

# Arkansas District Courts

There are more district courts in Arkansas than any other type of court and therefore, many cases begin in district court. Arkansas district courts are divided into State District Courts and Local District Courts.

The Arkansas District Judges Council states "few Arkansans will ever enter the doors of a circuit court and fewer still will find themselves in the Supreme Court or Court of Appeals. It is fairly likely, however, that many Arkansans will, at some point, come into contact with district courts. For this reason, these courts may be the most important part of our judicial system."

## STATE DISTRICT COURTS

State district courts have jurisdiction over their whole district and have full-time judges that preside over the cases. These districts may be city, county or district wide. There are currently 25 state district court judges presiding over 15 districts, with more districts to be created in 2017. These courts have jurisdiction over certain issues. You would go to a District Court for issues involving:

- Misdemeanors and certain violations of state law and local ordinances
- Preliminary felony cases
- Protective orders
- Civil cases involving contracts, damage to personal property and recovery of personal property in matters less than \$25,000.
- Forcible entry and unlawful detainer hearings
- Emergency or uncontested matters in civil, domestic relations, and probate divisions

State district court judges can also hear certain matters filed in circuit court upon referral by the circuit court or if both the parties consent. State District Court judges not only hear the District Court docket, but their role has been expanded to hear circuit court cases under certain circumstances.

## LOCAL DISTRICT COURTS

Local district courts are presided over by part-time judges who may privately practice law. Local district

courts have territorial jurisdiction as established by the General Assembly, most of which is county wide.

Their subject matter jurisdiction includes misdemeanors and violations of state law and local ordinances, preliminary felony cases and civil cases involving contracts, damage to and recovery of personal property in matters less than \$5,000.

## SMALL CLAIMS DIVISION

There is also a small claims division in each local district court that provides a forum where you can represent yourself to resolve contracts and personal property matters of less than \$5,000.

Small claims courts are in the same building as the local district court and are served by the same personnel as district courts. Small claims courts are designed to allow people to settle certain disputes in court under relaxed rules of procedure and without attorneys. No attorney or anyone other than the plaintiff and the defendant are allowed to take part in a case in small claims court.

If a judge determines that a party is being represented by an attorney in a case pending in the small claims division of any district court, the case will immediately be transferred to the regular district court docket.

You can view small claims legal information and forms at [www.arlegalservices.org/smallclaims](http://www.arlegalservices.org/smallclaims).

## DISCLAIMER:

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*The information and statements of law in this fact sheet should not be considered legal advice. This fact sheet is provided as a broad guide to help you understand how certain legal matters are handled in general. Courts may interpret the law differently. Before you take action, talk to an attorney and follow his or her advice. Always do what the court tells you to do.*