

**Information and Instructions for Filing a Civil Complaint  
IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA**

**I. INFORMATION**

**Jurisdiction**

The United States District Courts have limited jurisdiction to adjudicate lawsuits. You should indicate what grounds you have for filing in federal court, if you know them.

**Venue**

The word "venue" refers to the geographic area over which a court has authority. The federal district courts each have their own venue and there are very strict rules on where you may file your complaint. If you do not comply with these rules, your action may be transferred to another district court or dismissed. You should check the federal venue statutes, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391 - 1412, or the statute under which you are proceeding for the proper venue before filing your action.

The State of Iowa is divided into the Northern and Southern Districts. The main office for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa is located at: 111 7th Ave SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 52401, and is comprised of the following counties:

Allamakee	Benton	Black Hawk
Bremer	Buchanan	Buena Vista
Butler	Calhoun	Carroll
Cedar	Cerro Gordo	Cherokee
Chickasaw	Clay	Clayton
Crawford	Delaware	Dickinson
Dubuque	Emmet	Fayette
Floyd	Franklin	Grundy
Hamilton	Hancock	Hardin
Howard	Humboldt	Ida
Iowa	Jackson	Jones
Kossuth	Linn	Lyon
Mitchell	Monona	O'Brien
Osceola	Palo Alto	Plymouth
Pocahontas	Sac	Sioux
Tama	Webster	Winnebago
Winneshiek	Woodbury	Worth
Wright		

## **Rules of Court**

If you file a complaint in the Northern District of Iowa, you must follow the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, as well as the court's Local Rules. Even if you proceed pro se (representing yourself without an attorney), you must follow those rules.

## **Change of Address**

To ensure prompt delivery of court documents, you must file a change of address with the court every time your address changes. Failure to do so will prevent the court from notifying you of developments in your case and may result in dismissal of your action.

## **Legal Advice**

Court personnel, including district court judges, magistrate judges, the clerk of court, and all staff, are prohibited by law from giving you legal advice. You should seek legal advice from your attorney or a legal clinic.

## **II. INSTRUCTIONS**

### **Completing the Complaint Form**

To file a complaint, complete a complaint form and mail the original to the clerk of court. (If you pay the filing fee, you must also submit one copy of the complaint for each defendant). All copies must conform to the original. If you wish to receive a copy back, you must include a copy with your original filing. In addition, the complaint must:

- (1) be typed or legibly written;
- (2) be signed by each plaintiff; and
- (3) conform to the instructions in the "Filing Fee" section below.

You should answer all questions concisely and to the best of your ability. If you need extra space to answer a question, insert an additional page in the appropriate place. Do not use the back of the page unless you cannot obtain blank paper. Do not name as a plaintiff in your complaint any other person, unless he or she is raising claims which arise from the same incident or involve the same issue as the claim raised in your complaint.

## **Jury Demands**

Depending on your claim and the type of relief you are seeking, you may be entitled to a trial by jury. However, you may lose your right to a jury trial if you do not request it early in the proceeding. If you want a jury trial, you should write "Jury Trial Demanded" on the first page of your complaint, to the right of the caption, below the words "Case No."

## **Filing Fee and Proceeding In Forma Pauperis**

The fee for filing an action in a United States District Court is \$400. A check or money order should be made payable to "Clerk, United States District Court." If you pay the \$400 filing fee, you will be responsible for service upon each defendant. To properly serve the defendant(s), you must submit to the clerk's office for each named defendant a copy of the complaint, and a completed summons. The clerk's office will return to you each defendant's copy of the complaint for you to serve and a copy for your own records. In the alternative, you may request that the defendant(s) waive service. Instructions and forms for requesting the waiver of service are available from the clerk's office. (Note: If a defendant fails to waive service, you will still be responsible for serving upon such defendant a copy of the complaint and a summons).

If you are financially unable to pay the filing fee, you may ask the court to file your action without prepayment of costs. (One whose complaint is filed without the payment of the filing fee is said to proceed in forma pauperis). (NOTE: Each plaintiff named in your complaint must submit a separate application if the complaint is to be filed in forma pauperis). If you proceed in forma pauperis, the clerk's office will serve a copy of your complaint upon each defendant. However, you are responsible for providing the court with the correct address of each defendant.

## **Appointment of Counsel**

A pro se litigant does not have an absolute right to a court-appointed attorney. The court may, in its discretion, appoint an attorney to represent you.

## **Subsequent Filings**

### Certificate of Service

To file a motion, pleading or other paper, you must submit the original document to the clerk's office. The original document must include a certificate of service which should be in the following form:

#### Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing was mailed to [Opposing Party or Counsel] at [Address] on [Date].

---

[Your Signature]

Any pleading or document received by the court that fails to include a certificate of service may be returned. In addition to filing the original document with the court, you must mail a copy of each document to all other parties, or if they have counsel, to their attorney(s).

## **Motions Filed By Other Parties**

If you do not timely respond to a motion filed by another party, you may waive your right to challenge the subject matter of the motion. Applicable time periods are set forth in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the court's Local Rules.

## **Letters to the Court**

It is improper to send letters directly to district judges or magistrate judges regarding cases pending before them. All correspondence should be forwarded to the clerk of court. Copies of correspondence should also be sent to all other parties, or if they have counsel, to their attorney(s).

## **Mailing**

All correspondence, fees, legal documents, etc. should be mailed to the following address:

### **In Cedar Rapids:**

Clerk of Court  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Iowa  
111 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
Box 12  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

### **In Sioux City:**

Clerk of Court  
United States District Court  
Northern District of Iowa  
320 6th Street  
Room 301  
Sioux City, IA 51101