP 4: Attach the filing fee.

Make a check or money order payable to the *Treasurer, State of New Jersey*.

Plaintiff’s Filing Fees:

- \$42 for one defendant (\$35 Filing Fee and \$7 certified and regular mail Service Fee).
- \$12 for each additional defendant (\$5 Filing Fee and \$7 certified and regular mail Service Fee.)

STEP 5: Where to file the *Small Claims Complaint* (Form A).

The complaint must be mailed or delivered to the Office of the Special Civil Part in the county where at least one defendant lives or, if the defendant is a business entity, in the county where its registered office is located or in any county in which it actually does business. If there is more than one defendant, the complaint can be filed in the county where any of the defendants live or, if a business entity, is located or does business. If none of the defendants live or do business in New Jersey, the complaint must be filed where the cause of the complaint occurred.

STEP 6: Check your completed forms.

Check your forms and make sure they are complete. Remove all instruction sheets. Make sure you have signed the forms wherever necessary.

Checklist - You must have all of the following items in this order:

- ___ Complaint (Form A)
- ___ Summons (Form B)
- ___ Filing fee, in the form of check or money order. Do not mail cash. You may use cash if you pay in person, but you should keep the receipt you get from the court staff for your records

STEP 7: Mail or deliver your package of completed papers to the court.

You can deliver your papers to the court in person or you can mail them. If you mail the papers, we recommend that you use certified mail, return receipt requested. This will provide you with a green receipt card that can serve as proof that you mailed the papers. Your post office can tell you how to send certified mail, return receipt requested.

- Mail or deliver to the court the original of all the forms.
- Keep one copy of the entire packet for your own records.
- Review steps 1 through 7 before mailing this packet to the court.

STEP 8: You will get a court date for your trial.

After you file your papers with the court, you will receive a postcard in the mail with the date you must appear in court. The defendant will also be notified to appear in court on the same date. If you do not appear in court on this date, your case may be dismissed. If you cannot make your court date because of circumstances beyond your control, you must contact the court in advance and request that your date be rescheduled.

If the other party does not appear, the court may find the other party is in default. Bring all the evidence (documents, photographs, and witnesses) you need to prove your case with you to court on your court date. A witness' written statement, even if under oath, is not admissible in court. Only actual testimony in court of what the witness heard or saw will be allowed. Prepare your questions in advance. Even if the defendant does not appear, the judge may schedule a Proof Hearing at which you must present all documents that support your case such as canceled checks, money orders, sales receipts, bills, contracts, estimates, leases, letters, photographs, and other documents proving your claim.

The court will likely ask that you attempt to settle your case with the help of a judge's law clerk or another trained mediator before you go to trial. If you settle your case, you must tell the judge and court clerk. If you need an interpreter or an accommodation for a disability for your trial, please contact the court before your trial date.

Instructions for Completing Form A (Small Claims Complaint – Motor Vehicle)

This complaint must be used only if your case involves a motor vehicle accident and you want to file a complaint in Small Claims Court. After you fill in the required information at the top of the form, in the middle section of the page, below the word COMPLAINT, complete the following information:

1. Type or print the date the accident occurred.
2. Type or print the name of the defendant(s).
 - a. After the word *Owner*, type or print the name of the owner of the vehicle in the space.
 - b. After the word *Operator*, type or print the name of the person who was driving the car in the space.
3. Type or print the name of the place where the accident occurred. You can use the name of the street or the name of the streets at an intersection near the accident if you do not have an exact address.
4. In the space after the word *Demand*, enter the amount you are suing for in court.
5. Complete the information regarding interpreters or accommodation for a disability.
6. If the *Complaint* (Form A) or any of the copies of papers that you attach to the complaint contain a Social Security number, driver's license number, vehicle plate number, insurance policy number, active financial account number or active credit card number, **you must** redact (black out) this information so that it cannot be seen, unless any such personal identifier is required to be included by statute, rule, administrative directive or court order. If an active financial account is the subject of your case and cannot otherwise be identified, you may use the last four digits of the account to identify it.

NOTE: Do not redact (black out) this information in the original papers that you are keeping since you may have to show them to the court at some point.

7. Date and sign the form.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

You **cannot** use this form for any matter other than for injuries to you or your property resulting from a motor vehicle accident.

SMALL CLAIMS COMPLAINT (Motor Vehicle)

NOTICE: This is a public document, which means the document as submitted will be available to the public upon request. Therefore, do not enter personal identifiers on it, such as Social Security number, driver's license number, vehicle plate number, insurance policy number, active financial account number, or active credit card number.

