

NON-PRISONER *PRO SE* FILER INSTRUCTIONS (rev. 2.12.2026)

The following reminders are provided to *pro se* litigants (litigants representing themselves/filing without an attorney):

FEDERAL COURTS HAVE LIMITED JURISDICTION.

- Re: the Civil Case (CV) docket – Matters that are not subject to this court’s jurisdiction may be transferred to another federal court where venue is proper or dismissed. Filing fees are not refunded for dismissed cases. The clerk does not screen civil cases for proper jurisdiction and is prohibited from providing legal advice. Ensure your case is subject to this court’s jurisdiction and that venue is proper before you file.
- Re: the Miscellaneous Case (MC) docket – It is designated for limited matters that are usually ancillary to other federal cases. Non-standard matters that do not seek relief from a judge of this court are ineligible for acceptance.

YOUR CASE AND DOCUMENTS WILL BE PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE VIA THE COURT’S PACER SYSTEM.

- Because documents are accessible worldwide via the judiciary’s Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system, Rule 5.2 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (Fed. R. Civ. P.) requires you to redact your social security number, tax ID number, and financial account numbers to the last four digits and dates of birth to display only the year.
- The clerk does not apply redactions to documents or review documents for compliance. Sealed documents are subject to the provisions of Rule 5(a)(7) of this district’s Local Rules – Civil Rules (LR CV).
- Please note, even if you mail letters directly to a judge, they are usually sent to the clerk’s office for public docketing. You are encouraged to communicate all matters intended for review by a judge via a properly captioned pleading or document that complies with federal and local filing rules.

THE COURT WANTS TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION.

- Under LR CV-11, the signature block on every document must include your name and physical address (a PO box is not allowed). If you have a telephone number and email address, please include them, too. Should your physical address change after you file the complaint, you must file a written notice that identifies all your cases. If you fail to keep the clerk informed of your current address, you may not receive orders and notices of hearings, which could result in your case being dismissed.
- You will find federal and local rules on our website under the **Rules & Orders** tab and a list of legal services, law libraries, and Pro Se forms including the civil cover sheet, a variety of complaint forms, and a motion to proceed *in forma pauperis* (“IFP”) under the **Pro Se** tab. Court addresses are under the **Court Information** tab.
- Your complaint must be handwritten or typed, signed in ink, and filed in paper. LR CV-5(a) does not authorize case initiation via email or fax, but after you file one document in paper in each of your cases, you may begin to electronically file (“e-file”) in the court’s Case Management/Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF) system. CM/ECF is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. E-filers are automatically emailed a Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF) when a document or order is filed that allows access to the document. Even if you do not wish to e-file, you may still sign up to receive NEFs. (NEF noticing replaces paper noticing.) Please see the **Invitation to a Non-Prisoner Pro Se to E-Filing/Consent to Receive Electronic Notice** located on the **Pro Se Forms** page.

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE TO PROCEED WITHOUT PREPAYMENT OF THE FILING FEE.

The fee to file a complaint is \$405. This includes the \$350 fee required by 28 U.S.C. § 1914(a) and the \$55 fee required by 28 U.S.C. § 1914(b) and the District Court Miscellaneous Fee Schedule. If you file a motion to proceed IFP that is granted, both fees will be waived.

SERVICE OF PROCESS OF YOUR COMPLAINT REQUIRES PRECISE PROCEDURES.

- **If your motion to proceed IFP is granted:** The judge will complete screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) (see *Newsome*, 301 F.3d at 231 applying it to non-prisoner cases). The clerk must wait for the judge's order to commence service of process before issuing the summons, which is typically served by the U.S. Marshal. If necessary, the clerk will send the summons forms to you to complete before returning to us for issuance.
- **If you paid the filing fee:** Unless the defendant waives service, you must serve each defendant with a copy of the complaint in accordance with the provisions in Fed. R. Civ. P. 4. The waiver of service and summons forms are available on our website under the **Pro Se** tab. If you intend to serve via summons, follow the instructions found on our website under the **Filing** tab, **Filing Procedures** menu, **Civil Cases** link to request issuance. After service is complete, file proof of service as required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(l).
 - **If you intend to serve by mail:** Review Rules 103, 106, and 107 of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure regarding *who* may serve, method required, and what is necessary to show proof of service. If you want to use the provision in Rule 103 to use someone to serve by mail who is not authorized by law or certified as a private process server under order of the Texas Supreme Court, submit your request in writing.
 - **If you sue a federal agency or employee thereof:** You must also serve the local U.S. Attorney and the U.S. Attorney General. See the **Designation of Personnel for Acceptance of Service of Process upon the U.S. Attorney in Civil Cases** on our website under the **Filing** tab, **Filing Procedures** menu, **Civil Cases** link.

A CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE MAY BE REQUIRED AFTER ANOTHER PARTY HAS APPEARED IN YOUR CASE.

- **If you register to e-file:** A certificate of service will not be required for a document served via CM/ECF (see Fed. R. Civ. P. 5(d)(1)(B)), but any document that is not served by CM/ECF must include a certificate of service that details how it will be served (*e.g.*, documents served on a party who is not a registered e-filer, sealed documents inaccessible for viewing via PACER).
- **If you do not register to e-file:** Although the clerk's entry on the docket of public paper filings usually results in the service of your document upon registered e-filers pursuant to LR CV-5(e), after another party has appeared in your case, you must serve them with a copy of each document you file and include the certificate of service required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 5(d). (Note: The clerk's entry does not serve sealed documents as they cannot be viewed in PACER.)
- If a certificate of service is required, it should appear after the usual signature block at the end of the document and indicate the name of the person(s) served, the method of service, and the date of service. **Sample language is shown below. Remember to sign your name again below the certificate.**

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE: I certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing document was forwarded by [authorized method used to serve] to [each attorney/party name that you serve] on [date].