



Going to court on your own: what to know

This guide explains, in plain words, what to expect and what to do.

You don't have to know everything. Here is the essential. This does not replace an attorney: if you can talk with one before your hearing, do. If you need help finding one, call us.

First: do not miss your hearing. If you don't show up, the court can order your removal in your absence. If you are afraid or something is stopping you from going, talk with an attorney before you decide. Don't improvise.

1. Confirm your hearing

- Your notice shows the date, time, court and room.
- Check it on EOIR's automated line, 1-800-898-7180, or on their online portal.
- New York has several immigration courts. Confirm which one you must go to.
- Dates can change. Check again a few days before and the day before.

2. If you moved, tell the court now

- Give the court your new address right away (Form EOIR-33/IC).
- An old address is the most common reason people miss hearings.
- If you have a pending case with USCIS, update it there too.
- Call us if you need help with the form.

3. Ask for an interpreter

- You have the right to an interpreter in your language.
- Ask in advance, and again when the hearing starts.
- Don't bring your children to interpret.

4. What to bring

- Your ID and your hearing notice.
- Every paper you have received, and copies of your documents.
- Pen and paper. Water and a snack.
- Two phone numbers of people you trust, written on paper.

What the first hearing is

It is usually called a *master calendar* hearing, and it is short. The judge will ask your name, your address, your language and whether you have an attorney. The judge may also ask you to respond to what the government says in your notice. That answer matters: talk with an attorney first if you can. At the end, the next hearing date is set.



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The day of the hearing

- 1 **Leave with plenty of time.** Security and waiting take time. Dress simply and silence your phone.
- 2 **Ask court staff** where to check in and where cases are called.
- 3 **In the courtroom:** stand when the judge enters, speak only when asked, and address the judge as “Your Honor.”
- 4 **If you don't understand,** say so: “I don't understand, can you repeat that?” If you don't know or don't remember something, say that. Don't guess.
- 5 **Don't sign** anything you don't understand.
- 6 **A word you will hear: “Respondent.”** In court and in the papers, this is what the person whose case it is is called. It is only the name of your role. It doesn't mean you did something wrong.

When you leave

- Ask for the paper with the **next date, time and room**. Write them down and put them in your phone's calendar.
- If you get an order you don't understand, get legal help **the same day**. Deadlines to appeal are short, sometimes 30 days.
- Eat, drink water and rest. It's heavy, even when it goes well.

If something goes wrong

- Stay calm. Don't resist.
- Ask to call someone you trust, and say if children depend on you.
- Don't sign anything. Ask to speak with an attorney.

Beware of fraud

Be wary of anyone who promises results or asks for a lot of money. In the United States, a “notario” is not an attorney.

My hearing

Date and time

Court and room

My attorney or legal help (name and phone)

My plan, in case something happens

Who takes care of my children

Where my documents are

Who to call first

You don't have to go alone.

Call or WhatsApp us at (561) 445-6141, or write to info@dignitytoolkit.org. We will do what we can to connect you with legal help and a volunteer who can accompany you.