



## How to Start a Civil Lawsuit without an Attorney

To file a civil complaint, a plaintiff must submit the following documents to the Clerk's Office:

1. Original Complaint
2. Civil Cover Sheet
3. Summons
4. Filing fee **OR** request to waive the filing fee in the following form:
  - a. Payment of \$400.00. The Clerk's Office accepts most major credit cards, cash, and checks made payable to: Clerk, U.S. District Court; **OR**
  - b. Completed Application to Proceed in District Court without Prepaying Fees or Costs.

All of the forms that you need to start a civil lawsuit are available on the Court's website at [www.mnd.uscourts.gov](http://www.mnd.uscourts.gov). This Court's website has a page that provides useful information for individuals representing themselves in Court, including information for how to file a civil complaint. The webpage may be found at [www.mnd.uscourts.gov/Pro-Se.shtml](http://www.mnd.uscourts.gov/Pro-Se.shtml).

### Complaint

The District of Minnesota has a general complaint form, employment discrimination complaint form, and a social security appeal complaint form. These complaint forms are available on the Court's [website](#) in MSWord and PDF formats. For more guidance on how to complete a complaint, see Chapter Two of the Pro Se Civil Guidebook, available on the Court's [website](#).

### Civil Cover Sheet

A civil cover sheet must be filed with each civil complaint and is used for administrative purposes by the Court. The civil cover sheet is available on the Court's [website](#).

### Summons

The original summons must be filed with an original civil complaint. A summons directs a defendant to serve an answer on the plaintiff within a certain amount of time. The summons must be signed and dated by the Clerk's Office to be effective. A summons form is available on the Court's [website](#).



The summons caption (or case title) must match the case title provided on the complaint. *Do not fill out a separate summons for each named defendant – complete only one summons naming all defendants.*

After the summons is issued by the Clerk's Office, the plaintiff should provide sufficient copies of the summons and complaint for the service of all defendants. More information on service of process may be found in Chapter Two of the [Pro Se Civil Guidebook](#).

### **Filing Fee**

In order to initiate a civil case, the Clerk's Office must collect a \$400.00 filing fee. The filing fee may only be waived if a judge grants an Application to Proceed in District Court without Prepaying Fees and Costs.

To proceed without paying the filing fee, you must submit an Application to Proceed in District Court without Prepaying Fees or Costs. This form is available on the Court's [website](#). A magistrate judge will review your request and you will be notified of the judge's decision. If the judge grants your request, you will be considered as proceeding In Forma Pauperis or IFP. Permission to proceed IFP entitles a plaintiff to file an action without paying filing fees or costs of service of the complaint upon the defendant(s). Proceeding IFP *does not* waive subsequent costs or fees, including costs for copies.