



NEW YORK STATE UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM

NEW YORK STATE COURTS

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUDGE

Both the federal government and each of the 50 states have their own court systems. The Constitution and laws of each state establish the state courts. The New York State Unified Court System is made up of various levels of trial and appellate courts; the highest court is the Court of Appeals.



Most legal issues are resolved in our state courts. New York's state court system handles nearly four million cases a year, heard throughout the State's 62 counties. Matters brought before the State's judges, hearing officers, support magistrates and attorney-referees span the gamut from criminal cases to personal injury claims to commercial disputes to landlord-tenant issues. Sometimes, we may overlook the fact that the State's Judiciary – along with our Executive and Legislative branches – is a co-equal partner in government that, in many ways, can have a significant impact on our daily lives.

The structure of the New York State Unified Court System can seem as complex as it is vast. This guide provides an easy-to-understand overview of the courts and also includes information about important resources and services. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the workings of our courts and hope you find this guide a helpful reference tool.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet DiFiore". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Janet DiFiore

*Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals
and the State of New York*

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COURT AUTHORITY AND STRUCTURE

Cases start in the trial courts. Though most cases are decided at the trial-court level, parties will occasionally ask a higher court to reconsider the case (an “appeal”). Most appeals are first heard in the intermediate appellate courts, which review the decisions of lower courts to make certain that the law was properly applied. In New York, the highest court is the **Court of Appeals**. Listed here are brief descriptions of the various trial and appellate courts that make up the New York State court system.

THE TRIAL COURTS

IN NEW YORK CITY

The Civil Court of the City of New York decides lawsuits involving claims for damages up to \$25,000 and includes a small claims part for cases involving amounts up to \$5,000 as well as a housing part for landlord-tenant matters.

The Criminal Court of the City of New York handles misdemeanors (crimes punishable by fine or imprisonment of up to one year) and lesser offenses. Criminal Court judges also conduct arraignments (initial court appearances following arrest) and preliminary hearings for felonies (crimes punishable by imprisonment of more than one year).

OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY

District Courts, located in Nassau County and the five western towns of Suffolk County, arraign defendants accused of felonies and handle misdemeanors and lesser offenses as well as civil suits involving claims up to \$15,000.

City Courts arraign defendants accused of felonies and handle misdemeanors and lesser offenses as well as civil suits involving claims up to \$15,000. Some City Courts have small claims parts,

where matters involving claims up to \$5,000 are handled, and/or housing parts, which handle landlord-tenant matters.

Town and Village Justice Courts handle misdemeanors and lesser offenses. Although the County Courts try felony cases, town and village justices first arraign defendants in Town and Village Courts. Town and Village Courts also hear civil suits involving claims up to \$3,000.

County Courts, located in each county outside New York City, have exclusive authority to conduct trials in felony matters, while sharing authority with local City and Town and Village Courts to handle trials in misdemeanor cases and other minor offenses. County Courts also have limited authority over cases involving claims for money damages up to \$25,000.

TRIAL COURTS OPERATING IN AND OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY

The Supreme Court generally hears cases outside the authority of the lower courts, such as civil matters involving higher dollar amounts; divorce, separation and annulment proceedings; and criminal prosecutions of felonies. (Outside New York City, Supreme Courts hear civil matters while the County Courts hear criminal matters.)

The Family Court hears matters involving children and families including adoption; guardianship; foster care approval and review; juvenile delinquency; family violence; child abuse and neglect; and child support, custody and visitation.

The Surrogate's Court hears cases relating to individuals who have passed away, including the validity of wills and the administration of estates. These courts are also authorized to handle adoptions.

The Court of Claims has exclusive authority over lawsuits seeking money damages against the State of New York. The Court of Claims

also has jurisdiction over lawsuits seeking money damages against certain state-related entities such as the New York State Thruway, the City University of New York and the New York State Power Authority (for claims related to the taking of real estate only).

