

FILING A SMALL CLAIMS SUIT

JURISDICTION:

Small Claims Cases:

A small claims case is a lawsuit brought for the recovery of money damages, civil penalties, personal property, or other relief allowed by law. The claim can be for no more than \$20,000, excluding statutory interest and court costs but including attorney fees, if any. Small claims cases are governed by Rules 500-507 of Part V of the Rules of Civil Procedure.

Debt Claim Cases:

A debt claim case is a lawsuit brought to recover a debt by an assignee of a claim, a debt collector or collection agency, a financial institution, or a person or entity primarily engaged in the business of lending money at interest. The claim can be for more than \$20,000, excluding statutory interest and court costs but including attorney fees, if any. Debt claim cases in justice court are governed by Rules 500-507 and 508 Part V of the Rules of Civil Procedure.

VENUE:

General Rule. Generally, a defendant in a small claims case or a debt claim case is entitled to be sued in one of the following venues:

1. The precinct and county where the defendant lives,
2. The precinct and county where the damage to property or injury to the plaintiff occurred, or
3. The precinct and county where the contract was going to be performed, if it is a contract case
4. The precinct and county where the personal property the plaintiff is suing for is located.

FILING SUIT:

The **responsibility for filling out your petition and civil case information sheet rests with you**. Court clerks will assist you if you have **procedural questions**. The filing fee is (\$54.00) and the service fee is (\$90.00) **per defendant** to be served in Caldwell County, for a total of **(\$144.00)**. If the defendant(s) resides outside of Caldwell County, contact the court for further procedural instruction.

****Payment must be in the form of a MONEY ORDER or CASHIER'S CHECK payable to CALDWELL COUNTY TREASURER.****

Effective 01/01/2023

CITATION:

The citation is sent to the Caldwell County Constable for service. Out of County service is sent to the Sheriff or Constable of the county in which the defendant(s) reside, or any manner authorized for service of citation in district, county or justice court. **You as Plaintiff are responsible for providing a correct address for service.**

DISCOVERY:

Pretrial Discovery. Pretrial discovery is limited to that which the judge considers reasonable and necessary. Any request for pretrial discovery must be presented to the court for approval by written motion. The motion must be served on the responding party. The discovery request must not be served on the responding party unless the judge issues a signed order approving the request. Failure to comply with a discovery order can result in sanctions.

REPRESENTATION:

You may represent yourself in Justice Court or you may have an attorney represent you. The Rules of Evidence do not apply in Justice Court.

ANSWER:

The defendant in the suit is commanded to answer the Court, **in writing**, which is due by the end of the fourteen (14) day after the date the citation is served upon him/her.

TRIAL BY JUDGE OR JURY:

If the defendant in your suit files a written answer, the court will set a trial date no less than 45 days (however always at the judge's discretion). Notice will be mailed to the Plaintiff and Defendant stating the date and time to appear.

If the defendant in your suit fails to file a written answer, a plaintiff who seeks a default judgment against a defendant ***must request a hearing, orally or in writing.*** The purpose of this hearing is for you to prove your damages in the suit.

Any party is entitled to a trial by jury. A written demand for a jury must be filed no later than 14 days before the case is set for trial. A party demanding a jury must pay a fee of \$22.00. If the demand is not timely, the right to a jury trial is waived.

AFTER JUDGMENT:

THIS COURT DOES NOT COLLECT THE JUDGMENT FOR YOU.

If you receive a judgment and the defendant does not make a motion for a new trial within *14 days* or appeal the case within *21 days* after the judgment is signed, the following remedies are available:

- **ABSTRACT OF JUDGMENT:**

The fee is \$5.00 for the JP Court to prepare. You should then record the Abstract of Judgment in the County where the defendant owns real property (land).

- **WRIT OF EXECUTION**

If you are granted a judgment against the defendant AND if the defendant does not appeal within 21 days, you may request a Writ of Execution any time after the 30th day after the judgment is signed. A Writ of Execution allows a Sheriff or Constable in the State of Texas to seize nonexempt property from the defendant in order to satisfy the judgment.

The cost of filing a Writ of Execution is \$250.00 for filing and service in Caldwell County.

You may have other remedies available, but they are more complicated and are not covered here. Please consult an attorney for any other remedies you may have to collect your judgment.

If your address changes within a 10-year period following the judgment, it is your responsibility to notify the court of your new address.

