



GOING TO COURT GUIDELINES

Self Help Legal Resource Center

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GET ALL YOUR EVIDENCE TOGETHER. Evidence is anything that has to do with your case. Evidence can be things like photographs, receipts, written agreements, letters or communications to or from you and the defendant, and so on. Make sure your evidence has to do with your case.

IF CONTESTED: GET YOUR WITNESSES READY. Witnesses are people who know things about your case. Witnesses can be anybody – friends, relatives, neighbors, building inspectors, mechanics and so on. Be sure to talk to people ahead of time so that you know what you are going to say to the judge and they will be in court for you. If there is anyone important who you think might not show up, ask the court clerk for a subpoena for that person. (You will be required to pay a witness fee, mileage to the courthouse for the witnesses, plus a service fee.) This must be done at least 10 days before your court date.

HAVE NOTES AND PRACTICE WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY IN COURT. Go over what you want to say in court. Make notes on the important things that you want to remember to tell the judge. It may help to have a friend who does not know all the facts listen to your story to see if you make sense. Remember to make sure that what you want to say is related to your case. The courtroom is not the place to simply criticize or attack the opposing side or witnesses.

DRESS UP. How you look is important in court. Wear nice clothes. Be neat and clean. Men should wear a suit and tie. If you do not have one, borrow one. If you do not have any access to a suit and tie, wear a clean shirt that is tucked in. Do not wear t-shirts with large logos slogans. Also, do not wear work boots. Wear nice dress shoes or clean sneakers. Do not wear any clothing advertizing drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products. Men should not wear hats or hoods, unless worn for bona fide religious reasons. Women should wear blouses, pant suits and skirts. Women should not wear mini-skirts, halter tops, or tank tops. Also, do not wear sandals or open toe shoes.

BE AT THE COURTHOUSE EARLY. Some courts expect you to sign in with the clerk so that the judge knows you are there and your case can be called. The judge will probably throw out your case if you do not show up on time. If you have a very good reason AND you call the court ahead of time to tell them you cannot make it, the judge MIGHT set a new hearing date.

RELAX. BE VERY POLITE TO EVERYONE. Even if the other person is lying, do not interrupt. Do not chew gum or candy in the courtroom. Speak clearly and loud enough so you can be heard. Call the judge "Your Honor" and stand up when you talk to the judge. If you get nervous, relax, take a deep breath and speak slower. Berrien County Court prohibits cellular phones, pagers, and electronic or communication devices, so leave them in your car or at home.