

V. GETTING READY FOR YOUR DAY IN COURT

A. How should I prepare for court?

Like the judge, you play an important role in creating a positive and respectful environment in the court. As a way of demonstrating respect for the law and for the important matters before the court, including your case, pay attention to the following details:

- Arrive at the courthouse well ahead of the scheduled time so that you can get through security, find the correct courtroom, and check in if necessary.
- Make sure you have all of the necessary papers, witnesses or items you might need to tell your story or handle your business at the courthouse.
- Be prepared to wait for other cases to be heard. Be patient. Listen and observe.
- Practice telling your story so that you are prepared to speak in front of the judge or other person hearing your case.
- Avoid wearing shorts, tee shirts, halter tops, worn-out jeans or other informal or distracting clothing. Be certain that your clothing appears neat and clean.
- Hats or other head coverings should not be worn into the courtroom unless worn for religious reasons.
- Do not bring any weapons to the courthouse.
- Do not bring a camera into the courtroom without permission.

B. How should I conduct myself in court?

While in the courtroom:

- Sit quietly when court is in session. Do not chat or whisper with others.
- Turn off all cell phones and beepers (or they may be taken from you).
- Be courteous, fair, and polite to everyone you encounter in the courthouse.
- If at all possible, do not bring children to court. Children can be a distraction from the important events taking place and many topics that come up are inappropriate for children to hear. If you must bring children, bring someone

with you who can watch them. Bring books or quiet games to keep children occupied.

- Do not read newspapers or books in the courtroom.
- Do not bring food or drink into the courtroom.
- Pay attention to what is going on in the courtroom even if it is not your turn to be heard. Listen, observe, and learn from other matters being heard. This will help you when it is your turn.

When it is your turn to be heard by the court:

- Remain seated until your case is called. Follow the instructions of court personnel as to where to stand when you are called.
- Address the judge as “your honor” and stand while speaking to him or her.
- Do not interrupt another speaker or the judge. You will be given a turn to tell your side of the story.
- Address your remarks to the judge, not to the other party.
- Try to control your emotions so that you can tell your story in a way that is understandable. Don’t yell or react to other speakers by sighing or gesturing or acting in a threatening manner. This will not help your case and could hurt it.
- Speak slowly and clearly so that your message is heard and understood.
- If you have a question about how to proceed, ask the judge.