



# A Tenant Workbook

---

Preparing for Landlord/Tenant  
Court in Essex County, New Jersey

## **DISCLAIMER**

**2025**

This workbook is for informational purposes only and is not intended as legal advice. This document does not constitute a solicitation, and your use of this document does not create any attorney-client relationship between you and Volunteer Lawyers for Justice or Newark Community Solutions. If you need legal advice, you should contact a lawyer about the specific facts of your case.

This resource was made possible with support from Further Justice.

### **Volunteer Lawyers for Justice**

Phone: 973.943.4754  
Website: [vljnj.org/get-help](http://vljnj.org/get-help)

### **Newark Community Solutions**

A Program of the  
Center for Justice Innovation  
Email: [edi@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:edi@innovatingjustice.org)  
Phone: 833.434.0881  
Website: [innovatingjustice.org](http://innovatingjustice.org)

## How To Use This Pamphlet

This workbook is meant to help you prepare for your landlord tenant hearing in Essex County, New Jersey. You can use it to help gather important documents, organize your facts and defenses for court, and store important information for your court date. If you are receiving this workbook on the day of your hearing, it is still a helpful resource to record information (you won't be able to use your phone in the courtroom) and to prepare for any actions you wish to take after a decision is made at trial.

The workbook is divided into 3 sections:

- Preparing for Court
- The Day of Court
- After Court

You can ✓ things off as you go and there is space at the end with important resources and blank pages for notes.

# 1

## Preparing for Court

### Attending Court Is Required

It is important that you appear in court on your court date. If you do not appear, a default judgment will be entered against you and your landlord will be permitted to evict you. Check the date and time you are instructed to appear in court.

---

**DATE**

---

**TIME**

### Things to Do in Advance

Bring any documents to support your case. Documents should be printed. You may want to bring rent receipts, pictures, and communications to and from your landlord. If you want to show the Judge something, you must have it the day of trial.

FOR ESSEX COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

- Read this workbook and take notes where it is helpful.
- Pack a copy of your complaint, any other documents you wish to share as evidence, and something to write with.
- If you need an interpreter or accommodations for a disability you can call the court or go to customer service to request one.
- If you wish to speak to an attorney about your case, call a legal service organization immediately. If you need help connecting with an attorney, Newark Community Solutions can help!

## Packing List

- [ ] Copy of the Complaint
- [ ] Something to Write With

Other Supporting Documents or Evidence (printed pictures, rent receipts, other receipts, communications with landlord/property managers, etc.):

- [ ] \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] \_\_\_\_\_

## A TENANT WORKBOOK

**Court number:** 973.776.9300

**Extension for Interpretation:** 56888

**Extension for Disability Accommodations:** 55700

**Court Website:** [njcourts.gov/self-help/landlord-tenant](http://njcourts.gov/self-help/landlord-tenant)

---

### **DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO A PRINTER?**

*Come to the Newark Community Solutions Office at 223 Hawthorne Avenue, Newark, NJ 07112 and we can help. The office is open Monday through Thursday 9 am - 5 pm. You can also reach us by phone or email at 833.434.0881 and [edi@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:edi@innovatingjustice.org).*

# 2

## The Day of Court

Court begins at 8:30 am. You must arrive on time. Be sure to account for the time needed to go through the security line, check in, and find a seat in the assembly room before court begins.

### What Happens in the Assembly Room

Make sure your cell phone is turned off or on silent.



The court staff will first play a short video advising tenants of their rights in English, then in Spanish. This is sometimes called the “Harris Announcement.”



After the video, the Judge or court staff will call the names of the landlords and tenants whose cases are scheduled to be heard that day. There will be many cases on the list so listen carefully.



When you hear your name, **answer “TENANT” in a loud voice and stand-up if you can.**

Your landlord or your landlord’s attorney will also be required to answer when your case is called. If no one answers for your landlord, the eviction case against you *should* be dismissed.

At this point, one of two things is likely to happen:

**If you hear the Judge say that your case is “DISMISSED,”**  
you can leave the assembly room. This means that your landlord or their attorney did not answer when the case was called.

Do not leave the courthouse unless you are sure that the case against you was dismissed. You can confirm the status of the case with the check-in staff.

**If the court staff says “READY CASE,”**  
that means all parties have appeared and your case will go forward. Listen for the name of the Judge who will be hearing your case. Write the Judge’s name down on the “notes page.”

