



## SMALL CLAIMS COURT MAGISTRATES

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### SMALL CLAIMS COURT MAGISTRATES

The chief court administrator appoints magistrates for three-year terms.

Applicants for magistrate positions must be Connecticut-licensed attorneys for at least five years.

People may file complaints about magistrates with the Judicial Branch's Magistrate Matters staff.

The chief court administrator may impose a range of sanctions against a magistrate for misconduct, including terminating his or her appointment as a magistrate.

### ISSUE

How are small claims court magistrates appointed?  
How can a person file a complaint about a magistrate?  
How does the Judicial Branch process complaints?

### SUMMARY

Magistrates are non-judicial officers serving in the Judicial Branch. In addition to small claims cases, the law authorizes magistrates to hear cases involving infractions, violations (which, like infractions, are punishable only by a fine), and certain motor vehicle offenses. Magistrates do not conduct jury trials ([CGS §§ 51-193/](#) to [-193u](#)).

The law authorizes the chief court administrator to appoint an attorney who has been admitted to the bar in this state for at least five years to the position of magistrate. In addition, a probate court judge who

also has the same five year's practice in the state can submit his or her name to the probate court administrator, who submits a list of those applicants to the chief court administrator for inclusion on a list of available magistrates ([CGS §§ 51-193/](#) to [-193u](#)). While the statutes do not establish a term of office for magistrates, the Judicial Branch has set their term at three years.

The statutes do not specify a complaint process for magistrates. According to the Judicial Branch, a person may file a written complaint about a magistrate in the following ways:

**Mail:**

Magistrate Matters  
225 Spring Street  
Wethersfield, CT 06109

**Fax:** (860) 263-2773

**Email:** [Magistrate.Matters@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Magistrate.Matters@jud.ct.gov)

According to the Judicial Branch, the magistrate matters staff handles complaints in the following manner.

1. They review a complaint to determine if it is about the case's outcome. If it is, staff inform the complainant that (a) they cannot handle a complaint about a case's outcome and (b) the person can file a motion to open the case or a writ of error.
2. Staff generally contact the clerk who was in the courtroom during the event that is the subject of the complaint. They do not identify the issue in the complaint while gathering information.
3. Staff contact the magistrate to request a written response to the complaint.
4. Staff review the information collected and, if it confirms a problem identified in the complaint, make a recommendation to the Office of the Chief Court Administrator. They can recommend a range of responses, including (a) discussing and clarifying the situation with the magistrate, (b) offering suggestions to avoid similar situations in the future, (c) orally reprimanding the magistrate, or (d) suspending or terminating the magistrate.
5. Staff send a letter to the complainant, magistrate, and Office of Chief Court Administrator explaining the outcome.

According to the Judicial Branch, the chief court administrator can revoke a magistrate's appointment for any appropriate reason. The branch also reviews complaints filed against a magistrate when he or she requests re-appointment at the end of a three-year term.

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