Plaintiff or Filing Attorney Information:

Name _____
NJ Attorney ID Number _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____

Court

Name of Court _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____

From Plaintiff

Name _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____

**Superior Court of New Jersey
Law Division, Special Civil Part
Small Claims Section**

_____ County
Docket No: _____
(to be provided by the court)

To Defendant

Name _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____

**Civil Action
Complaint
Motor Vehicle**

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff says the negligence of the defendant operator and/or defendant owner caused a motor vehicle accident resulting in property damage to plaintiff's vehicle, in the following accident:

- 1. Date of Accident: _____
- 2. Name of Defendant(s)
 - a) Owner: _____
 - b) Operator: _____
- 3. Place of Accident:
 - a) Street: _____
 - b) Municipality: _____
 - c) County: _____

Demand: \$_____.

IMPORTANT: Plaintiffs and defendants must bring all witnesses, photos, and documents, and other evidence to the hearing. Subpoena forms are available at the Clerk's office to require the attendance of witnesses.

At the trial Plaintiff will require:

An interpreter Yes No Indicate Language _____
An accommodation for disability Yes No Indicate Disability _____

I certify that the matter in controversy is not the subject of any other court action or arbitration proceeding, now pending or contemplated, and that no other parties should be joined in this action.

I certify that confidential personal identifiers have been redacted from documents now submitted to the court, and will be redacted from all documents submitted in the future in accordance with *Rule* 1:38-7(b).

Date

Plaintiff's Signature

Plaintiff's Name Typed, Stamped or Printed

Instructions for Completing Form B Small Claims Summons

- A. Under the section labeled *Plaintiff or Plaintiff's Attorney Information*, type or print the name, address and telephone number of your attorney if you have one. If you do not have an attorney and are representing yourself, type or print your name, address and telephone number.
- B. Under the section labeled *Defendant Information*, type or print the Defendant(s)' name, address, and telephone number.
- C. In the upper right hand corner before the word *County*, type or print the name of the county you are suing in.
- D. In the spaces below the word *County*, type or print the address and telephone number of the courthouse you are filing in.
- E. Where it says to *Check One*, check whether you are suing for breach of contract or a tort (see definitions on page 3).
- F. In the space after the words *Demand Amount*, type or print the amount you are suing for.
- G. In the space after the words *Filing Fee*, type or print the total amount of the filing fee for the number of defendants you are suing (see STEP 4 on page 4).
- H. Leave the space after the word *Service Fee* blank for the court staff to complete (see STEP 4 on page 4).
- I. Leave the space after the words *Attorney's Fees* blank. If you are represented by an attorney he or she will fill that section out for you.
- J. Leave the area after the word *Total* blank for the court staff to complete.

SMALL CLAIMS SUMMONS AND RETURN OF SERVICE – PAGE 2

NOTICE: This is a public document, which means the document as submitted will be available to the public upon request. Therefore, do not enter personal identifiers on it, such as Social Security number, driver’s license number, vehicle plate number, insurance policy number, active financial account number, or active credit card number.

Plaintiff or Plaintiff’s Attorney Information:

Name: _____
NJ Attorney ID Number _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
LAW DIVISION, SPECIAL CIVIL PART

_____ COUNTY

_____ Plaintiff(s)

versus

Docket Number: _____
(to be provided by the court)

_____ Defendant(s)

Defendant Information:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

Civil Action
SUMMONS

(Check one): [] Contract [] Tort

Demand Amount: \$ _____
Filing Fee: \$ _____
Service Fee: \$ _____
Attorney’s Fees: \$ _____
TOTAL: \$ _____

YOU MUST APPEAR IN COURT ON THIS DATE _____ AND TIME _____ [] a.m. [] p.m.
OR THE COURT MAY RULE AGAINST YOU.

REPORT TO: _____

RETURN OF SERVICE (For Court Use Only)

Date Served: _____

RETURN OF SERVICE IF SERVED BY COURT OFFICER

Docket Number _____
Date: _____ Time: _____ WM _____ WF _____ BM _____ BF _____ OTHER _____
HT _____ WT _____ AGE _____ HAIR _____ MUSTACHE _____ BEARD _____ GLASSES _____
NAME: _____ RELATIONSHIP: _____

Description of Premises _____

I hereby certify the above to be true and accurate:

Special Civil Part Officer