

VIRGINIA:

IN THE GENERAL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

TEMPORARY AND OPTIONAL FIRST RETURN PROCEDURAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR CIVIL WARRANT IN DEBT DEFENDANTS

You have been served with a *Warrant in Debt* which is a civil claim for money. These instructions are meant to help you to understand the process and minimize the need for you to come to Court in light of the COVID-19 crisis. These procedures are temporary and optional.

When is my Court Date?

_____ is the date and time of your *First Return* which is the initial court appearance. The First Return is not a trial; rather, it is when the Court and Plaintiff (the person or business that is suing you) will determine whether you agree or disagree that the money is owed. If you agree that the money is owed, then a judgment will be entered against you. If you disagree that the money is owed, then a trial may be set at which the judge will receive evidence from both sides and make a decision in the case.

Do I have to come to court for the First Return?

IF YOU **AGREE** THAT YOU OWE THE MONEY, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO COME TO COURT FOR YOUR FIRST RETURN. IF YOU **DISAGREE** THAT YOU OWE THE MONEY, YOU MAY:

- COME TO COURT FOR YOUR FIRST RETURN, OR
- USE THE FIRST RETURN FORM ATTACHED TO AVOID COMING TO COURT UNTIL THE DATE AND TIME SET FOR YOUR TRIAL.

Attached is a *First Return Form*. **If you complete the form in full and return it to the Court before the date and time of your First Return listed above then you do not have to come to court for the First Return.** You should keep a copy for your records (take a picture). If you contest this claim and wish to avoid coming to Court for the First Return, you **must** provide a phone number and/or email address where the Court can reach you.

There are three ways for you to return the *First Return Form*:

- 1) Mail to the Court at City of Alexandria General District Court, P.O. Box 320489, Alexandria, VA 22320,
- 2) Drop off at the entrance to the Courthouse in the GDC Dropbox at 520 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (you will not have to pass through security), or
- 3) Scan and email to the Court at alexgdcivil@vacourts.gov. This email address will only be used temporarily during the COVID-19 crisis and will be discontinued as soon as these temporary procedures are no longer in effect.

I completed the First Return Form and returned it to the Court. What happens next?

If you disagree that you owe the money, the Court will contact you to schedule a telephone call with the Plaintiff and the Court ("Status Conference"). During the Status Conference, the judge will determine whether the case is ready for trial, consider any other pretrial matters either party wishes to raise, and schedule the case for trial if necessary. The Plaintiff may contact you prior to trial to see if the case can be settled. If the case is not settled, then the date and time for trial may be set during the Status Conference. The Status Conference may be on video if all parties have that capability and the Plaintiff makes the appropriate arrangements. Please note that the judge cannot require the parties to settle the case and the judge is not authorized to set up a payment plan unless it has been agreed to by the you and the Plaintiff.

These temporary procedures are optional and are meant to make this process easier and safer for you. You may come to Court for your First Return if you do not wish to follow these optional temporary procedures. Please be aware that there is additional screening to be allowed entry into the Courthouse in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call us at (703) 746-4021.