APPELLATE COURTS

INTERMEDIATE APPELLATE COURTS

Appellate Terms of the Supreme Court in the First and Second Departments* hear appeals of decisions in cases starting in the New York City Civil and Criminal Courts. In the Second Department, the Appellate Terms also hear appeals of decisions in cases that started in the District, City or Town and Village Courts. The County Courts in the Third and Fourth Departments, while primarily trial courts, hear appeals of decisions in cases starting in the City Courts and Town and Village Courts.

There are four Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court, one in each judicial department.* The Appellate Divisions hear civil and criminal appeals from the trial courts as well as civil appeals from the Appellate Terms and County Courts.

HIGHEST APPELLATE COURT

The Court of Appeals, New York's highest court, hears civil and criminal appeals from the State's intermediate appellate courts, and in some instances from the trial courts. The Court of Appeals also hears appeals of decisions reached by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, which is responsible for reviewing allegations of misconduct brought against judges. In addition, the Court of Appeals makes rules governing the admission of attorneys to the New York State bar.

* For administrative purposes, the court system is divided geographically into four judicial departments and 13 judicial districts. The First Judicial Department includes districts 1 and 12; the Second Judicial Department, districts 2, 9, 10, 11 and 13; the Third Judicial Department, districts 3, 4 and 6; and the Fourth Judicial Department, districts 5, 7 and 8.

* See directory on pages 11–15 for a list of counties comprising each district.

RESOURCES AND SERVICES FOR THE PUBLIC

HELP FOR THOSE WITHOUT A LAWYER

COURTHELP: ONLINE ASSISTANCE

A website designed to help New Yorkers who do not have attorneys navigate the court system, CourtHelp, www.nycourthelp.gov, has information on court procedures, court locations, law libraries, legal research sites and lawyer referral services. Visitors to the site can also download free court forms.

COURT HELP CENTERS

Many courts in New York State have help centers located right at the courthouse to assist people who do not have a lawyer. These offices are staffed by clerks and court attorneys who provide free legal and procedural information, offer referrals and provide free court forms and publications. Some centers have volunteer lawyers available to provide free legal advice to litigants who do not have an attorney. For help center locations visit www.nycourthelp.gov.

DIY (DO-IT-YOURSELF) FORM PROGRAMS

DIY Form Programs are free, easy-to-use computer programs that allow you to create court forms for certain types of cases. These programs are available on the CourtHelp site, www.nycourthelp.gov, and at many court help centers, public law libraries and court clerks' offices.

Need help with legal research? See "Legal Research Assistance for the Public" on page 10.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

The New York State court system is committed to fostering compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and to providing services, programs and activities in a way that assures accessibility for all users of the courts. To that end, each court location has an ADA liaison to handle accommodation requests. For more information, including a list of ADA liaisons, visit www.nycourts.gov/accessibility, email ADA@nycourts.gov or call 212-428-2760 or 212-428-2522.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) PROGRAMS (*Mediation, etc.*)

The court system supports community- and court-based programs that offer mediation, arbitration, collaborative family law and other dispute resolution options as an alternative to litigation. These processes are available for a wide variety of matters such as family, neighbor and business disputes. Parties who participate in ADR processes typically indicate high levels of satisfaction both with the process and the outcome. To learn about the benefits of alternative dispute resolution or to access a program near you visit: www.nycourts.gov/adr or call 518-238-4351.

ASSIGNED COUNSEL PROGRAM

Court-appointed lawyers are provided by the Assigned Counsel Program for criminal defendants and parties in certain Family Court proceedings who cannot afford to hire an attorney. For more information contact the Assigned Counsel Program in your local county.

ATTORNEY DIRECTORY

The court system maintains an online registry of New York State attorneys, where you can verify an attorney's work number and address as well as registration status. To access the directory visit: <http://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/attorney/AttorneySearch>.

ATTORNEY DISCIPLINARY PROGRAM

Established to protect the public from attorneys who are incompetent or unethical, the Attorney Disciplinary Program conducts investigations of claims of attorney misconduct. In more serious cases, charges are brought before the Appellate Division, which may result in suspension or disbarment of the attorney. For information on professional standards for attorneys, clients' rights and responsibilities and related matters visit: www.nycourts.gov/ip/attorneygrievance.

