



**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF STANISLAUS**

**NOTICE TO SMALL CLAIMS LITIGANTS**

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The Superior Court of California, County of Stanislaus – Small Claims Division strongly encourages alternative dispute resolution (mediation) to resolve cases where the parties agree to participate voluntarily.

**What is mediation?**

Mediation is a voluntary process for resolving disputes with the help of a neutral, third party, called a mediator. Mediation allows you and the other party to reach a mutually acceptable settlement of your case instead of having to appear in court to have a judge impose a decision on you. The mediator will not provide legal advice, evaluate your case, or make any decision or judgment for you. However, the mediator will help you and the other party focus on reaching an agreement that is acceptable to all parties involved in the dispute. The mediator will draft the agreement in writing in your words.

**When can I go to mediation?**

You may participate in mediation before your court date and it is strongly urged that you do. You may also participate in mediation on the date scheduled for trial, however if your case is resolved prior to the court date, you may be able to avoid having to appear in court all together.

If you choose mediation, you are encouraged to contact the following agency as soon as possible to schedule the mediation or to ask any questions that you may have:

*Stanislaus County*  
**Mediation Center** (A program of Project Sentinel, Inc.)  
(209) 236-1577 or visit [www.stanislausmediation.org](http://www.stanislausmediation.org)

The staff at the office listed above will discuss the mediation process with you. They can provide a wide variety of conflict resolution services. **YOU WILL NOT BE CHARGED FOR THESE SERVICES.**

**How does mediation work on the day of the trial?**

Mediation services for Small Claims litigants are available on site at the Stanislaus Courthouse on the day of trial. Both the plaintiff and the defendant must agree to participate in the process. A mediator from the program will meet with you and the other party in your case. You do not need to make an appointment ahead of time to participate in mediation on the day of your hearing; however you may wish to call the dispute resolution program office ahead of time to try to resolve your Small Claims case before the hearing date.

If your case is resolved through mediation, you and the other party will sign a document that outlines what you both have agreed to do. If you are not able to resolve your case through mediation, you will go back into the courtroom and a judicial officer will hear your case. Mediation will not delay your opportunity for a court hearing. The Court, of course, hopes that the mediation will resolve the dispute and eliminate the need for court action.

**What are the benefits of mediation?**

One of the advantages of mediation, compared with a trial, is that it allows the parties more time to present their issues and it allows options and resolutions to be discussed candidly and privately. In a trial, there is typically a winner and a loser. The loser is not likely to be happy, and even the winner may not be completely satisfied with the outcome. As a result, the parties to a dispute can be in more control of the resolution than when a judge is involved. Mediation can help the parties find win-win solutions and achieve their real goals. This may increase the parties' overall satisfaction with both the dispute resolution process and the outcome resulting in a higher likelihood of the responsible party voluntarily making payments to the prevailing party without the necessity of further court proceedings.

Mediation proceedings are confidential and conducted in private. Mediations can be conveniently scheduled at any time during the day, some early evenings, and on limited weekends.