



Understanding Initial Pleadings

Every family law case, whether a divorce, custody, legitimation, modification, or contempt matter, begins with paperwork filed with the court. These first filings are called pleadings. They tell the court and the other party who is involved, what is being asked for, and the basic reasons why. They are not a complete argument, just the initial request.

How a case begins

- 1 The Petition.** The party starting the case files a petition (sometimes called a complaint). It lays out the basic facts and what that party is asking the court to order.
- 2 Supporting documents.** Depending on the case, the petition may be filed with a financial affidavit, a proposed parenting plan, child support worksheets, and court filing forms.
- 3 Service.** The other party must receive formal notice of the case, along with a summons from the court. This is done by a sheriff or process server, or the party may sign an acknowledgment of service instead.
- 4 The Answer.** The party who was served files a written response, generally within 30 days, agreeing or disagreeing with each statement in the petition.
- 5 The Counterclaim.** Along with the answer, the responding party may ask the court for what they want. This is called a counterclaim.

Terms you will hear

Petitioner or Plaintiff. The party who starts the case.

Respondent or Defendant. The party who responds to the case.

Verification. A signed statement, under oath, that the facts in a pleading are true.

Filing. Officially submitting a document to the court so it becomes part of the case record.

What to keep in mind

Pleadings are intentionally brief. They are not the place to tell your whole story. The details come later.

What is requested in a pleading is a starting point, not a final result. Most cases resolve by agreement.

Never ignore court papers. If a response is not filed on time, the case can move forward without your input.

This guide provides general information about initial pleadings in Georgia family law matters and is not legal advice about your specific case. Your attorney will explain how these documents apply to your situation.

YOUR ROLE

Review every draft carefully before you sign, tell us about anything inaccurate, and send us any papers you receive from the court or the other party right away.

QUESTIONS?

As always, all questions and requests should be directed to the team via email to team@pepitone.law.