ATTORNEY FOR THE CHILD PROGRAM

The Attorney for the Child Program (formerly known as the Law Guardian Program) provides legal counsel to minors in certain Family Court matters, including juvenile delinquency and child protective proceedings. For more information, contact your local Family Court.

CASE INFORMATION AND TRACKING

Using our free case information services you can find future appearance dates for cases in criminal, family and housing courts. You may also view information on both active and disposed civil cases in Supreme Court and local Civil Court. By signing up for our eTrack case-tracking service you can obtain email updates and appearance reminders for civil and criminal court cases. For more information visit www.nycourts.gov and click on the E-Courts link. Email inquiries may be sent to ecourts@nycourts.gov.

CHILDREN'S CENTERS

Some courthouses have an on-site Children's Center, a secure, staffed facility where youngsters can stay while their parents are in court. For more information, including Children's Center locations, visit: www.nycourts.gov/ip/childrenscenter.

COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS OR FILING A COMPLAINT

COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS

- To make a comment or suggestion, contact the Chief Clerk of the appropriate court or email question@nycourts.gov.

TO MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT A COURT EMPLOYEE

- Contact the Chief Clerk of the court in which the employee works; or the Office of the Inspector General (to investigate claims of wrongdoing) at **646-386-3500**; or the Managing Inspector General for Bias Matters (for allegations of bias based upon race, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, national origin or religion) at 1-877-236-3242 (toll-free). For more information visit: www.nycourts.gov/howdoi/courtemployee.shtml#clerks.

TO MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT A JUDGE

- Contact the administrative office for the court to which the judge is assigned (see directory on page 11); or the Managing Inspector General for Bias Matters (for allegations of bias based upon race, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, national origin or religion) at: **1-877-236-3242** (toll-free).
- Complaints involving allegations of misconduct by a judge may also be referred to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, which has offices in New York City, Albany and Rochester. For more information go to www.scjc.state.ny.us.

COUNTY CLERKS' OFFICES

In New York City, the five County Clerks serve as jury commissioners and also perform a range of non-jury functions including the maintenance of Supreme Court case records, certification of Supreme Court documents, filing of business certificates and collection of fees for the filing of court documents. Outside

New York City, County Clerks serve as clerks of the Supreme and County Courts, maintaining County Court and Supreme Court records, collecting fees for the filing of court documents and also performing many record-keeping functions, some of which are related to the courts. For more information check your local County Clerk's office.

COURT INTERPRETING SERVICES

If you need a foreign or Sign language interpreter for a court appearance, contact the Chief Clerk's office of the court in which you are going to appear. An interpreter will be assigned for your court appearance free of charge. If you do not know how to reach the court you may contact the Office of Language Access by calling **646-386-5670** or emailing courtinterpreter@nycourts.gov. For more information about language access or court interpreters visit www.nycourts.gov/courtinterpreter.

CRIMINAL HISTORY SEARCH

The court system's criminal history database includes records from all 62 New York State counties. For a fee, the courts' Criminal History Record Search Unit performs searches of the database to provide an individual's criminal history to public agencies, private companies and members of the public. For more information visit www.nycourts.gov/apps/chrs or call **212-428-2943**

DIVORCE RESOURCES

For a general overview of the divorce process in New York State and links to resources in your local county, visit www.nycourts.gov/divorce/index.shtml

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCES

Domestic violence impacts the lives of thousands of New Yorkers each and every day. This type of violence is a crime. Resources are available for those who find themselves in a situation involving domestic violence. Find information at: www.nycourts.gov/topics/domesticviolence.shtml

FIDUCIARIES

Fiduciaries are appointed by the court to a position of trust, serving individuals and the courts in a variety of ways, including as guardians, receivers or referees. The courts' Office of Guardian and Fiduciary Services offers training and other help to such individuals. For more information visit www.nycourts.gov/ip/gfs/index.shtml or call 212-428-5505.

