

Subpoenas In Civil Actions, or Civil Cases

An Informational Guide to a North Dakota Civil Court Process

The North Dakota Legal Self Help Center provides resources to people who represent themselves in civil matters, or civil cases, in the North Dakota State District Courts. The information provided in this informational guide isn't intended for legal advice but only as a general guide to a civil court process.

If you decide to represent yourself, you need to do additional research to prepare.

If you're unsure how to proceed, don't know if this informational guide suits your needs, or need legal advice or legal representation, consult a lawyer licensed to practice in North Dakota. For more information about finding a lawyer, go to ndcourts.gov/legal-self-help/finding-a-lawyer.

When you represent yourself, you're expected to know and follow the law, including:

- State or federal laws that apply to your case;
- Case law, also called court opinions, that applies to your case; and
- Court rules that apply to your case, which may include:
 - North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure;
 - North Dakota Rules of Court;
 - North Dakota Rules of Evidence;
 - North Dakota Administrative Rules and Orders:
 - Any local court rules.

Links to the laws, case law, and court rules can be found at ndcourts.gov.

A glossary with definitions of legal terms is available at ndcourts.gov/legal-self-help/glossary.

When you represent yourself, you're held to same requirements and responsibilities as a lawyer, even if you don't understand the rules or procedures.

This information isn't a complete statement of the law. This covers basic information about subpoenas in a North Dakota State District Court civil case. The Center isn't responsible for any consequences that may result from the information provided. The information can't replace the advice of a lawyer licensed in the state of North Dakota.

Use at your own risk.

Caution!

A self-represented individual may only represent themselves in a North Dakota state district court civil case.

If a Plaintiff/Petitioner or Defendant/Respondent is an artificial person, such as a business, corporation or limited liability company, a non-lawyer can't represent the artificial person in a North Dakota state district court civil case. Consult a lawyer licensed to practice in North Dakota.

What Is A Subpoena?

A subpoena is the process to require the attendance of a non-party witness at deposition, hearing or trial.

A subpoena is also the process to require a non-party to produce documents, electronically stored information or tangible things (tangible is something that can be shown or touched); or to require the inspection of premises.

Subpoenas may be used by a party in a civil case to require a non-party to do the following at a specific time and place:

- Attend and testify at a deposition, hearing or trial;
- Produce the documents listed in the subpoena;
- Produce the electronically stored information listed in the subpoena;
- Produce the tangible things listed in the subpoena (the tangible things must be in the person's possession, custody or control); or
- Permit the inspection of the premises listed in the subpoena.

If a party wants to require a non-party to do more than one of the actions listed above, the party may include the actions in one subpoena, or use a separate subpoena for each action.

Who is a Party and a Non-Party?

The parties in a civil case are the Plaintiffs or Defendants, or the Petitioners or Respondents.

A non-party in a civil case is anyone who isn't a Plaintiff or Defendant, or a Petitioner or Respondent.

Laws & Rules Related To Subpoenas In A Civil Case

Rule 45 of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure governs the subpoena process.

Note: This Informational Guide gives the basics of the subpoena process, but doesn't cover every possible issue or situation. **Review Rule 45 carefully to meet the requirements for subpoenas in your civil case.** Other North Dakota court rules may apply to your particular circumstances that aren't included in this Informational Guide.

Rule 5(d) of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure requires that the Summons and Complaint, or a Summons and Petition, or other initiating document of the civil case must be filed with the court before a subpoena may be issued.

<u>Chapter 31-01 of the North Dakota Century Code</u> governs witness qualifications, rights and duties.

- <u>Section 31-01-16</u> of Chapter 31-01 of the North Dakota Century Code governs witness fees, mileage and travel expense reimbursement for witnesses.
- Also <u>see Section 44-08-04</u> and <u>Section 54-06-09</u> for calculating mileage and travel expense reimbursement for witnesses. (*These sections apply to reimbursement for state officers and employees.*)

<u>Chapter 31-03 of the North Dakota Century Code</u> governs the means of compelling attendance of witnesses.

North Dakota court rules apply in North Dakota State District Court. The rules are available at ndcourts.gov/legal-resources/rules. The rules are available in print in many North Dakota public and academic libraries.

