EVICTION INFORMATION AND FORMS

- 1. It is your responsibility to prepare all eviction forms when filing an eviction suit if you choose not to hire an attorney. Our office will supply you with this packet; however, we cannot give you any legal advice or help you fill out the forms.
- 2. An eviction suit must be filed in the Justice precinct where the rental property is located.
- 3. Texas Property Code, Sec. 24.005 sets out the notice requirements for evictions suits.
- 4. The notice to vacate must be in writing and should be unconditional; ie., it should tell the tenant to vacate by a specific date in no uncertain terms. A non-payment of rent notice form is included in this packet.
- 5. Unless there is an agreement in writing between the parties shortening the notice requirements, the landlord must wait three days after the notice to vacate is served before filing a suit for eviction.
- 6. When filing, the landlord must bring the following:
 - (a) A copy of the lease if there is a written lease.
 - (b) A copy of the notice to vacate
 - (c) \$154.00 for filing and service on one person (additional service is \$100.00 per person)
 - (d) All work and residence addresses and telephone numbers of the tenant(s) known by the landlord.
- 7. Generally, all parties named in the lease should be sued and served with a citation in the eviction proceeding. Any judgement granted will run only against those who are specifically named and served. Personal service is required to obtain a default judgement for back rent; however, a judgement for restitution of premises may be obtained with substitute service.
- 8. The owner's agent may file any type of eviction suit and may represent the owner at any default judgement hearing. If the case is contested an agent may represent either party if the case involves non-payment of rent or holding over. The parties or their attorneys must try all other types of evictions if case is contested.
- 9. A suit for rent may be included with the eviction suit if the amount is within the jurisdiction of the Justice Court, Charges for items other than rent cannot be joined with the suit for eviction.
- 10. A default judgement can be granted if the tenant falls to appear on the date set for trial unless a continuance is granted by the Court.
- 11. The Tenant may answer the suit by personally appearing in court with the civil clerk.
- 12. Either party to the lawsuit has (5) days to appeal the court's decision. The appeal is perfected by the filing of an appeal bond or pauper's oath at that time. A properly filed appeal stops all further Justice Court proceedings until a decision is rendered by the County Court at Law.
- 13. If neither party appeals, the landlord may obtain a Writ of Possession from the court after the five (5) day period for appeal has passed. The writ filing fee is \$5.00 and the constable fee is \$220.00 to execute the writ. The writ is an order to the Constable to cause the tenant to vacate the premises. Questions pertaining to the execution of the writ should be directed to the Constable's office, Civil Divisions. DO NOT DISCONNECT THE UTILITY SERVICES TO THE PREMISES BEFORE YOUR CASE COMES TO TRIAL WITHOUT CONSULTING AN ATTORNEY.

