

New York Courts



A message from Chief Judge Janet DiFiore:

Every day, New Yorkers from all walks of life turn to the courts to resolve their legal disputes. When they do, it is crucial that they have basic information about the courts, including the location of the courthouses within their communities and the types of cases handled by particular courts.

The court system has designed this guide to provide court users with useful information about the State trial courts. It is our hope that this outline will help New Yorkers better understand and better navigate their State courts.

SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court has broad authority over all categories of cases, including civil and criminal matters. The court generally hears civil matters seeking monetary damages of more than \$25,000. It also handles cases where a party seeks to enjoin or stop certain actions by another party. The Supreme Court is the only court with the authority to address matters related to the termination of a marriage, including separation, annulment and divorce.

While the Supreme Court has authority to hear criminal matters involving felonies (offenses punishable by a term of imprisonment that exceeds one year), generally outside New York City these matters are heard in the County Court.

COUNTY COURT

The County Court is located in each county outside New York City. It is authorized to handle the prosecution of all crimes committed within the county. It has exclusive authority to handle trials in felony matters and shares authority with local district, city, and town and village courts to handle trials in misdemeanor cases misdemeanors (offenses punishable by a term of imprisonment that exceeds 15 days but does not exceed one year) and other minor offenses and violations (offenses punishable by a term of imprisonment that is less than fifteen days). The County Court also has limited authority to hear civil

cases involving monetary awards of \$25,000 or less.

DISTRICT COURT

The District Court has been established in Nassau County and the five western towns of Suffolk County. The court has the authority to hear criminal matters involving misdemeanors and minor offenses. It also handles preliminary proceedings in felony matters, after which the case is transferred to County Court. The District Court also is responsible for Vehicle and Traffic Law misdemeanors.

In addition, the District Court hears civil matters involving claims up to \$15,000, small claims proceedings up to \$5,000 and commercial claims up to \$5,000. Landlord/tenant matters also are heard in the District Court.

CITY COURT

City Court exists in every city in the State and has authority to hear both criminal and civil matters. On the criminal side, the City Court is responsible for all Penal Law and City Code misdemeanors and minor

offenses committed within the court's regional boundaries. It also handles arraignments and preliminary proceedings in felony matters. In addition, the City Court is responsible for Vehicle and Traffic Law misdemeanors.

On the civil side, the City Court hears civil actions seeking amounts up to \$15,000 in monetary awards, small claims proceedings involving claims up to \$5,000 and disputed parking tickets. The Court also handles landlord/tenant matters.

FAMILY COURT

The Family Court hears and determines most legal matters involving children and families. There is a Family Court within each county of the State which is authorized to hear matters relating to:

- custody, visitation and guardianship
- monetary support for children, spouses and ex-spouses
- adoption
- paternity
- abuse and neglect of children
- violence among family members
- children accused of committing crimes

- children in need of supervision

The Family Court does not handle proceedings involving separations, annulment or divorce. These matters must be brought in the Supreme Court, which has exclusive authority over such issues.

SURROGATE'S COURT

The Surrogate's Court exists in every county in the State and handles all matters relating to wills, estates and property of deceased persons. The Surrogate's Court also shares authority with the Family Court to hear adoption proceedings.

COURT OF CLAIMS

The Court of Claims handles all civil cases seeking monetary damages from New York State. It has locations statewide.

TOWN AND VILLAGE COURTS

Town and Village Courts are located in towns and villages throughout New York State and hear both criminal and civil matters. On the criminal side, these courts are authorized to handle the prosecution of misdemeanors and

violations that are committed within the town's or village's geographic boundaries. Town and Village Courts also conduct arraignments and preliminary hearings in felony matters. In addition, these courts hear Vehicle and Traffic Law misdemeanors and traffic infractions. On the civil side, the Town and Village Courts hear actions seeking monetary awards up to \$3,000 and small claims proceedings for awards up to \$3,000. These courts also handle landlord/tenant matters.

1-800-COURT-NY
WWW.NYCOURTS.GOV

Contacts:

COUNTY CLERKS' OFFICES

The County Clerks' Offices are responsible for maintaining County and/or Supreme Court case records as well as many other record keeping functions, including the recording of deeds, mortgages and liens against property.

COMMISSIONERS OF JURORS' OFFICES

The Commissioners of Jurors' Offices are responsible for supplying the trial courts with prospective jurors and handling related functions. Information about jury service can be obtained by calling 1-800-NYJUROR (695-8767).

LAW LIBRARIES

A public access Law Library is available in each county of the State for the public's use. For information about the location in your county, please check the specific court information in this brochure.

CHILDREN'S CENTERS

Children's Centers are available in many courthouses to provide quality child care for litigants' children while litigants attend to court business. For information about locations in your county, please check the specific court information in this brochure.