For complaints relating to a fiduciary appointment contact the Managing Inspector General for Fiduciary Appointments at (646-386-3515).

JUROR WEB SITE AND HOTLINE

Jurors and other individuals interested in the jury system can obtain information about jury service in New York on the courts' juror web site, www.nyjuror.gov, which includes juror orientation videos, juror handbooks, links to the state's 62 local jury offices and an online form to volunteer for service. Those seeking information about jury service can also call 1-800-NY-JUROR (1-800-695-8767) toll-free or email nyjuror@nycourts.gov for assistance.

LAY GUARDIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A guardian is an adult selected by the judge to make decisions for another person who needs help managing finances and/or making personal care decisions. The Guardianship Assistance

Network (GAN) helps families and friends who have been appointed by the court under Article 81 of the New York State Mental Hygiene Law to serve as guardians. GAN offers support, practical advice and training to help lay guardians carry out their responsibilities. For more information call **347-296-1948** or email **GAN@courts.state.ny.us**.

LEGAL RESEARCH ASSISTANCE FOR THE PUBLIC

Public access law libraries are located in courthouses in each county to provide legal research assistance to local attorneys and the general public. Court librarians are also available during business hours to answer questions by calling **1-800-COURT-NY (1-800-268-7869)** toll-free (assistance is available in languages other than English). For more information about the courts' legal research services visit www.nycourts.gov/lawlibraries/index.shtml or call **518-238-4361**.

PARENT EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAM

The court system oversees a statewide network of certified Parent Education and Awareness Programs that offer parents undergoing a divorce or separation information and practical tools to help them better understand how the breakup can affect their children and aid them in making their new family situation less stressful. While parents are often ordered or referred by the court to attend a parent education class, parents may also voluntarily participate in these programs. For more information visit www.nycourts.gov/parented or email **nyparent-ed@nycourts.gov**

DIRECTORY OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

Administrative judges oversee the courts within their jurisdiction, managing caseloads and administrative functions, including personnel management and budget administration. Following is a statewide directory of administrative judges' offices by court or judicial district. You can also view our online directory at www.nycourts.gov/Admin/local-admin.shtml.

COURTS IN NEW YORK CITY

CITYWIDE COURTS

NEW YORK CITY CIVIL COURT 646-386-5400

Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York and Richmond counties

111 Centre Street, New York, NY 10013

www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/index.shtml

NEW YORK CITY CRIMINAL COURT 646-386-4600

Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York and Richmond counties

100 Centre Street, New York, NY 10013

www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/criminal/index.shtml

NEW YORK CITY FAMILY COURT 646-386-5206

Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York and Richmond counties

60 Lafayette Street, Suite 11A, New York, NY 10013

www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/family/index.shtml

1ST JUDICIAL DISTRICT (MANHATTAN)

NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT–

CIVIL MATTERS 646-386-5713

60 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007

www.nycourts.gov/supctmanh/

**NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CRIMINAL MATTERS** 646-386-4000

100 Centre Street, New York, NY 10013

www.nycourts.gov/courts/1jd/criminal

2ND JUDICIAL DISTRICT (BROOKLYN)

**KINGS COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CIVIL MATTERS** 347-296-1200

360 Adams Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

www.nycourts.gov/courts/2jd/kings/civil/index.shtml

**KINGS COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CRIMINAL MATTERS** 347-296-1000

320 Jay Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

www.nycourts.gov/courts/2jd/kings/criminal/index.shtml

11TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (QUEENS)

**QUEENS COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CIVIL MATTERS** 718-298-1000

88-11 Sutphin Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11435

www.nycourts.gov/courts/11jd/supreme/civilterm/index.shtml

**QUEENS COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CRIMINAL MATTERS** 718-298-1000

125-01 Queens Boulevard, Kew Gardens, NY 11415

www.nycourts.gov/courts/11jd/supreme/criminalterm/index.shtml

12TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (BRONX)

