

**Title: Before Court: Getting Ready**

**Chapter Titles:**

**How to Prepare for Your Day in Court**  
**Learn about Court Rules And Research the Law**  
**Organize Evidence and Arrange for Witnesses**  
**Let's Review**

Going to court can be one of the most important and stressful days of your life. Decisions that affect your future may be made, such as who should care for your child, or whether you owe someone money. This video will discuss tips to help you prepare for your day at court.

If you can, have a lawyer come to court with you. Without one, you may be at a disadvantage, especially if the other side has one. You do not have a constitutional right to a lawyer in most civil, that is, non-criminal, cases. You may, however, be able to get free or reduced cost legal help. Visit the Maryland People's Law Library at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org) for more information on how to find a lawyer or to learn more about free or reduced cost legal help. If you need additional guidance take a few minutes to watch our videos on Finding Legal Help.

First, Let's talk about how to prepare for your day in court.

**Chapter Heading: How to Prepare for Your Day in Court**

Whether or not you have a lawyer, follow these steps to be sure your day goes smoothly.

Write down and meet deadlines.

Be sure to file responses and motions on time.

Keep any paperwork the court or any other party sends to you.

And put important dates on your calendar.

If you have children, try to find childcare for them on that day, unless they are required to come to court. It may be difficult for you to present your case effectively while also caring for children. You also do not want your children to hear information that might be upsetting or inappropriate. Remember, court hearings can be unpredictable. A hearing scheduled for 8:30 a.m. may take longer than you think, or it may be delayed until the afternoon. That can be a very long day for a child.

Second and third on your list -- learn about court rules and research the law.

### **Chapter Heading: Learn About Court Rules and Research the Law**

It is important to understand how the court normally does things so you won't be surprised. To be prepared, you need to know what the court will expect from you. Take some time to explore the court's website as well as our Court Help Video Library.

Also, your need to research the law. Remember, you must be able to present the facts of your case and prove that the law supports the outcome you want. To do this you need to understand the law and how the facts of your case satisfy the law. You can find basic information about Maryland law at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org). You may also be able to get help from a law librarian at a Maryland public law library. Visit [mdcourts.gov/ccll](http://mdcourts.gov/ccll) for hours and locations.

Fourth, organize evidence and arrange for witnesses.

### **Chapter Heading: Organize Evidence and Arrange for Witnesses**

Prepare the information you will present to the court. It is up to you and you alone to prove your case. Practice what you're going to say and gather evidence such as pictures and documents. If necessary, you can draw a diagram or put information into charts. If there are witnesses to the incident, you can ask those individuals to testify to explain what they know about the case. Remember, the judge is not your lawyer, and they may not consider any facts outside of the courtroom. You must bring those facts into the courtroom with exhibits and testimony. Finally, make three copies of any written

documents you plan to give the court as evidence. One for you, one for the judge, and one for the other side.

OK, let's review.

### **Chapter Heading: Let's Review**

Before your day in court make sure to:

- Have a lawyer represent you if possible
- Write down and meet deadlines
- Find childcare
- Review the court rules
- Research the law relevant to your case, and
- Organize what you want to say, arrange for witnesses, and bring evidence

If you have questions, make sure to ask. You can talk to a lawyer for free through a Maryland Court Help Center by calling 410-260-1392. You can also chat online or find a walk-in center by visiting [mdcourts.gov/helpcenter](http://mdcourts.gov/helpcenter). Thanks for watching. I hope this information has been helpful.