ANTES DE PRESENTAR SU DEMANDA DEBE USTED LEER ESTAS INTRUCIONES

- 1. Si decide no contratar abogado, es su resposabilidad preparer las formas para presenter su demanda para despojar. Nuestra oficiana le proprociona este paquete de formas y ejemplos, pero no podemos asesorario sobre la ley ni ayudarle a llenar las formas.
- 2. La demanda para despojar debe registrarse en el Tribunal del distrito en que se encuentra la propiedad en alquller.
- 3. La Fraccion 24.005 de Codigo de Texas Sobre Propidades, explica los requisitos para notificar en demandas para despojar.
- 4. La notification para despojar debe darse por escrito y debe ser incondicional; es decir, debe decirsele al inguilino en terminos directos, que, desaloje la propiedad en una fecha especifica.
- 5. El propietario debera esperar tres dias despues de que se entrego la notificación de despojo antes de presentar su demanda, a menos que entre las partes exista un acuerdo para reducir los requisitos para notificar.
- 6. Al presentar su demanda, el propietario debra traer consigo:
 - (a) Una copia del contrato de renta.
 - (b) Una copia de la notification de despojo.
 - (c) \$154.00 para registrarla y para notificar a una persona (\$100.00 por persona para notificar personas adicionales)
 - (d) Todas las direcciones y telefons de los trabajos y domicilios del/de los inquilino(s) de los que este enterado el propietario.
- 7. Es un proceso para depojar, generalmente todas las personas nombradas en un contrato de renta deben ser demandadas y notificadas por citatorio. Cualquier sentencia que se otorgue sera efectiva solamente contra las personas que se nombran especificamente y se han notificado.
- 8. El representante del propietario puede presentar cualesquier clase de demanda para despojo y puede representar al propietario en cualesquier audiencia para un fallo por falta de comparecencia. Si hay disputa, ambas partes pueden tener un representante si se trata de una demanda por no pagar renta o por retencion de la propiedad. Las partes o sus abogados deberan tartar todas las otras clases de despojos si el caso es disputado.
- 9. Junto con la demanda para despojo se puede presentar una demanda por renta si la cantidad que se debe queda dentro de la jurisdiccion del Tribunal de Justicia. <u>Demandas por otras cosas que no sean renta no se pueden incluir en la demanda para depojar.</u>
- 10. A menos que el Tribunal otorque un aplazamiento, si el inquilino no comparece en la fecha fijada para el Juicio Tribunal puede fallar en su contra por no comparecencia.
- 11. Sera necesario que el propietario, o su agente, comparezca y declare bajo juramento para que un fallo por enta sea otorgado.
- 12. El inquilino puede contester la demanda presentandose personalmente en el Tribunal.
- 13. Ambas partes en la demanda tienen cinco(5) dias para apelar la decision del Tribunal. La apelacion se efecuar con presentar una fianza de apelacion, o presente una declaracion de indigense juried. Una aplelacion debidamente presetada detiene todos los procedimientos en Tribunal de justicia hasta que haya un fallo por el juzgado de derecho del Condado (County Court at Law).
- 14. El propietario puede obtener del Tribunal un Interdicto de Despojo despues que los cinco (5) dias para apelar se han vencido. Ninguno de los dos partes apelan. El interdicto cuesta \$5.00; esta es una orden para que el aguacil puede hacer que el inquilino desaloje la propiedad \$220.00. Preguntas relacionadas con la ejecusion del interdicto deberan ser dirigidas a la oficina del aguacil.

COUNTY, TEXAS To DOB, and DL number, if the property is:
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IMMEDIATE POSSESSION BOND: If Plaintiff	has filed a bond for immediate possession, Plaintiff						
requests that: (1) the court set the amount of the bond; (2) the court approve the bond; and (3) proper notices, as required by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, are given to Defendant(s). SERVICE OF CITATION: Service is requested on Defendant(s) by: personal service at home or work, or by delivery to a person over the age of 16 years at Defendant's usual place of residence. If required,							
							wed by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Other home or
						work addresses where Defendant(s) may be	e served are:
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Plaintiff knows of no other home or work a	ddresses of Defendant(s) in this county.						
	is served with the citation and that Plaintiff is awarded a						
	ion of the premises, including removal of Defendant(s)						
	nises, unpaid rent, if set forth above, attorney's fees, court						
	e rate stated in the lease, or if not so stated, at the						
statutory rate for judgments.	22 and must be naid at least 2 days before trial						
	22 and must be paid at least 3 days before trial.						
☐ I hereby consent for the answer and any address as follows:	other motions or pleadings to be sent to my email						
Plaintiff's Printed Name	Signature of Plaintiff or Agent or Attorney						
Defendant's Information (if known): Name							
Date of birth:							
Last three digits of Driver License:	Last three digits of Soc. Sec. No.:						
SERVICE BY EMAIL: (Normally, documents is	n this case are sent by mail. If it is easier for you, you can						
choose to get some of the documents sent b	y email. If you choose to get documents by email, you						
must have an email account where you can	receive, open, and view large attachments, and it is						
•	t every day. Even if you receive some documents by email,						
•	t the case by mail or personal service, so you must not						
	her parties received by mail or personal service.)						
☐ Yes, I would like to receive docun	nents related to this case by email at this email address:						
☐ No, I do not want to receive any o	documents by email.						