Laws constantly change through legislation, administrative rulings and court decisions. To determine how a law applies to your situation, review the applicable law or laws, administrative rulings and court decisions.

Notes of court decisions related to North Dakota law can be found in the print editions of the North Dakota Century Code. Print editions of the North Dakota Century Code are available in many North Dakota public and academic libraries.

Only a lawyer licensed to practice in North Dakota who has agreed to represent you can give you legal advice. Legal advice includes interpreting how the laws and rules apply to your situation.

Who Can Issue A Subpoena?

When you represent yourself in a civil case, you can't issue a subpoena on your own. Only a Clerk of Court or a lawyer for a party can issue a subpoena in a civil case.

When a party in a civil case requests a subpoena from the Clerk of Court of the North Dakota county where the civil case is filed, the Clerk of Court shall issue a subpoena to the party.

Note: The subpoena is signed by the clerk, but is otherwise blank. The party requesting the subpoena must complete the subpoena **before** arranging for service of the subpoena.

The Clerk of Court may require you to provide your own subpoena document for the Clerk of Court to sign.

What Is The Cost Of A Subpoena?

The Clerk of Court charges a \$10.00 fee for issuing a subpoena in a civil case.

Who Can Request A Subpoena From The Clerk Of Court?

A party to a civil case can request that the Clerk of Court of the North Dakota county where the civil case is filed issue a subpoena.

Contact information for Clerk of Court by North Dakota county is available at ndcourts.gov/court-locations.

When Can A Party To A Civil Case Request A Subpoena?

A party to a civil case can request a subpoena from the Clerk of Court after:

- 1. The Summons and Complaint, Summons and Petition, or other initiating document of the civil case is filed with the court; and
- 2. A civil case number is assigned.

For information about filing a civil case in North Dakota District Court, review the "Filing Documents with the District Court" section of the <u>Guide to a Civil Action</u>, or <u>Civil Case</u>.

What Information Is Needed To Request And Prepare A Subpoena?

Before you request a subpoena, gather the following information (a printable checklist is available at the end of this informational guide):

- Names of the parties in the civil case, as listed in the caption of the Summons and/or Complaint/Petition;
- The name of court where the civil case is filed, including the judicial district and North Dakota county;
- The civil case number;
- Name and address of the non-party to whom the subpoena is directed;
- If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance, the date, time and place of the deposition, hearing or trial;
- If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance at a deposition, the method of recording testimony;
- If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance, the amount of the witness fees, mileage and travel expenses;

Note: If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance and you **don't** include payment of one day's witness fees, mileage and travel expenses with the subpoena, the non-party **doesn't** need to obey the subpoena.

- A list of the specific documents, electronically stored information or tangible things, if the subpoena requires their production;
- The address of the premises, if the subpoena requires inspection.

Important: You have a duty to take reasonable steps to avoid imposing an undue burden on a person subject to a subpoena. The court must enforce this duty and may impose sanctions on you, the party responsible for the subpoena.

Is There Any Other Information Included In The Subpoena?

Depending on your circumstances, you may need to include additional information in your subpoena. Review Rule 45 carefully to meet any additional requirements.

Note: If your subpoena requires **only** pre-trial or prehearing production of documents, electronically stored information, or tangible things or the inspection of premises, the text of the notice in Rule 45(f) must be included in the subpoena. The text of the Rule 45(f) notice, as of April 12, 2024, is:

"You may object to this subpoena by sending or delivering a written objection, stating your valid reason, to [Insert the name and address of the party, or attorney representing the party seeking production of documents, electronically stored information, or tangible things or the inspection of premises]. Any objection must be received within ten days after you receive the subpoena. If the time specified in the subpoena for compliance is less than ten days, any objection must be received at least 24 hours before the time specified for compliance.

If you make a timely objection, you do not need to comply with this subpoena unless the court orders otherwise. You will be notified if the party serving the subpoena seeks a court order compelling compliance with this subpoena. You will then have the opportunity to contest enforcement.

Failure to obey this subpoena, without making a timely objection, and stating a valid reason, may be contempt of court."

When Is Notice Required Before The Subpoena Is Served?

