



BUZZARD
— LAW FIRM —



FREE GUIDE · CIVIL LITIGATION

Sued, or Thinking About *Suing?*

What to do when you're served, the deadlines that can decide a case before it starts, and how civil cases move through North Carolina courts.

Buzzard Law Firm
728 S. Main St., Lillington, NC

910-893-2900
Civil litigation in Harnett County

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

In a lawsuit, the calendar can matter as much as the facts.

Whether you've just been served with a lawsuit or you're owed money, a contract was broken, or a dispute has gone nowhere, civil cases run on strict deadlines. Miss one, and you can lose by default or lose the right to sue at all.

North Carolina at a glance

30 days

to answer a complaint after you're served. The clerk can usually grant one 30-day extension if asked in time. N.C. R. Civ. P. 12(a), 6(b)

3 years

is the general deadline to sue on most contracts and many injury and property claims. N.C.G.S. § 1-52

\$10,000

and under: many claims can be heard in small claims court before a magistrate. N.C.G.S. § 7A-210

\$25,000

and under is generally district court; larger cases go to superior court. N.C.G.S. § 7A-243

IF YOU'VE BEEN SERVED

Seven steps for the first week

- 1 **Note the date you were served.** Your answer deadline runs from that date.
- 2 **Read the summons and complaint carefully:** who is suing, what they claim, and the court and file number.
- 3 **Don't ignore it.** If you don't respond, the other side can ask for a default judgment.
- 4 **Don't contact the other side** about the case without advice. What you say can become evidence.
- 5 **Preserve everything:** emails, texts, contracts, invoices, photos and records. Don't delete anything related to the dispute.
- 6 **Check your insurance.** Some policies cover the defense of certain claims; notify the insurer promptly.
- 7 **Talk to a lawyer** well before the deadline, so there's time to answer or request an extension.

IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT SUING

Questions to answer first

- ☐ **Is there a written agreement?** Contracts often control deadlines, notice requirements, attorney's fees or where a case is filed.
- ☐ **Can you prove what you're owed?** Invoices, payments, messages and witnesses matter.
- ☐ **Is the deadline still open?** Different claims have different limitation periods.
- ☐ **Can the other side pay?** A judgment is only as good as your ability to collect it.
- ☐ **Is there a faster way?** A demand letter, negotiation or mediation may resolve it without a trial.

THE PROCESS

How a civil case usually moves

Pleadings

The complaint is filed and served; the defendant answers or files motions.

Discovery

Each side exchanges documents, written questions and depositions.

Mediation

Superior court civil cases generally go to a mediated settlement conference.
N.C.G.S. § 7A-38.1

Trial

If the case doesn't settle, it's decided by a judge or jury.

Mistakes to avoid

- 01 Missing the answer deadline** and getting a default judgment.
- 02 Deleting texts, emails or files** about the dispute.
- 03 Venting on social media** about the other party.
- 04 Signing a settlement** without understanding what claims you're giving up.
- 05 Waiting too long to sue** and losing the claim to a limitation period.

ABOUT BUZZARD LAW FIRM

Trial lawyers for disputes that need to be resolved.

Buzzard Law Firm represents people and businesses in breach of contract, employment, real estate, landlord–tenant and construction disputes. Founder **Robert A. “Tony” Buzzard** is a Top 100 trial lawyer, and attorney **Rachel Hairr** also handles civil litigation.

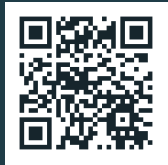
Litigation is usually a last resort, but when a case has to go to court, it helps to have lawyers who are comfortable in front of a judge and jury.



Talk to a lawyer before the deadline.

Call our Lillington office to schedule a consultation. Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

910-893-2900



Scan to request a consultation, or visit
buzzlawfirm.com/consult

728 S. Main St., Lillington, NC 27546

Attorney advertising. This guide provides general information about North Carolina and federal law as of its publication date. It is not legal advice, and reading it does not create an attorney–client relationship. Laws change and every case depends on its facts; talk to a lawyer about your situation. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome. © 2026 Buzzard Law Firm.

BRING THIS TO YOUR CONSULTATION

Dispute summary

The case	
DATE YOU WERE SERVED (IF SUED)	COURT AND COUNTY
FILE NUMBER	AMOUNT IN DISPUTE
OTHER PARTY (PERSON OR BUSINESS)	THEIR LAWYER, IF ANY
The dispute	
WHAT HAPPENED, IN ORDER, WITH APPROXIMATE DATES	
WHAT OUTCOME YOU WANT	
☐ Summons and complaint ☐ Contract or agreement ☐ Invoices and payments ☐ Emails and texts ☐ Photos ☐ Insurance policy ☐ Witness names	