REMOTE PARTICIPATION:

	ens by phone call, you will be able to talk to and hear will not be able to see them. Copies of any evidence to sent to the judge before the hearing.)
	n this case, except a jury trial, by phone call with the hat I must have a phone to use on the date and time of
☐ No, I am not able to have hearings b	y phone call.
talk to the judge, Plaintiff, and any witnesses.	g happens by video conference, you can hear, see, and You will be able to see any evidence presented during a smartphone, or tablet that has a camera feature.
	n this case, except a jury trial, by video conference. I r having the equipment and internet access needed to the date and time of the hearing.
☐ No, I am not able to have hearings be NOTE: Your responses in this section do not rather they help the court know how you as Respectfully submitted,	guarantee that hearings will be held remotely, but
Signature of Plaintiff	Signature of Attorney, if any
Printed Name: Address:	Printed Name: Address:
Email: Telephone: Fax:	Email: Telephone: Fax: State Bar No.:
SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED before me on _	
CLERK OF THE JUSTICE COURT OR NOTARY	

Cause No.	

AFFIDAVIT

SERVICEMEMBERS CIVIL RELIEF ACT SEC. 201(b)

Plaintiff being duly sworn on his oath deposes and say	s that defendant(s)	
() Is not in the Military		
() Not on active duty in the Military		
() Not in a foreign country on Military Service		
() Is on active duty Military and/or is subject to th	e service Members Relief act	of 2003.
() Defendant has waived his rights under the Serv	ce Members Relief Act of 20	03.
() Military status is unknown at this time		
	Plaintiff	
Subscribed and sworn to before me on this	day of	_, 20
	Notary Public in and for t	
	Clerk of the Justice Court	

Penalty for making or using false affidavit+ A person who makes or uses and affidavit knowing to be false, shall be fined up to \$10,000.00 as provided in title 18 United States code, or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both.

Date	
4,00	_
	_
	_
Re: Notice to Vacate for	nonpayment of rent
Dear	
• •	t of rent on your dwelling unit, your right of occupancy by terminated pursuant to our contract. Your liability not been terminated.
dwelling on or before m is at least three days fro Your failure to move out	is hereby made, you are hereby given notice to vacate the idnight, the day of which m the delivery of this notice to you or to your dwelling. It then will result in appropriate legal action before the lay or postponement of such action shall not constitute
	Signature of landlord or agent

Self-Help Legal Information Packet: Filing an Eviction Case



Self-Help Legal Information Packets are provided for the benefit of justice courts and individuals seeking access to justice through the court system. They do not constitute legal advice, and the court is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in the packet.

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What is an Eviction Case?

An **eviction case** is filed whenever a person or company is trying to recover possession of real property (like land, a house, or an apartment building) from someone else. Usually, it is a landlord filing against a tenant. The person or company filing the case is called the **plaintiff** and the person or company they file against is called the **defendant**.

Do I Need to File an Eviction Case?

The clerk or judge **cannot** give you advice on whether or not to file an eviction case and **cannot** have a conversation with you about the facts of your situation.

If you are trying to end the legal right for a person or company to occupy property that belongs to you, you will need to file an eviction case.

You need to file an eviction case if:

- You are trying to remove someone who was renting your property as their residence;
- 2) You are trying to remove someone who was renting your property for a business or other purpose; or
- 3) You allowed another person to use your property as their residence, even without a written lease or rent involved.

To win an eviction case, you will need to show:

- 1) The tenant **breached their lease** (this means they didn't pay their rent or did something they were not allowed to do under the contract, such as have unauthorized pets);
- 2) The tenant's lease has ended and they haven't left (this could include a month-to-month tenancy that you properly terminated);
- 3) The person was a **tenant at will** (meaning there was no set time when the lease would be over) **and** there was no rent due under the agreement, you gave a proper notice to vacate, and the person didn't leave; or
- 4) The person entered and remains in the property without your permission (squatter).