There are situations where notice must be served **before** the actual subpoena can be served.

Review <u>Rule 45(b)</u> carefully to determine if you must prepare and arrange for service of notice **before** you can arrange for service of the actual subpoena.

 <u>Rule 27</u>, <u>Rule 30</u> and <u>Rule 34</u> of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure include requirements for notice of deposition and notice of demand for production or inspection. Other Rules may apply.

If you determine notice is required, see <u>Rule 5(b) of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure</u> for the ways notice of the subpoena can be served. You need to arrange for service of the notice document.

General information about Rule 5 service requirements can be found at ndcourts.gov/legal-self-help/service-in-a-civil-action by reviewing the document titled "Information and Instructions for Service After a Civil Action Has Been Started."

A variety of General-Use Declaration of Service forms are also available by clicking on the link.

How Is The Subpoena Served?

The party who requested the subpoena arranges for service of the subpoena on the non-party to whom the subpoena is directed.

Note: If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance and you **don't** include payment of one day's witness fees, mileage and travel expenses with the subpoena, the non-party **doesn't** need to obey the subpoena.

Exception: If the fees, mileage and travel expenses will be paid by the state or a political subdivision, you don't need to include payment with the subpoena.

Subpoenas must be served by one of the options in <u>Rule 4(d) of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure</u>. Review Rule 4(d) carefully!

General information about Rule 4 service requirements can be found at ndcourts.gov/legal-self-help/service-in-a-civil-action by reviewing the document titled "Information and Instructions for Service to Start a District Court Civil Action."

General-Use Declaration of Service forms are also available by clicking on the link.

What If The Person Is Located Outside Of North Dakota?

If a party in a North Dakota State District Court case needs to arrange for service of a subpoena on a non-party located outside of North Dakota, they may need to work with the state court where the non-party is located.

Contact the state court of the state in which the non-party is located and ask about the process for issuing a foreign subpoena for service. The process may also be called domesticating a foreign subpoena.

In general, this process involves submitting the North Dakota subpoena to the state court of the state in which the non-party is located. If you meet the state court's requirements, the state court issues a subpoena for service within the state in which the non-party is located.

If the state court of the state in which the non-party is located **doesn't** have information about the process, contact a law library in that state, or contact a lawyer licensed to practice in that state. If you contact a lawyer, be aware you may need to retain the lawyer.

The ND Legal Self Help Center can't provide any assistance with court processes in courts of other states.

What Duties Does A Person Have When Responding To A Subpoena?

A non-party who is served a subpoena has certain duties when they respond to the subpoena, depending on the contents of the subpoena.

Review Rule 45(d) carefully to determine the duties that apply.

The court may hold a non-party in contempt if they don't have an adequate excuse for disobeying the subpoena.

Note: If the subpoena requires the non-party's attendance and the party responsible for the subpoena **doesn't** include payment of one day's witness fees, mileage and travel expenses with the subpoena, the non-party **doesn't** need to obey the subpoena.

Does A Person Responding To A Subpoena Have Any Protections?

Yes, Rule 45(c) provides a number of protections to a non-party who was served a subpoena.

The protections include:

- The party responsible for the subpoena must take reasonable steps to avoid imposing an undue burden or expense on the non-party subject to the subpoena.
- The non-party may ask the court to quash (stop) or modify the subpoena.
- When a subpoena requires production of documents, electronically stored information, or tangible things (tangible is something that can be shown or touched); or to permit inspection of premises, **but doesn't** also require the non-party to appear, the non-party isn't required to appear at the deposition, hearing or trial.
- The non-party may object in writing to inspection, copying, testing, or sampling any or all of the commands in a subpoena for production of documents or tangible things, or to permit inspection of premises.

- North Dakota residents may only be required to attend depositions in the county where the person resides, is employed or transacts business. However, the court may order attendance at a convenient place.
- North Dakota residents may be required to attend a hearing or trial any place within North Dakota.

Does The ND Legal Self Help Center Have Examples Of Subpoena Documents?

Yes, the ND Legal Self Help Center has some examples of subpoenas or related documents.

All of the examples of subpoenas and related documents are found at the end of this informational guide.