You should stay in the assembly room until you receive instructions from the Judge or court staff. The Judge or court staff may tell you to go to the mediation room on the other side of the check-in windows to discuss the case with the landlord or their attorney, or the court staff may send you to a court mediator to try to settle the case.



## What Happens in the Mediation Room

When both parties are present on the day of trial, they are given an opportunity to settle the case in mediation before the case is heard by the Judge. In a settlement meeting, you can speak with your landlord or their attorney to try to come to terms that you are both comfortable with. This could include a payment plan or negotiating more time to move out.

---

### REMEMBER THAT SETTLEMENT IS YOUR CHOICE.

*You do not have to agree to any settlement offer, whether it was made by the landlord, the landlord's attorney, or even the mediator.*

### If You Agree to Settle the Case

- [ ] Make sure you understand the terms of the settlement. Ask any questions you have before you sign the agreement.
- [ ] If you settle your case, make sure you and the landlord (or their attorney) fill out and sign a document called a “**stipulation of settlement**” or “**consent judgment**” that explains the terms of your settlement.
- [ ] If you are not agreeing to move out, make sure the completed settlement document allows you to “**retain possession**” (stay in your apartment).

## A TENANT WORKBOOK

- You may need to stay at the courthouse to “place the settlement on the record” which means a Judge or a hearing officer will review the settlement and make sure you understand what the settlement means.
- If you violate the terms of the settlement, you may be evicted.

### **If You Do Not Agree to Settle the Case You Will See the Judge**

- If you and the landlord (or the landlord’s attorney) choose not to settle your case, **you should not leave the courthouse.**
- Make sure you know which Judge you need to go see.
- When you are before the Judge, do your best to stay calm and be polite. The landlord or their attorney will speak first—do not interrupt. You will get time to speak.
- If you have evidence, such as pictures or rent receipts, you will show it to the Judge.
- The Judge assigned to your case will then decide whether the landlord has the right to evict you.

# 3

## After Court

### You Can Remain in Your Home If

Your case is dismissed by the landlord, their attorney, or the by the Judge after trial.

OR

You agreed to a settlement where “**the tenant remains.**” This will usually include a payment plan where you must make all payments in the settlement on time, including monthly rent.

### You Must Leave Your Home If

Your settlement requires you to leave by a certain date. The landlord will still be required to get a **Warrant of Removal** to enforce the agreement.

OR

You enter into a payment plan and you miss a payment. The landlord can then request a **Warrant of Removal.**

OR

A **Judgment for Possession** is entered after trial. The landlord will then request a **Warrant of Removal.**

## If You Get a Warrant of Removal

When receiving a Warrant of Removal, the Warrant of Removal will include a date when the lockout can happen. The date of the lockout will be at least three (3) days after the Warrant of Removal is given to the you or left someplace you can see, like your front door.

To stop the lockout, you can try to resolve the case directly with the landlord or go to court. Below are brief descriptions of the types of relief you can ask for. For any filing with the court, you must notify your landlord or their attorney that the filing is being made.

### **Order to Show Cause**

If you think the wrong thing happened at trial or that you have a defense to the eviction that the court has not considered, you can file an Order to Show Cause. If granted, the court can stop or delay the lockout. The landlord will get a chance to respond. The Judge can then decide to vacate (get rid of) the Judgment for Possession.

### **Order for Orderly Removal**

This can give you up to seven additional days to move out. If you choose this option, the court will typically require you to have all of your belongings removed by the lockout date or give up the right to get back any items left behind after the new move-out date.

## **Hardship Stay**

If you can pay all your back rent and continue to pay rent going forward but for some reason cannot find another place to live, you can apply for a hardship stay. The court can award up to six months for the hardship stay.

## **Need Further Assistance?**

Please reach out to the **Comprehensive Eviction Diversion and Defense Program** at:

Newark Community Solutions

**Office number:** 833.434.0881

**Email:** [edi@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:edi@innovatingjustice.org)

## **Other Helpful Court Phone Numbers and Resources**

**Court Website:** [njcourts.gov](http://njcourts.gov) (TIP: click on the “Self-Represented” tab on the top of the page)

**Main Number for the Essex County Courthouse:**  
973.776.9300

**Extension for Customer Service:** 56886

**Extension for Interpretation:** 56888

**Extension for Disability Accommodations:** 55700