You do **not** need to file an eviction case if:

- 1) You are excluding someone from your property who was not renting the property or using it as their residence (such as an overnight visitor);
- 2) The person has already permanently vacated the property. If they have vacated but still owe you back rent, you can file a Small Claims Case to recover the back rent (see the information packet on *How to File a Small Claims Case* for details).

What Do I Do Before Filing an Eviction Case?

Step 1: Breach of Lease or Notice of Termination of Lease

If the defendant has a written lease agreement or pays you rent, you cannot just evict them from the property for no reason. If they have a lease with a set end date, they are entitled to stay in the property until that date, unless they don't pay their rent or violate some other term of the lease.

A **termination notice** is required if either:

- 1) The tenant has a written lease that they did not breach, and that lease does not have a set end date; or
- 2) They do not have a written lease, but there is an agreement that they pay you rent.

The termination notice is a written notice telling them the day that their lease now ends. This notice must be at least one rental payment period. Most agreements without set end dates are "month-to-month" agreements, so you would need to give at least one month's notice. For example, you could give a termination notice on January 27th informing the tenant that the lease is terminated effective February 28th.

If they breached the lease, or there is no written lease and no agreement to pay rent, then no termination notice is needed, and you can proceed to *Step 2: Notice to Vacate*.

Step 2: Notice to Vacate

You **must always** deliver a **notice to vacate** to the defendant before filing an eviction case. This is a written demand for the defendant to leave the property within a set time. This period of time is **3 days**, unless you agreed in a contract to a different period of time (or the property was purchased at a tax sale, or you are trying to remove the tenant of a person who was foreclosed upon).

The notice to vacate may be delivered to the defendant by:

- 1) Handing it to them personally,
- 2) Mailing it to the premises, addressed to the defendant, or
- 3) Posting it on the **inside** of their front door.

If you cannot post it on the inside of the front door due to a dangerous animal or deadbolt-type device, or because you fear personal harm will come to you or any other person, you may post it on the outside of the front door, in an envelope that has the tenant's name, address, and the words "IMPORTANT DOCUMENT" on it. If you post it on the outside of the front door, you must also mail it to the tenant the same day.

You cannot file the eviction case until the time period in the notice to vacate runs out and the tenant fails to vacate the property. The time period begins on the day the notice is delivered to the tenant.

You **must** give a notice to vacate, even if you already gave a termination notice setting a lease end date. In the example above, you gave a termination notice on January 27th telling the tenant the lease will end on February 28th. If the tenant is still there on March 1st, you would be required now to give them notice to vacate and allow the time period in that notice to run out before filing an eviction case.

If the person is a squatter, you can give them an oral notice to vacate the property immediately. If they fail to leave, you can file an eviction at that time.

Where Do I File an Eviction Case?

Eviction cases **must** be filed in the in the justice court in the precinct and county where the property is located. If you file the case in any other precinct, the court must dismiss your case, and you do not get a refund of the filing fees.

The court may be able to help you determine the proper precinct to file in. Other resources you may use include precinct maps or the elections office. It is ultimately **your responsibility** to file your case in the proper location!

How Do I File an Eviction Case?

The first step in filing a case is to file a **petition**, which is a form that says who you are suing, why you are suing them, how much you are suing them for, and provides contact information. An eviction petition must contain information about what the reason is for eviction (nonpayment of rent, they stayed past the end of their lease, etc.), where the property is located, and how and when you delivered the notice to vacate. If the tenant owes you rent, you need to put that (and how much they owe you) in the petition. The court will likely have a petition form that you can use.

Important – If the tenant owes you money other than back rent (like late fees, unpaid utility bills, or property damage), you cannot recover that in an eviction case! Do not put these amounts in your petition. Only back rent, your costs to file the case, and attorney's fees (if you have a written lease authorizing attorney's fees) may be awarded. If the tenant owes you other money, you can file a small claims case to try to recover that money. See the information packet on *Filing a Small Claims Case* for details.

The petition must name each and every tenant that you are trying to evict. A tenant is anyone listed on a written lease or any person who is responsible for paying rent to you.