By providing the examples of subpoenas and related documents, the ND Legal Self Help Center **doesn't** imply or state that the content of the examples are legally sufficient or suitable for your circumstances. **Use at your own risk.**

Is There Help Available For Creating Subpoena Documents?

If you'd like assistance creating your legal documents, consult a lawyer licensed to practice in North Dakota. Ask the lawyer about Limited Legal Representation.

Lawyers licensed to practice in North Dakota may agree to help you with part of your civil case, such as preparing legal documents, while you handle the rest of your civil case. You and the lawyer must agree in writing to Limited Legal Representation.

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Lawyer Resources & Limited Legal Representation

You aren't required to hire a lawyer to access the state court system. If you decide to represent yourself, you must follow all of the rules, laws and procedures that a lawyer is required to follow.

Lawyer Resources

To learn more about finding a lawyer to represent you, go to ndcourts.gov/legal-self-help/finding-a-lawyer. You may also find the following options of interest.

- Legal Services of North Dakota is a non-profit organization, providing free legal
 assistance to North Dakota residents in a variety of matters based on income. Legal
 Services of North Dakota can also determine whether an applicant meets the income
 requirements for the Volunteer Lawyers program that offers low-cost legal assistance
 based on income. The phone number is (800) 634-5263 and the website is
 legalassist.org.
- Dakota Plains Legal Services is a non-profit legal services organization that provides free legal assistance to low-income individuals, older Americans and veterans. Dakota Plains Legal Services (DPLS) has eight offices and serves communities across South Dakota and North Dakota, including nine tribal nations. DPLS is committed to increasing access to justice with quality legal assistance. Contact information is available on the DPLS webpage of dpls.org.
- **The State Bar Association** provides a lawyer referral service to match paying clients in need of legal services with lawyers. The phone number is (866) 450-9579 and the website is sband.org.
- For a list of all lawyers who are licensed to practice in North Dakota, go to the North
 Dakota Supreme Court website at ndcourts.gov/Lawyers. You can narrow your search by
 name or location.

Limited Legal Representation

Lawyers licensed to practice in North Dakota may provide Limited Legal Representation in civil cases. Limited Legal Representation (sometimes called "unbundling") is a way that a lawyer can help you with part of your case while you do the rest of your case. You pay for the part of the case the lawyer handled.

For example:

- You may want a lawyer to give you an expert opinion about your options, or your legal rights and responsibilities;
- You can consult with a lawyer to prepare or review your paperwork, but attend hearings yourself;
- You can represent yourself through the whole case, and periodically consult with a lawyer who can coach you on the law, procedures and strategy;
- You can do the preparation yourself and hire a lawyer just to make the court appearance for you.

You and the lawyer must agree in writing to Limited Legal Representation.

North Dakota Free Legal Answers

This civil legal program is a partnership of the American Bar Association and the State Bar Association of North Dakota.

The purpose of the program is to provide free answers to **specific** civil legal question to low-moderate income North Dakotans who submit their questions online. Anonymous volunteer lawyers answer your question, but can't represent you.

Go to <u>nd.freelegalanswers.org</u> for information about the program, the online application, and, if you qualify, ask your civil legal question.

Please note that this program **doesn't** provide any assistance with criminal legal questions.

Checklist of Information Needed To Request & Prepare A Subpoena

When You Represent Yourself In A Civil Case, You Can't Issue A Subpoena On Your Own. Only A Clerk Of Court Or A Lawyer For A Party Can Issue A Subpoena In A Civil Case.

If You're Unsure How To Proceed, Consult A Lawyer Licensed To Practice In North Dakota.

