

HOW TO ADDRESS YOUR TICKETS

- This information only applies to:
 - low-level infractions and misdemeanors, such as loitering, drinking in public, jaywalking, trespassing, etc.; and
 - tickets incurred in LA County.
- This does NOT apply to parking tickets.
- Providing this information does NOT establish an attorney-client relationship between you and Public Counsel.
- You should consult an attorney or other advocate regarding your case because the general information provided below may not apply to your actual situation.
 - Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) may be able to help. Contact their intake line: 1.800.399.4529.

INITIAL STEPS – GET INFORMED & GET PREPARED!

I. Get information on your ticket(s)

- ✓ Go to www.lacourt.org;
- ✓ From the Online Services section under the heading “Traffic” - decide whether to find your ticket by Driver’s License number (search results will show all traffic and quality of life offenses linked to that license or ID number) or Citation number;
- ✓ Click “Agree” to the User Agreement;
- ✓ Enter date of birth and citation number or Driver’s License number;
- ✓ Select Law Enforcement Agency from drop down menu (look at the top right corner of the citation);
- ✓ Select the Court location indicated on the bottom of the ticket (usually Metropolitan Courthouse).

The search results will show most, if not all, of your outstanding infraction and misdemeanor matters in LA County. You will see the citation number, violation date, last action and the assigned courthouse. The search results will NOT indicate the underlying offense. If you do not have a copy of the ticket, the traffic clerk at any superior courthouse can provide a printout of the original. If the results show that you have a warrant, do not worry. The warrant for Failure to Appear gets recalled and removed when you appear in court.

II. Gather proof of each of the following as applicable:

- ✓ Income (GR or SSI benefits award letter, paystubs, etc.);
- ✓ Homelessness (a homeless verification form from a homeless service provider);
- ✓ Disability;
- ✓ Veteran status;
- ✓ Participation in services such as case management, mental health counseling, substance abuse, job training, AA/NA, etc. as well as proof that you are attending program meetings and are not using any substances;
- ✓ Letter from your case manager discussing positive changes you have made, what services you are accessing, and how removal of this ticket will improve your life.

Generally the information you are collecting is to demonstrate to the Court that you deserve an alternative to paying the fine or the other penalties typically imposed for your offense. Courts want to see that, despite your challenges, you are doing all you can to improve your situation.

NEXT STEPS - For Those Who Have NOT Missed any Court Dates on Their Tickets:

1. If you cannot pay the ticket you must go to court on the payment due date written by the officer at the bottom of your ticket to schedule an arraignment with the court clerk. You will not appear in front of a judge at this time. If you have tickets in multiple courts, such as a ticket at the Metropolitan courthouse and a ticket at the Beverly Hills courthouse, you will have to go to each courthouse separately.
2. You may also schedule an arraignment online at www.lacourt.org. It usually takes about 1-2 weeks from ticketing for information to show up online. Sometimes, the information does not show up online until the payment due date indicated on the ticket. You can wait until your ticket information shows up online before attempting to schedule an arraignment either in person or online.

NOTE: You may request up to two extensions of time to save money to pay off the ticket(s). Postponement of arraignment can be requested in person with the court clerk and, sometimes, online.

3. ARRAIGNMENT

At arraignment, you must plead not guilty, guilty, or no contest (essentially a guilty plea). If you plead guilty or no contest you will have to pay the fine or request community service.

a. If you plead “Not Guilty”

- the court will set a trial date and

- require you to post bail for the full amount of the ticket.
 - You should request a waiver of bail and to be released on your own recognizance (“OR”) if you have a low income. If possible, bring proof that you have a low income. Note: Waiver of bail and release on “OR” is not likely to be granted if you missed court (i.e., have a Failure to Appear-FTA).
- GO TO COURT ON YOUR TRIAL DATE! [See section #4 *Trial* below]
- Before court begins you may want to seek out the police officer who cited you to discuss potential reductions or deals. The officer’s name is written on your citation. If you do not have a copy of your citation you can ask the court clerk for the officer’s name before your trial starts. Ask the officer to step outside the courtroom with you and describe your situation to the officer including any proof of low income, disability, school, medical conditions, case management, etc. Then ask the officer if s/he would be willing to dismiss the ticket in the interest of justice because having to pay the ticket would create a serious hardship. If you reach a deal ***you still must attend your trial.***

b. If you plead “Guilty” or “No Contest”

- request suspension or reduction of all fines and fees or a dismissal in the interests of justice. In either case, you should have all the supporting documentation listed in item II above such as proof of income and/or a letter from your case manager or other professional showing that paying the fines would be a serious hardship to you.
 - If that doesn’t work, request community service. If you cannot afford the fees associated with community service, you must ask for a fee waiver at trial. Also ask for enough time for you to complete the services hours, and to be able to complete the service at a site that is convenient for you (such as close to your home). Provide proof as stated in item II above (including any disability that impacts where and when you perform your community service). If you do not complete community service by the deadline, you are still responsible for paying the fees and fines. The ticket matter will remain open and you will be charged with failure to pay (FTP) if you are unable to pay.
- request traffic school; or
- request a reduction in fees/fines (if not already requested) and/or to pay in installments by payment plan. (Bring proof as stated in item II above.)

- You may be charged a fee to be allowed to pay in installments.
- If the court allows a payment plan, go to court and make a payment whenever you can; be sure it is paid off by the court's deadline.

