

Should I Represent Myself?

If you want to represent yourself in court, you should consider the type of case, the complexity of the case, if you can get a lawyer for free or for a low cost, and if you are the type of person who can handle the case on your own.

Types of Cases Where a Lawyer is Recommended

- You have a **criminal or child abuse** case. In these cases, you have a right to a lawyer. Look for our video titled *Finding Legal Help in a Criminal Case* or visit mdcourts.gov/districtpdinfo
- You are a survivor of **domestic violence**. Visit mdcourts.gov/dv for a list of resources.
- You want to file a lawsuit involving **physical injury**.
- Your case involves **transfer of real estate**.
- You want to **organize a business**.
- You're going to court for a **family law matter** like child custody or support, paternity, divorce, or alimony.

Watch the Video



Important Questions to Ask Yourself

- If you didn't see your case on the list above it doesn't mean representing yourself is a good idea. There are many kinds of cases and each situation is unique. Ask yourself these questions to help you decide if you need a lawyer.
- **Can I afford to lose this case?** - A court case may be your only chance to be heard, and if this is a "make it or break it" case for you, you might need a lawyer.
- **Is this an emotional case for me?** - Lawyers can give you unbiased guidance. They can also act as a buffer between you and someone who knows how to upset you, or someone whom you find difficult to confront.
- **Do I fully understand the papers I received from the other side or from the court?** - Always review your paperwork closely and follow up on anything you don't understand.
- **Does the other side have a lawyer?** – If so, the other side may have a big advantage over you even when the case seems like a straightforward matter.
- **Is my case a small claim?** - Generally, cases before the District Court where the amount involved is \$5,000 or less are considered small claims. Certain rules and procedures are relaxed to make it easier for people to represent themselves. Watch our video titled *Before You File a Small Claim* to learn more.



Maryland Court Help

Free. Online. In Person. By Phone.

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Should I Represent Myself?

- You are best able to represent yourself if you are a person who is organized, pays attention to detail, and keeps good records. You must also be comfortable speaking in public, be able to stick to deadlines, and feel comfortable looking up legal information online or at a law library.



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