Before you request a subpoena from the Clerk of Court, gather the following information:					
	Names of the parties in the civil action, or civil case (as listed in the caption of the Summons and/or Complaint/Petition):				
	The name of court where the civil case is filed, including the judicial district and North Dakota county:				
	The civil case number:				
	Name and address of the person (non-party) to whom the subpoena is directed:				
If the subpoena requires the person's attendance at a deposition, hearing, or trial:					
	The date, time and place of the deposition, hearing or trial:				
	For attendance at a deposition, the method of recording testimony:				
	The amount of the witness fees, mileage and travel expenses:				

Note: If the subpoena requires the person's attendance and you **don't** include payment of one day's witness fees, mileage and travel expenses with the subpoena, the person **doesn't** need to obey the subpoena.

lf t	he subpoena requires production of documents, electronically stored information or
tar	ngible things:
	A list of the specific documents, electronically stored information or tangible things:
	the subpoena requires only pre-trial or prehearing production of documents, electronically ored information, or tangible things or the inspection of premises, the text of the notice in Rule
<u>45</u>	(<u>f) of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure</u> must be included in the subpoena.)
lf t	he subpoena requires inspection of the premises:
	The address of the premises:

Important: You have a duty to take reasonable steps to avoid imposing an undue burden on a person subject to a subpoena. The court must enforce this duty and may impose sanctions on the party responsible for the subpoena.

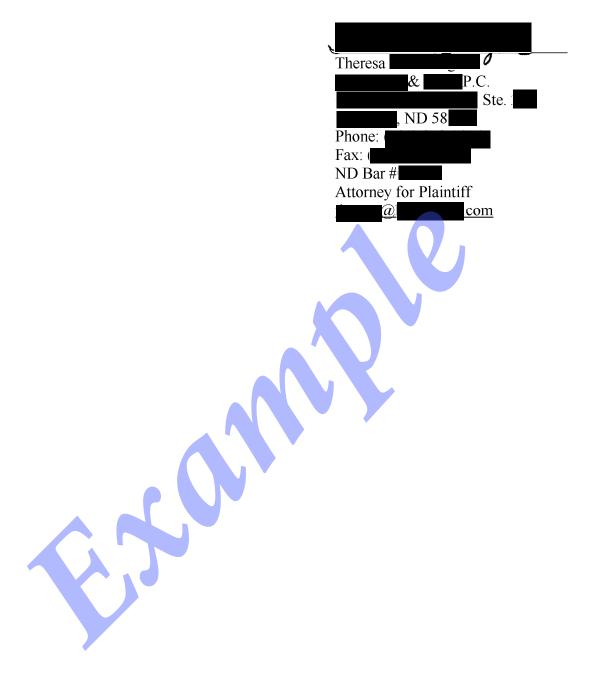
Disclaimer: The North Dakota Legal Self Help Center provides resources to people who represent themselves in civil matters in the North Dakota state courts. The information provided by the Center isn't intended for legal advice but only a general guide to the civil court process. The Center can't guarantee that all judges and courts will accept forms available through the Legal Self Help Center. The Center isn't responsible for any consequences that may result from the information provided. The information can't replace the advice of a lawyer licensed in the state. Use at your own risk.

Example of Notice for a Subpoena to Appear at a Deposition

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA			IN DISTRICT COURT			
COUNTY OF			JUDICIAL DISTRICT			
Virginia ,			Case No. 2023-CV-00			
	Pla vs.	aintiff,)	NOTICE OF DEPOSITION OF DEFENDANT			
Melis)				
	De) efendant.)				
TO:	THE DEFENDANT, M		D 58			
[1]	PLEASE TAKE NOTIO	$\mathbb{C}\mathbf{E}$ that pursuant (to Rules 30 and 45 of the North Dakota Rules of			
	Civil Procedure, the Plaintiff, Virginia by and through her legal counsel,					
	Theresa deposition of the following	of & & and & & and Defendant:	P.C., hereby gives notice of taking a			
	Melissa Melissa ND 58					
[2]	The Subpoena to Appear,	, attached hereto,	commands and requires the Defendant to attend			
	the deposition of Melissa	a	t 9:00 a.m. (CST) on Tuesday, May 23, 20			
	at	located at	, Suite , I , ND			
	58 , before a Court Reporter in and for the State of North Dakota, at which time and					
	place you are notified to appear and take part in the examination as you may be advised.					
	The Deposition is schedu	led for and antici	pated to last no longer than two (2) hours.			