IF YOU HAVE PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT THE COURT

**LEGAL QUESTIONS WILL NOT BE
ANSWERED BY THIS OFFICE**

WRITTEN NOTICE AND STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Date: _____

Return Address:

Address To:

Dear _____

You are hereby given notice that the amount of \$ _____

is due to be remitted for settlement of your obligation within ____ days of receipt of this notice.

You are advised that if payment or the return of (property) _____

is not received within the time limit prescribed, that suit will be filed in a civil court of the law to

recover set amount or property plus all necessary and reasonable expenses incurred by the

undersigned in the preceding required to obtain payment hereof.

Sincerely,

CAUSE NO. _____

PLAINTIFF

§ IN THE JUSTICE COURT

§

§

v.

§ PRECINCT 2

§

§

DEFENDANT

§ CALDWELL COUNTY, TEXAS

PETITION: SMALL CLAIMS CASE

I. DEFENDANT(S) ADDRESS:

II. COMPLAINT: Plaintiff files this suit against Defendant based upon the following facts:

III. RELIEF: Plaintiff seeks:

damages in the amount of \$ _____,

return of personal property as described as follows (*be specific*):

_____, which has a value of \$ _____.

Additionally, Plaintiff seeks the following:

IV. SERVICE OF CITATION: Service is requested on Defendant(s) by:

Personal service at home or work,

Registered mail, or

Certified mail return receipt requested.

If required, Plaintiff requests alternative service as allowed by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Other addresses where Defendant(s) may be served are:

V. ONGOING INTEREST: Plaintiff does or does not seek ongoing interest. If so:
The effective interest rate claimed is _____%; this interest rate is based
upon contract statute and began accruing on _____; the dollar
amount of interest claimed as of _____ is \$_____.

VI. JURY REQUEST

I request a jury trial. *(The fee is \$22 and must be paid at least 14 days before trial unless you file a Statement of Inability to Afford Payment of Court Costs in compliance with Rule 502.3.)*

I do not request a jury at this time.

VII. SERVICE BY EMAIL *(Normally, documents in this case are sent by mail. If it is easier for you, you can choose to get some of the documents sent by 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 important that you check this email account every day. Even if you receive some documents by email, you will still receive some documents about the case by mail or personal service, so you must not ignore any documents from the court or other parties received by mail or personal service.)*

Yes, I would like to receive documents related to this case by email at this email address: _____.

No, I do not want to receive any documents by email.

VIII. REMOTE PARTICIPATION

Hearing by Phone Call: *(When a hearing happens by phone call, you will be able to talk to and hear the judge, Plaintiff, or any witnesses, but you will not be able to see them. Copies of any evidence to be used must be exchanged by the parties and sent to the judge before the hearing.)*

Yes, I am able to have any hearings in this case, except a jury trial, by phone call with the judge and Plaintiff and understand that I must have a phone to use on the date and time of the hearing.

No, I am not able to have hearings by phone call.

Hearing by Video Conference: *(When a hearing happens by video conference, you can hear, see, and talk to the judge, Plaintiff, and any witnesses. You will be able to see any evidence presented during the hearing. You will need to have a computer, a smartphone, or tablet that has a camera feature. You will also need access to the internet to be able to have a video conference.)*

Yes, I am able to have any hearings in this case, except a jury trial, by video conference. I understand that I am responsible for having the equipment and internet access needed to participate in a video conference on the date and time of the hearing.

No, I am not able to have hearings by video conference.

NOTE: Your responses in this section do not guarantee that hearings will be held remotely, but rather they help the court know how you are able to participate.

Respectfully submitted,

Signature of Plaintiff

Signature of Attorney, if any

Printed Name: _____

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Fax: _____

State Bar No.: _____

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED before me this _____ day of _____, 20____.

Clerk of the Justice Court or Notary

Servicemember's Civil Relief Act

CASE NO. _____

AFFIDAVIT

Plaintiff being duly sworn on oath deposes* and says that defendant(s) is (are)

(CHECK ONE)

- not in the military
- not on active duty in the military and/or
- not in a foreign country on military service
- on active military duty and/or is subject to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act of 2003
- has waived his/her rights under the Servicemembers Civil Act of 2003
- military status is unknown at this time

PLAINTIFF

Subscribed and sworn to before me on this ____ day of _____, 20____

NOTARY / CLERK

Notary Public in and for the State of Texas

SEAL

Clerk of the Justice Court

***Penalty for making or using false affidavit – a person who makes or uses an affidavit knowing it to be false, shall be fined as provided in Title 18, United States Code, or imprisoned for not more than one year or both.**