**BRONX COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CIVIL MATTERS** 718-618-1200

851 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451

www.nycourts.gov/courts/12jd/civil/civil.shtml

**BRONX COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CRIMINAL MATTERS 718-618-3100**

265 East 161st Street, Bronx, NY 10451

www.nycourts.gov/courts/12jd/criminal.shtml

13TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT (STATEN ISLAND)

**RICHMOND COUNTY SUPREME COURT–
CIVIL AND CRIMINAL MATTERS 718-675-8700**

26 Central Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10301

www.nycourts.gov/courts/13jd/

COURTS OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY

3RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(CAPITAL DISTRICT AREA) 518-285-8300

*Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Schoharie,
Sullivan and Ulster counties - all courts*

2500 Pond View, Suite 210, Castleton-on-Hudson, NY 12033

www.nycourts.gov/courts/3jd/

4TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(ADIRONDACKS, NORTHERN NEW YORK) 518-285-5099

*Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Montgomery, St.
Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington
counties - all courts*

65 South Broadway, Suite 101, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

www.nycourts.gov/4jd/

5TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(SYRACUSE AND NORTHWEST) 315-671-2111

*Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, Onondaga and
Oswego counties– all courts*

Onondaga County Office Building,
600 South State Street, Syracuse, NY 13202

www.nycourts.gov/courts/5jd/index.shtml

6TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(BINGHAMTON AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES) 607-240-5350

*Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Madison,
Otsego, Schuylar, Tioga and Tompkins counties - all courts*

31 Lewis Street, 5th Floor, Binghamton, NY 13901

www.nycourts.gov/courts/6jd/

7TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(ROCHESTER AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES) 585-371-3266

*Cayuga, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Steuben,
Wayne and Yates counties - all courts*

Hall of Justice,
99 Exchange Boulevard, Room 161, Rochester, NY 14614

www.nycourts.gov/courts/7jd/

8TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(BUFFALO AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES) 716-845-2505

*Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara,
Orleans and Wyoming counties - all courts*

92 Franklin Street, 3rd Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202

www.nycourts.gov/courts/8jd/

9TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

(WHITE PLAINS AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES) 914-824-5100

*Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties -
all courts*

County Courthouse, 111 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard,
11th Floor, White Plains, NY 10601

www.nycourts.gov/courts/9jd/

10TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

NASSAU COUNTY - ALL COURTS 516-493-3001

100 Supreme Court Drive, Mineola, NY 11501

www.nycourts.gov/courts/10jd/nassau/index.shtml

10TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

SUFFOLK COUNTY - ALL COURTS 631-853-7740

400 Carleton Avenue, P.O. Box 9080, Central Islip, NY 11722

www.nycourts.gov/courts/10jd/suffolk/index.shtml

STATEWIDE

COURT OF CLAIMS 518-432-3411

P.O.B. 7344, Capitol Station, Albany, NY 12224

www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyscourtofclaims/

Visit the New York State Unified Court System online at
www.nycourts.gov
to learn more about court programs and services.

HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL FEATURES YOU'LL FIND ON OUR WEBSITE:

Attorney Referral Services

(If you need help finding an attorney)

www.nycourts.gov/litigants/attorneyreferral.shtml

Criminal History Search

www.nycourts.gov/apps/chrs

Judges' Directory

(Information about NY State Unified Court System Judges)

www.nycourts.gov/judges/directory.shtml

Jury Service

www.nyjuror.gov

Mediation and other Alternative Dispute Resolution Services

www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr

Public Information/Outreach

(Court publications, public service announcements, events calendar, educational tools for students and teachers)

www.nycourts.gov/community_outreach

Suggestions, Comments or Complaints

www.nycourts.gov/howdoi/fileacomplaint.shtml

Don't have an attorney and need help navigating the courts? Visit www.nycourthelp.gov for court forms, information about court procedures and more.

For More Information

Please Call 1-800-COURT-NY (1-800-268-7869)

Assistance Is Available In English And Other Languages.

Tty: Call 711 (nyrelay.com)

Or Visit Us Online At:

www.nycourts.gov



NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION

25 Beaver Street, New York, NY 10004