

# 2004 Small Claims Report Card



## MICHIGAN

Overall Grade:

**D**

Dollar Limit (40%)	D
Self-Help (20%)	C
Convenience (10%)	F
Mediation (10%)	F
Expedited Collection (10%)	F
Injunctive Relief (10%)	F
<b>Overall Grade</b>	<b>D</b>

### About Michigan's Small Claims Court:

↓ Michigan's score on the report card was the seventh worst in the country.

↓ Only seven states have small claims dollar limits lower than Michigan's limit of \$3,000. Such a low limit makes it difficult for people to resolve everyday disputes in small claims court. A bill has been introduced in the state legislature to raise this limit to \$10,000.

↓ None of the Michigan courts surveyed by HALT employ small claims advisors—court employees whose primary job is to help people navigate the small claims system.

↓ None of the Michigan courts surveyed by HALT hold evening or weekend sessions, making it impossible for many people to use the courts without missing work.

↓ With one exception, none of the Michigan small claims courts surveyed by HALT offer mediation services to help people resolve their disputes amicably before facing a judge. Oakland County small claims courts offer this option only if the parties pay for it.

Compiled by

**HALT**

An Organization of  
Americans for Legal Reform

**HALT's Small Claims Report Card** compares and evaluates the state of small claims court systems around the country. HALT gathered information on each state's small claims courts between October 2003 and January 2004. Where information varied by county, HALT's evaluation is based upon a sample of five counties in each state—usually the three most populous counties and two randomly selected counties.

HALT used the following information to determine the grade for each category:

**Dollar Limit (40% of total grade):** What is the maximum amount for which one can sue in small claims court.

**Self-Help (20%):** Does the court use small claims advisors—court employees whose primary job is to help people navigate the small claims system? Does the court provide printed guides to the small claims process? Does the court provide fill-in-the-blank forms to assist people suing or being sued? Are attorneys prohibited? Can anyone other than an attorney represent people in court?

**Convenience (10%):** Does the court hold evening or weekend sessions? What is the court's filing fee?

**Mediation (10%):** Does the court provide mediation? Is mediation mandatory? Do the parties have to pay for mediation?

**Expedited Collection (10%):** If someone sues and wins, does the court have systems in place to help that person collect a judgment—such as requiring explanation of the collection process, providing penalties for late payment, and requiring losing defendants to give a statement of their assets to winning plaintiffs?

**Injunctive Relief (10%):** Does the court have the power to decide cases other than by awarding money, such as by ordering a party to do something or refrain from doing something?

More detailed grade calculation information can be found on HALT's web site, [www.halt.org](http://www.halt.org).

## About HALT

**HALT—An Organization of Americans for Legal Reform** pursues an education and advocacy program that challenges the legal establishment to improve access and reduce costs in the civil justice system. HALT is known for its extensive collection of self-help law books and its advocacy to hold the legal profession accountable.

**HALT's Small Claims Reform Project** publicizes the advantages of small claims courts, educates consumers about how to use these user-friendly courts, and advocates for systematic reforms that increase access to them. These reforms include:

- raising dollar limits to \$20,000;
- improving the process of collecting judgments;
- granting small claims judges the power to issue court orders, not just award money damages;
- restricting the use of lawyers in small claims courts;
- expanding small claims dispute resolution programs; and
- creating user-friendly courts by pushing for evening and weekend hours.

The Ten Best Small Claims Court Systems		The Ten Worst Small Claims Court Systems	
1) Georgia	6) Tennessee	1) Kentucky	7) Michigan
2) California	7) Wisconsin	2) Missouri	8) North Carolina
3) Colorado	8) Minnesota	3) Wyoming	9) Alabama
4) Utah	9) (tie) Alaska	4) Louisiana	10) (tie) Connecticut
5) New Mexico	9) (tie) New York	5) (tie) Indiana	10) (tie) Kansas
		5) (tie) Oklahoma	10) (tie) Massachusetts
			10) (tie) Rhode Island



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