An eviction petition must be **sworn**, meaning you sign it in front of a notary or the clerk or judge, and are swearing under oath that everything in it is true to the best of your knowledge.

When you file the petition, you will have to pay a **filing fee of \$54**. Also, the petition and **citation** (the notice from the court to the defendant that they have been sued) must be **served on** (delivered to) the defendant. You will need to pay an additional **service fee** for each tenant for the constable or sheriff serving the paperwork. You are **not allowed** to deliver the paperwork yourself!

If you win your case, you will be awarded the fees that you had to pay, in addition to the other money you are entitled to recover.

What if I Can't Afford to File a Case?

Courts **must not** deny you access to justice simply because you cannot afford filing fees or service fees. If you are unable to pay those fees, fill out a **Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs** form – the court **must** provide this form for you.

You must swear to the information that you provide on this form and can face legal consequences if you do not fill it out to the best of your ability. Fill out the form completely and truthfully!

Do I Need a Lawyer to File a Case?

While you are allowed to have a lawyer in an eviction case, the rules and procedures are designed to be simple and straightforward, allowing people to seek justice without needing to hire a lawyer.

If you do not have a lawyer, the judge may allow you to be assisted or represented in court by a family member or other person, such as a property manager.

The court is required to make the Rules of Civil Procedure available to you at no cost. Rule 510 specifically applies to Eviction Cases and Rules 500-507 are the rules that generally apply to justice courts.

The court is **not** allowed to give you advice on whether you should file a case, who you should file a case against, or what steps you should take to win your case or collect your judgment.

Questions the court **can** answer for you are questions like "What do I need to do to have a jury trial?" or "How many days do I have to file an appeal?"

Questions the court **cannot** answer for you are questions like "Is it a good idea to get a jury for this case?" or "Am I going to win?"

If, after reviewing these materials and the rules, you still are not sure what to do, it may be best to talk to an attorney.

What Happens After I File an Eviction Case?

The court will generate the **citation**, which tells the defendant that they are being sued. The citation then must be served on the defendant. You can either pay the service fee for the constable or sheriff to serve the citation or submit a Statement of Inability showing you cannot afford the fee.

Once the defendant is served with the citation, the court will set your case for trial, which must be at least **6 days** after the defendant was served.

How Do I Send Paperwork to the Defendant?

Any paperwork such as motions, requests for a hearing, appeals, etc., must be sent to the defendant as well as to the court. You can send those papers to the defendant by:

- 1) delivering it to them in person,
- 2) mailing it to them using certified or registered mail,
- 3) using a delivery service such as FedEx or UPS,
- 4) faxing it to them, or
- 5) sending it by email if the defendant provided their email address for document delivery and agreed to email service in writing.

On the copy you give to the court, you must write down how and when the paperwork was delivered to the defendant.

What if We Reach an Agreement?

If the case goes to trial, usually there will be a "winner" and a "loser." resulting in someone being happy and someone being unhappy. To reduce that risk, parties will often come to a **settlement**, or an agreement on how to resolve the case. If you reach a new agreement with the defendant allowing them to remain in the property, you will need to file a **nonsuit**, which is a request for your case to be

dismissed. If the defendant then breaches that new agreement, you will have to start over from the beginning with a new notice to vacate and a new case.

Can I Have a Jury Trial?

Yes. Either side in an eviction case may request a jury trial. You must make a request in writing to the court at least 3 days before the date set for trial and pay a jury fee of \$22.

If no one requests a jury, the trial will be heard by only the judge, which is called a bench trial.

What if I Need More Time for Trial?

If you need more time for trial or have a conflict with the date that the trial is scheduled, you can file a motion (request) for **postponement**, also called a **continuance**. You should explain in writing why you need the postponement. In eviction cases, the case can't be postponed for more than 7 days unless both sides agree in writing.

Do not just decide not to show up on your trial date! That likely will result in your case being dismissed.

What Happens at the Trial?

Be sure to bring all of your witnesses and documents with you on your trial date! If the trial is a jury trial, the first step will be jury selection, which is formally called **yoir dire**.

