

A Maryland Judiciary Production
My Laws, My Courts, My Maryland
Finding Legal Help in a Civil Case

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Introduction

Hello and welcome. I'm here to help you learn about where to find legal help in a civil case. For most matters, you should hire a lawyer to represent you. The video titled *Should I Represent Myself?* in the video library can help you decide when to hire a lawyer. Unlike in a criminal case, the state will not provide a lawyer for free in most civil cases. If you want a lawyer, you must find and hire one. In this video, we will discuss how to find representation including free help if you have a limited income. If you decide to represent yourself, this video will also include information about where to find free help. Let's get started.

Hire a Lawyer in Private Practice

If you want a lawyer to represent you in a civil case, you can start by contacting lawyers in private practice. These lawyers will charge you a fee for their services. Some lawyers charge an hourly rate. Others may use a contingency fee system. Here, they take a portion of the award if you win. A good place to search for a lawyer is through a lawyer referral service. The service will ask you for basic information about your case and try to match you with a lawyer who has experience with that type of matter. You can then meet with that lawyer for a low fee. At the meeting, the lawyer will review your case. They may quote you a price for their services. You can choose to hire that lawyer or search for a different one. A complete list of lawyer referral services by county is available online at the Maryland Bar Association's website: www.msba.org.

Free or Pro Bono Representation

If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer in private practice, you may qualify for free legal representation. If an organization provides you with a private lawyer who helps you for free, this is called *pro bono* representation. Some organizations have their own attorneys on staff who can help you for free as well. Both types of service are usually offered through a nonprofit law firm or similar program. You must apply for representation and provide proof of income and other financial information. Free legal services programs have limited resources and do not handle all case types. Sometimes there will be a waitlist for assistance. For this reason, you should call and apply as soon as possible.

Sometimes tenants may qualify for a free lawyer in cases involving their landlords. Tenants should read court notices carefully for details about these programs.

View a list of free legal programs online at the People's Law Library website. That's www.peoples-law.org. Look for the link at the top that says, "legal services directory." You can search for free help either by county or by type of legal problem.

Now let's discuss what to do if you cannot find a lawyer or you do not wish to hire a lawyer.

Represent Yourself

Although court rules will almost always allow you to represent yourself, self-representation is not always a good idea. If you do represent yourself there are free resources that can help you. Speak with a lawyer for free at a Maryland Court Help Center. Lawyers at the Center cannot represent you in court, but they can answer questions, give you advice, and help with forms. They may also refer you to free representation. Call 410-260-1392 on weekdays from 8:30AM to 8:00PM to speak with a lawyer. Walk in help is also available. Call or go online to mdcourts.gov/helpcenter for a list of hours and locations.

The courts provide other resources to help you including forms, videos, brochures, and even an App for your phone. Visit mdcourts.gov/courthelp for a full list of resources. Lastly, you may need to perform some research for your case. The People's Law Library is an online resource that has easy to read articles about common legal topics. Additionally, many courthouses have public law libraries. In some locations, a law librarian may be able to help you with your research. Law libraries may also have a lawyer in the library program where you can get free help with your case. Hours and locations are at mdcourts.gov/lawlib.

Let's Review

Let's review what you have learned. In a civil case, you are responsible for finding a lawyer. The state will usually not provide one. You may hire a lawyer in private practice who will charge a fee. Some programs may provide you with a free lawyer. They will consider a request for representation based on your income, case type, and available resources. Finally, if you are representing yourself, take advantage of the free resources provided by the Maryland courts. Visit mdcourts.gov/courthelp for more information. Thanks for watching.

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