

The New York State Courts:

An Introductory Guide

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A Message from the Chief Judge

The state courts are truly the workhorses of the American legal system. Here in New York State, we handled



4.7 million cases last year, involving almost every type of endeavor known to humanity. We hear family matters, personal injury claims, commercial disputes, trust and estate issues, criminal cases, landlord-tenant matters. Every one of these cases is important to the individual parties involved; many have implications for the larger community as well.

Yet for all the activity and impact of the New York courts, many citizens are unfamiliar with our work and structure. This booklet provides an overview of how our courts are organized and the kinds of work they do.

The New York state courts encourage citizen interest. We hope many of you, after reading this booklet, will stop by to watch a trial or hear a legal argument at your local courthouse or in Court of Appeals Hall in Albany.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Lippman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

JONATHAN LIPPMAN

Chief Judge of the
New York State Courts

Contents

Court Authority and Structure	2
Trial Courts	2
Appellate Courts	4
Resources and Services for the Public	5
Help for Those Without a Lawyer	5
Accommodations for Those With Disabilities	5
Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs (mediation, etc.)	6
Assigned Counsel Program	6
Attorney Directory	6
Attorney Disciplinary Program	6
Attorney for the Child Program	6
Case Information and Tracking	7
Children’s Centers	7
Comments, Suggestions or Filing a Complaint	7
County Clerks’ Offices	8
Court Interpreting Services	8
Criminal History Search	8
Fiduciaries	8
Juror Web Site and Hotline	9
Lay Guardian Assistance Program	9
Legal Research Assistance for the Public	9
Parent Education and Awareness Program	9
Directory of Administrative Offices	10
Courts in New York City	10
Courts Outside New York City	10
Statewide	12

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. This is called 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.

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 10–13 for a list of counties comprising each district.

Resources and Services for the Public

Help for Those Without a Lawyer

CourtHelp: Online Assistance

A web site 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" entry on page 9.

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 212-428-2761.

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 alternatives to litigation. These alternatives are available for a wide variety of matters such as family, neighbor and business disputes. To learn about the benefits of alternative dispute resolution or to access a program near you visit:

www.nycourts.gov/adr or call **212-428-5534** or **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 10); 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. To visit the Commission online 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. If you do not know how to reach the court you may contact the Office of Court Interpreting Services by calling **646-386-5670** or sending an email to courtinterpreter@nycourts.gov. For more information about court interpreting services 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 **212-428-2810**.

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 and handbooks as well as links to the state's 62 local jury offices. 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 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@courts.state.ny.us.

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/AdminStructure.pdf.

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 **646-386-4700**

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 **646-386-5190**

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 **646-386-3211**

60 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007
www.nycourts.gov/supctmanh/

NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT—

Criminal Matters **646-386-3888**

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

QUEENS COUNTY SUPREME COURT–

Criminal Matters **718-298-1000**
 125-01 Queens Boulevard, Kew Gardens, NY 11415
www.nycourts.gov/courts/11jd

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**
18 Richmond Terrace, 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*
40 Steuben Street, 6th Floor, Albany, NY 12207
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,
Schuyler, 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) **585-454-4242**
*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 **516-571-2400**
 100 Supreme Court Drive, Mineola, NY 11501
www.nycourts.gov/courts/10jd/nassau/index.shtml

10TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Suffolk County - all courts **631-853-7742**
 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.nyscourtofclaims.courts.state.ny.us

**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 web site:

ATTORNEY REFERRAL SERVICES

(if you need help finding an attorney)

www.nycourts.gov/litigants/attorneyreferral.shtml

CRIMINAL HISTORY SEARCH

www.nycourts.gov/apps/chrs

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

(job postings, application forms, exam information)

www.nycourts.gov/careers

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.**

NOTES





FOR MORE INFORMATION
please call 1-800-COURT-NY (1-800-268-7869)
Assistance is available in languages other than English.

TTY: call 711 (nyrelay.com)

or visit us online at:

www.nycourts.gov

**NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION,
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
25 BEAVER STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10004
(212) 428-2116**