

Emergency, Community, Health and Outreach

ECHO TV Program “Going to Court in Minnesota”

**Package Script, Final Approved Pre-Prep | April 15, 2013
Word Count: 679 Words | Reading Grade Level: 5.4**

- 1-** Minnesota’s government has three parts, or branches. Each branch works with laws. People in the legislative branch make laws. People in the executive branch enforce laws so everyone follows them. People in the judicial branch —the courts—work independently to apply the laws fairly, one case at a time. Judges run the courtrooms. Sometimes courts also have juries. They help decide the facts.
- 2-** Courts do NOT favor one side or the other. Instead, courts are like a good referee. They apply the laws equally and fairly to everyone. In other countries, this may not be true. But in this country, it’s very important for courts to be neutral.
- 3-** There are many reasons to go to court: a traffic ticket, problems with a neighbor, family issues, or business conflicts. There are two kinds of court cases: civil and criminal.
- 4-** In criminal cases, the government accuses someone—a defendant— of a crime. A government attorney gives evidence of the crime. The defendant can also give evidence and argue the case. The court listens to both sides. If the court decides that the defendant broke the law, the judge decides the consequences. Criminal court is for any crime: speeding tickets, robbery, and even murder.
- 5-** In civil cases, one person or group—a party—says that another party harmed them. Here, the court’s job is to solve legal problems. At the end of the case, courts often order one party to pay money to the other party. Civil cases can be about housing, car accidents, or even business conflicts.
- 6-** If you have to go to court, do not be afraid. Remember, the court’s job is to listen and then apply the law fairly.
- 7-** If you are a defendant in a criminal case, you have the right to work with an attorney. Attorneys are experts in the law and the court. They also can speak to the judge for you. Their job is to

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help you understand your rights, and give you advice based on the law and the facts. But you have to help. Tell your attorney ALL the facts. Listen to your attorney and ask questions so you can get good advice. If you cannot afford an attorney in a criminal case, ask the court to provide one for you. These criminal case attorneys are called Public Defenders. In civil cases, there are no Public Defenders. So if you want an attorney in a civil case, you have to find and usually pay for your own.

- 8-** If you don't understand what's going on, ask for help. Court employees can answer your questions about how the court works. If you have a disability, you can also ask the court for help. Ask as soon as you can BEFORE you go to court, so the court can get ready.
- 9-** When you are in the courtroom for a hearing or trial, the court must have an interpreter who speaks your language. Ask the court for an interpreter BEFORE you go so the court can get ready. Only special court interpreters work in the courtroom. These interpreters work for the court, not for you. Interpreters repeat what people say so everyone understands. But if you don't understand, tell the judge, "I don't understand." Interpreters aren't attorneys. They don't give legal advice.
- 10-** You don't have to use an attorney. The court will not discriminate against you because of your race, religion, language, gender, or culture. Never try to bribe judges or court employees. Remember, courts are fair and neutral. Always tell the truth. It's a crime to lie in court. If you don't know the answer to a question, just say, "I don't know." If you can't remember, say, "I can't remember."
- 11-** Minnesota courts help solve legal problems. They apply the law to protect people and property. They help keep our communities fair and safe. If you're going to court, get prepared. Know what to expect before you go, be honest and respectful, and ask for help if you need it.