4. TRIAL

- a. If the officer who cited you does not show up to your trial date, the court must dismiss the matter and will inform you of that at your trial date. You do not have to do anything else.
- b. If the officer who cited you shows up on your trial date and you are able to reach a deal to dismiss the ticket or reduce the fines, present this settlement to the judge for approval.
- c. If the officer does not agree to dismiss or reduce the charge, you can still fight the ticket but you must provide specific evidence showing you are not guilty or the court will likely find you guilty based on officer credibility.
- d. If you do not have specific evidence to prove you are not guilty:
 - i. You can change your plea to guilty at the start of your trial and ask the court to dismiss the ticket in the interests of justice based on your personal circumstances. You should have all the supporting documentation listed in item II above such as proof of income and/or a letter from your case manager or other professional showing that paying the fines would be a serious hardship to you.
 - ii. If the court will not dismiss the ticket, request suspension of all fees and fines.
 - iii. If the court will not suspend the fees and fines, request community service. If you cannot afford the fees associated with community service, you must ask for a fee waiver at trial. Also ask for enough time for you to complete the services hours, and to be able to complete the service at a site that is convenient for you (such as close to your home). Provide proof as stated in item II above (including any disability that impacts where and when you perform your community service). If you do not complete community service by the deadline, you are still responsible for paying the fees and fines. The ticket matter will remain open and you will be charged with failure to pay (FTP) if you are unable to pay.

NEXT STEPS - For Those Who Have Missed Court Dates on Their Tickets and Never Appeared in Court on Their Tickets:

1. Go to the clerk at the courthouse where the ticket originated or to www.lacourt.org to see whether you have the option to schedule an arraignment online. If you have tickets in multiple courthouses and cannot schedule your arraignment online, then you will have to go to each courthouse separately.

- a. Go to the Traffic Court clerk window if the ticket is fairly recent or it is not in collections. If you arrive before 9:00 a.m., the clerk may be able to put you on the calendar for that day.
 - b. If your ticket is not recent and is held by “GC Services” (or, otherwise, is in collections), go to the “GC Services” window and advise the worker that you want to schedule an arraignment. They will tell you they cannot schedule an arraignment for you, that the Traffic Court clerk must do that. Ask them to provide you or the court clerk with whatever information you need to schedule your arraignment at the Traffic Court clerk window.
2. Do not leave without a court date. Even though you missed your court date, because you have never appeared on this ticket, you are entitled to have your matter heard by a judge. Keep in mind that the court date may be several months away.
 3. **GO TO THIS COURT DATE.** If you miss this court date, you will get a Failure to Appear and possibly a bench warrant.
 4. When you are in front of the judge, follow the steps set forth above under “Arraignment”.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">NEXT STEPS - For Those Who Have Appeared in Court on Their Ticket but Have Failed to Pay the Fine or to Complete Community Service:</p> |
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1. You will NOT be able to get an arraignment date – instead, try the following options:
 - a. Work out a payment plan with GC Services. Do not agree to more than you realistically can pay each month. For example, if your income is only \$221 per month, you may NOT want to agree to pay \$50 /month towards your ticket(s).
 - b. Consider writing a “Letter for Judicial Consideration” to the judge explaining your specific challenges (low-income, homelessness, disability) and why you were unable to pay the fines or complete your community service. You will want to discuss your circumstances and explain that you are unable to pay the citation AND why you deserve relief from the court. You may want to ask an advocate or case manager to assist you with this.
2. Seek help from a program that can assist, such as
 - a. Los Angeles City Attorney’s VALOR program (halocitationclinic@lacity.org); or
 - b. LAFLA (intake line: 1.800.399.4529).

| A quick note on community service: | A quick note on “GC Services”: |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The community service office will charge you a fee to do your community service unless you ask the judge for a waiver at the time s/he assigns you community service hours. 2. If you have a disability that may impact your ability to do certain tasks, tell the community service office. 3. Pay attention to deadlines. If you get close to the court deadline and you have not completed your hours, go to court and request more time. Again, you may be able to get an extension online at www.lacourt.org. The court is not likely to grant you additional time more than once, unless you have a good excuse such as incarceration, hospitalization, deployment, etc. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GC Services is a private bill collector that is not part of the Court. Their job is to collect outstanding debts. 2. GC Services cannot give legal or procedural advice. Please reach out to a legal advocate if any information provided by GC Services conflicts with anything on this flyer. 3. If you experience aggressive bill collection techniques from GC Services, take detailed notes about what was said and who said it. You may want to file a complaint with the California Attorney General (800.952.5225) and/or the Federal Trade Commission (877.382.4357). |

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEAL WITH YOUR TICKETS

- ✓ Signing your name at the bottom of a ticket is your promise to either pay the ticket or contest the ticket by scheduling an arraignment on or before the date written at the bottom of the ticket.
- ✓ Failure to pay your ticket or appear in court will most likely lead to an additional misdemeanor charge for failure to appear and a suspension of your driver’s license. It also may result in a bench warrant. While it is unusual for someone to be arrested and incarcerated on a bench warrant, a police officer has the discretion to arrest you.
- ✓ Outstanding tickets may appear in background checks and prevent you from getting employment.
- ✓ Unpaid tickets in collections may appear on your credit report and prevent you from getting a Driver’s License, obtaining employment or accessing credit.
- ✓ Having unpaid tickets could lead to garnishment of your wages.