

Tenant Guide to Trials

What is a trial?

- At trial, you and your landlord present your sides of the story to the judge.
- Trials tend to follow a specific format - the judge may tell you to do each step.
- You should be prepared to present your **evidence** to the judge, rather than simply telling the judge what happened.
- If you don't attend your trial, you risk losing your case by default.

As an example, consider a trial where a landlord is evicting the tenant for not paying their rent, but the landlord has repeatedly failed to fix a broken window.

What should I bring with me to a trial?

- **Exhibits** can take different forms, like pictures, messages or documents. It should show the judge why you should win the case.
 - Bring multiple printed copies of any pictures or documents to court.

For example, good exhibits could be pictures you took of the broken window and your texts to the landlord requesting repairs.

- **Witnesses** are people who can speak about the evidence. The judge should ask you if you have any witnesses.
- You do not have to bring any witnesses to your trial, but it may help if you can. You can also be a witness in your own case.
- If you present exhibits created by another person, that person will need to **testify** about their evidence.

For example, a good witness might be a friend who visited and saw the broken window.

Questions? Call LTLAN (202)-780-2575

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What happens at trial?

- At the beginning of the trial give the judge a brief summary of your side of the case (**opening statement**).
- Then, both sides will present evidence and call witnesses.
- At the end of the trial, tell the judge why the evidence from the trial shows you should win (**closing statement**).

An opening statement could tell the judge that you believe you owe less rent because your landlord repeatedly failed to fix your window.

A closing statement could tell the judge that the pictures of your broken window and testimony that you presented show that the room was unusable and you owe less rent

How do I present information at trial?

- Most information in a trial will come out through **testimony**, or questioning, of witnesses. Exhibits should be presented during testimony.
- Each side will question their witnesses (**direct examination**).
- After each witness, the other side can ask the witness questions too (**cross examination**)
 - You can challenge what the other side is saying if you believe it is inaccurate or incomplete.
 - If you are your own witness, you will testify but can be cross-examined by the landlord too. You should take notes on what happened and write out your testimony beforehand.

You could testify yourself about the broken window, or you could ask your witness when was the last time they visited, and then to describe your window.

What happens next?

- Once the trial is over, the judge will make a decision
- The judge's decision is binding, but if you are unhappy with the decision, you can request that an associate judge review it.