

FILING A SMALL CLAIMS or DEBT CLAIM 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 \$10,000.00, 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 no more than \$10,000.00, 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 debt claim case is entitled to be sued in one of the following venues:

1. The county and precinct where the defendant resides;
2. The county and precinct where the incident, or the majority of incidents, that gave rise to the claim occurred.
3. The county and precinct where the contract or agreement, if any that gave rise to the claim was to be performed; or
4. The county and precinct where the property is located, in a suit to recover personal property.

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 forty one (\$41.00), and the service fee is (\$85.00 per defendant), payable to Hill County. If the defendant(s) live outside Hill County, contact the county in which the defendant(s) resides for service fees of the other county.

CITATION:

The citation is sent to the Hill 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, and obtaining contact information of the Sheriff/Constable for out of county 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 as an individual 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**, on the fourteenth (14th) day from 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 approximately six to eight weeks after service. 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 in writing**. The purpose of this hearing is for you to prove up 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 \$500 for the JP court to prepare. You should then record the Abstract of Judgment in the County where the defendant resides.

- **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 \$5.00 for filing and \$200.00 for service in Hill County. Make payments Payable to Hill 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.

LEGAL QUESTIONS WILL NOT BE ANSWERED BY THIS OFFICE