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Notice of Deposition of Defendant

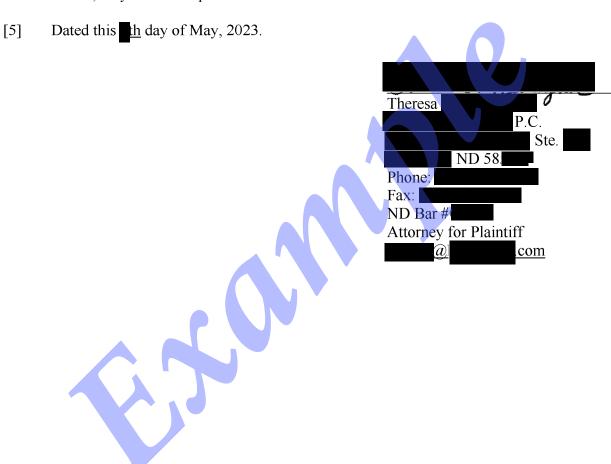


Example of Subpoena to Appear at a Deposition

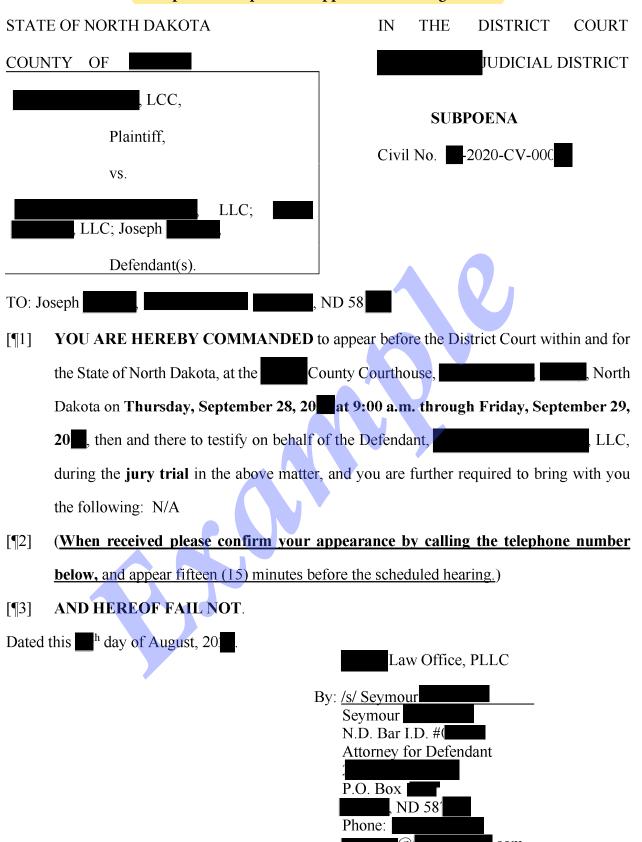
STAT	E OF NORTH DAKOTA IN DISTRICT COURT				
COUN	JUDICIAL DISTRICT				
Virgin) Case No. (1 -2023-CV-00				
	Plaintiff,) SUBPOENA TO APPEAR)				
	vs.)				
Meliss	Defendant.				
THE S	TATE OF NORTH DAKOTA TO: Melissa , ND 58				
[1]	PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that you are hereby commanded pursuant to Rules 30 and 4				
	of the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure, to appear at the deposition on the above				
	matter at 9:00 a.m. (CST) on Tuesday, May 23, 20 at a located				
	at Suite ND 58 , before a Court Reporter in				
	and for the State of North Dakota, at which time and place you are notified to appear and				
	take part in the examination as you may be advised. The Deposition is scheduled for and				
anticipated to last no longer than two (2) hours.					
<u>NOTICE</u>					
[2]	You may object to this Subpoena by mailing or delivering a written objection, stating your				
	valid reason, to Theresa of P.C. at				
	Suite , North Dakota 58 . Any objection must be received within ten (10)				
	days after you receive the Subpoena. If the time specified in the Subpoena for compliance				
	is less than ten (10) days, any objection must be received at least twenty-four (24) hours				
	before the time specified for compliance.				

Subpoena to Appear – Page 1 of 2

- [3] If you make a timely objection, you do not need to comply with this Subpoena unless the Court orders otherwise. You will be notified if the party serving the Subpoena seeks a court order compelling compliance with this Subpoena. You will then have the opportunity to contest enforcement.
- [4] Failure to obey this Subpoena, without making a timely objection, and stating a valid reason, may be contempt of court.

