

Civil and Criminal Court Case Definitions and Examples

What is a civil case?

If you decide to sue another person, an organization or a business, your case is a civil case. Private individuals, businesses or the government can sue other people and organizations. The person who is suing is called the **plaintiff** and the person who is being sued is called the **defendant**.

Some examples of civil cases are:

- a person who is hurt in a car accident sues the driver of the other car;
- a worker sues his employer after the worker hurts his back at work and can never work again;
- a homeowner who has hired a builder to build a new kitchen sues the builder when the kitchen is badly built and has to be fixed;
- a family sues their doctor when the doctor does not discover that the mother has cancer in time for the cancer to be treated.

People usually sue for an amount of money to make up for the injury or loss they have suffered. Civil cases do not result in prison terms.

What is a criminal case?

A criminal case is based on an offense against society's rules. The police are involved in investigating the crime and a person (called a **suspect**) is charged with a crime and brought to court. The state of Michigan (or the federal government) will be the one charging the suspect with a crime, not the actual victim. The government has to prove that the suspect committed the crime. In a criminal case, the suspect must be found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Crimes where the suspect could go to jail for more than one year are called **felonies**. Crimes where the suspect could serve a year or less in jail are called **misdemeanors**.

Some examples of crimes are:

- Drunk driving
- Murder
- Arson
- Selling illegal drugs