

FREE MEDIATION AVAILABLE FOR PARTIES IN NORFOLK GENERAL DISTRICT COURT

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, mediators are not currently permitted in the Norfolk Courthouse, so all mediations should take place prior to the scheduled court hearing. In order to schedule a no-cost mediation orientation and mediation well before your court date PLEASE CONTACT THE NORFOLK MEDIATION COORDINATOR PATRICIA WILLIS, at 757-739-0476 or PatriciaPritchardWillis@gmail.com. Free mediation is now available over videoconference or telephone conference call as a convenient option to stay safe and help with the backlog of court cases.

BENEFITS TO PARTIES FROM MEDIATION

1. You can agree during mediation on what actions will take place and the total amount, if any, that will be paid, when any payments will be made, and when the last payment must be made.
2. If you mediate your case successfully, the written signed agreement will be given to the court and the parties without you needing to appear on your originally scheduled court date.
3. The defendant (respondent) benefits by not having a judgment on his or her record.
4. Both parties benefit by avoiding the need for wage and bank account garnishments and other legal collection methods.
5. The plaintiff (petitioner) is protected. At the time of the mediation, a follow-up court date is scheduled, but usually only used if the agreement is not followed, in which case a judgment can be entered. If the agreement is followed, the case can be dismissed without the parties needing to appear.
6. If for any reason the parties cannot reach an agreement, you can still have the judge hear your case at its originally scheduled time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MEDIATION

WHAT IS MEDIATION? Mediation is a process where all parties involved in a dispute meet with a neutral facilitator called a mediator. The mediator encourages parties to state their concerns, identify issues and interests, discuss options for resolving conflict, and negotiate an agreement that is acceptable to all. The mediator puts any agreement into a written format.

WHY CHOOSE MEDIATION?

- **Generally High Success Rate** in achieving a mutually agreeable settlement between the parties and avoiding the burdens of a trial.
- **Better Results** because the parties themselves choose and agree on the resolution. You understand your dispute better than anyone and can address details that a court might not.
- **Often less expensive** because cases referred through the court are at ***no charge to the parties***. Dispute Resolution Services of the Supreme Court of Virginia currently provides the funding for and certification of the mediators.
- **The parties in the dispute control the outcome** as opposed to having the issues resolved by a judge.
- **Tends to produce lasting Agreements** as parties who create their own outcomes generally find themselves abiding by the arrangements they set for themselves.
- **Gives each party a chance to speak and be heard** as parties involved in the dispute will have the opportunity to talk about the issues that are important to them.
- **Confidentiality**-Everything discussed or shared in the mediation process with the parties or mediator is normally confidential. For example, the mediator does not share any information with the judge other than the written agreement.

HOW CAN I HAVE MY CASE MEDIATED? Parties who have cases filed in court can participate in free mediation services with a certified mediator prior to your court date by contacting the coordinator (information above). You can also come to court on your initial court date, and when you are before the judge, you can request mediation be scheduled prior to having to have your case tried. After the Covid-19 Judicial Emergency has ended, there will usually be a mediator on duty at the courthouse who you can tell of your interest in the no-charge mediation process. The mediation can then take place at the courthouse that day or scheduled for another day. The mediation process is voluntary. Therefore, the other party must be in agreement with your request to try mediation. Our free mediation program can be very valuable when there is one unrepresented party suing another unrepresented party scheduled for court. The mediators do not provide legal advice. The parties can choose to consult their own attorneys prior to signing an agreement. Attorneys are also welcome to participate in mediation with their clients or recommend that their clients mediate.