Next, you will be able to give an opening statement if you wish, where you explain to the judge and jury what the case is about.

After that, you will call any witnesses you have and ask them questions so they can **testify**, or tell their story, to the judge or jury. The defendant will also be able to ask your witnesses questions. You can also testify and show any evidence you may have (such as documents, contracts, cancelled checks, receipts, etc.).

Next, the defendant can present any evidence and call any witnesses that they may have. You get to ask questions of any witnesses they call, which is called **cross-examination**. You may ask the witnesses questions that relate to the facts of the case, but must remain calm, polite, and respectful of the court process, even if you disagree with what the witness says.

Finally, each side can make a final statement, called a **closing argument**, where you explain why you think you should win.

After that, the decision will be made by the jury if there is one, or by the judge if there is no jury. The decision will be announced in open court, and a written **judgment** will be made available.

What if the Defendant Doesn't Appear?

If the defendant doesn't appear at trial, the information in your sworn petition will be taken as the truth. If you provided enough information in your petition, you will be awarded a default judgment. If you did not, you may need to provide information to the court about things such as how and when you delivered the notice to vacate before the court can award you a judgment.

To get a default judgment, you will also need to provide the last known address of the defendant to the court in writing, as well as an affidavit stating whether or not the defendant is on active duty in the U.S. military (or that you do not know if they are), and how you know that they are or not, or why you do not know if they are.

You can verify military service at https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/.

What Happens if I Lose My Eviction Case?

If the judgment is in favor of the defendant, they will be able to remain in possession of the property. If you wish, you can file an **appeal**, which is a request for the county court to hear the eviction case over again. You can file an appeal within 5 days of the judgment. The 5 days include weekends and holidays. If the fifth day is a weekend, holiday, or day the court closes before 5 P.M., you have until the next business day to file your appeal.

To appeal, you will have to file either:

- 1) An **appeal bond** (promise from another person, called a **surety**, to pay the bond amount to the defendant if you don't pursue the appeal) in an amount set by the court;
- 2) A cash deposit in an amount set by the court, which may be awarded to the defendant if you don't pursue the appeal; or
- 3) A Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs if you cannot afford an appeal bond or cash deposit.

If you appeal with an appeal bond or a cash deposit, you must pay a filing fee of \$54 or file a Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs. You must also send notice of the appeal to the defendant within five days of filing it with the court.

Once your appeal is filed with the county court, you will be required to pay a separate filing fee or file a Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs with the county court.

What Happens if I Win My Eviction Case?

If the judgment is in your favor, the defendant has the right to file an appeal as described above.

If you get a judgment in an eviction case based on the defendant not paying rent, and the defendant appeals with an appeal bond or a Statement of Inability, the defendant will be ordered to pay one month's rent to the court. You can then receive that money, which covers the defendant's rent for the first month of the appeal process. This ensures that someone evicted for not paying rent isn't able to stay in the property for free during an appeal. If they do not pay the rent to the court, or if they do not file an appeal but do not leave the property, you can get a writ of possession, which is an order for the defendant to be removed from the property.

You will have to pay a fee for issuance of the writ, and a fee to the constable for executing the writ. If a writ is issued, a 24-hour notice will be posted on the door, and if the property isn't vacated in that 24-hour period, the constable will come out and supervise the removal of the defendant's property.

If you were awarded money in the judgment, such as for back rent or attorney's fees, see the "What Happens if I Win My Small Claims Case?" section of the information packet on Filing a Small Claims Case for information on enforcing money judgments.

Resources

Legal Aid - www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/legal-aid

Texas Lawyer Referral & Information Service - (800) 252-9690

To check military status – https://scra.dmdc.osd.mil/

Texas Justice Court Training Center information for self-represented litigants – www.tjctc.org/SRL

Office of Court Administration Self-Represented Litigant Site - www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/self-help/self-represented-litigants/

State Bar of Texas Information, including Legal Information and Low or No-Cost Legal Assistance - www.texasbar.com, and then click on "For The Public."

Forms and Information, including for other types of cases – www.texaslawhelp.org