

## Mediation in the District Court of Maryland

Welcome to the District Court of Maryland

You know, not to long ago I was in a similar position as many of you might find yourselves today. I had an argument over a bill with a customer who refused to pay. Well, after a lot of back and forth with no result I couldn't see any other way to handle it except to sue, so I did.

When we showed up for our court date, we were told there were mediators right there in the courthouse who could help us try and settle the dispute. I'd heard of mediation, but didn't know much about it. We both agreed to give it a try and it wasn't easy, but it worked. Through the mediation process we agreed on a solution that we both thought was fair so we didn't have to go to trial. I learned a lot about the process, so if you are here for a complaint about poor service, failure to pay, property damage, loss of property or even a neighborhood dispute maybe what I learned can help you too. The District Court handles many different kinds of civil cases: small and large claims, both contract and negligence, landlord/tenant, and peace orders to name a few. Some people that bring their complaint to the District Court have lawyers and some people represent themselves. Either way, when you come to court you have two possible outcomes-- winning or losing. Now, if you're the plaintiff (that's the person who filed the complaint) winning usually means you get a judgment, but then you have to collect on that which isn't always easy. It sometimes means even more court appearances. For the plaintiff, losing means you end up with nothing. But if you're the defendant, losing means a judgment and maybe collection efforts against you. Mediation offers something different. It's a problem solving process that uses professionally trained mediators that are neutral-- that means they don't take sides, make suggestions, or make decisions for you like a Judge. Mediators will help you to identify the issues important to everyone in the dispute, then help you explore ways to resolve those issues. Mediation is also confidential while a trial is open to the public and it's completely voluntary. Here's what some other people who have tried it had to say:

"I was extremely nervous about going into the courtroom and speaking in front of the Judge and instead I got to go in front of a mediator and it turned out to be a real win-win situation because I felt like I had a lot of control over the outcome of my case."

"Once I really learned about what and how it works it did wonders for my issue."

"The thing about the mediation process is that we didn't have to go out and hire an attorney. Put out a whole bunch of money. I highly recommend it to anybody."

Fortunately, you don't always have to wait for your court date to try mediation. Some District Courts make mediators available the day of the trial, but some refer cases before trial to volunteer community based mediation services. Using one of these services before trial allows you to try and resolve the dispute on your own, often, at a time and location convenient to you so you don't have to miss work or other commitments. And if you

settle your case, you don't have to show up for a court date. There are a lot of reasons to try mediation either before or on your court date. It cannot only save you time but money. You see mediation services offered through the District Court are free of charge. But whether you're mediating before your court date or on your court date, the best reason to try mediation is that you have a say in the outcome.

Now, if you have a unique legal issue or if you have personal safety concerns about sitting down with the other party in your case, then mediation may not be for you, but for any other civil claim you might have before the District Court, large or small, mediation is worth a try. If you would like more information, there are brochures available right here in the courthouse. And there might even be mediators or District Court representatives' available onsite today to answer your questions or to provide the mediation service if you would like to give it a try. Just ask the clerk or bailiff about this alternative to trial offered to you by the District Court of Maryland. Thanks for your attention. Good luck.