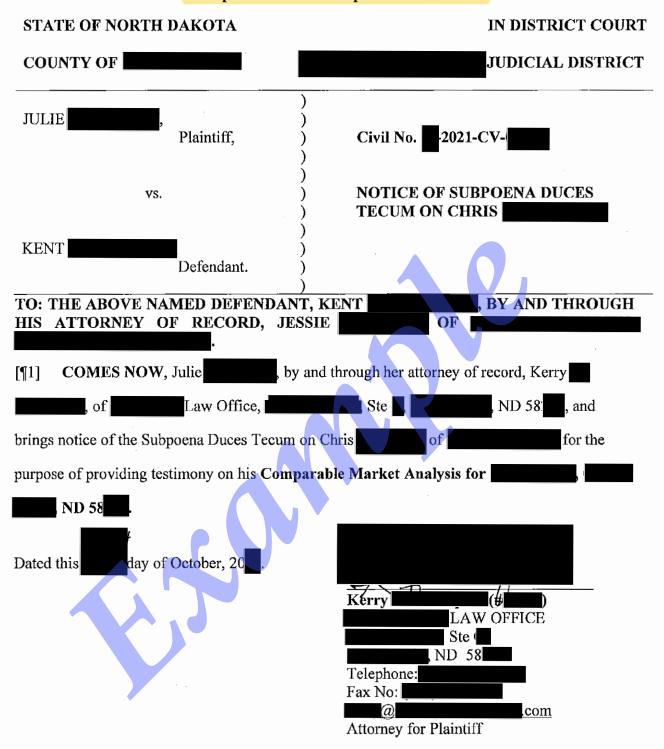


Example of a Subpoena to Appear at a Hearing or Trial

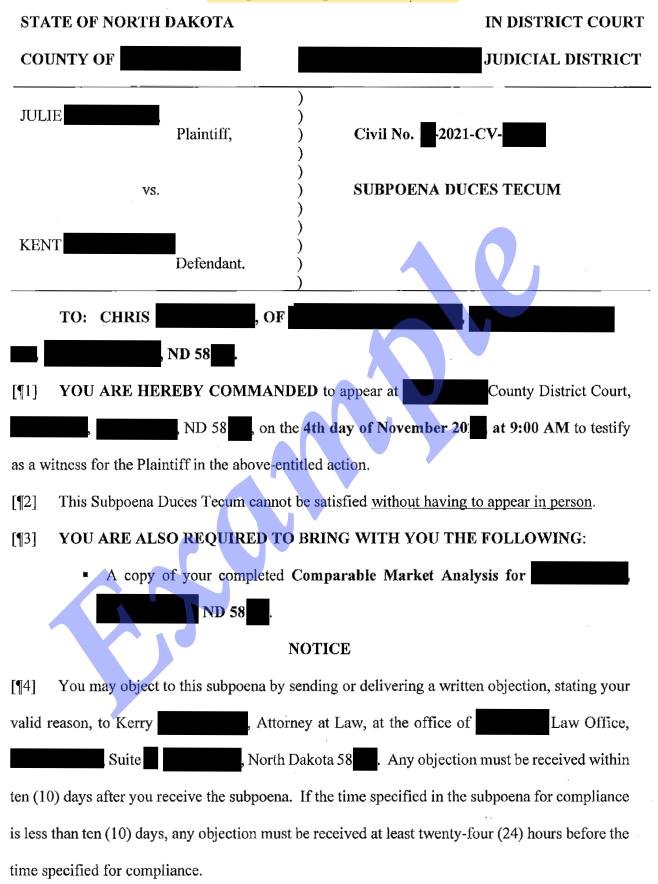


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Example of Notice of Subpoena Duces Tecum



Example of a Subpoena Duces Tecum



- [¶5] If you make a timely objection, you do not need to comply with this subpoena unless the Court orders otherwise. You will be notified if the party serving the subpoena seeks a court order compelling compliance with this subpoena. You will then have the opportunity to contest enforcement.
- [¶6] Failure to obey this subpoena, without making a timely objection, and stating a valid reason, may be contempt of court.

