HOW TO START A [CONTESTED](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/glossary.htm#contested) CASE

1) Fill out your complaint and other required documents.

2) **For TrueFiling Users:** Create a TrueFiling account and upload your complaint and all attachments as one “bundle.” See [ak-courts.info/tfhowto](https://courts.alaska.gov/efile/users.htm#guide-videos) for detailed instructions on using TrueFiling. Pay the filing fee within TrueFiling. If you cannot afford the fee, complete *Request for Exemption from Payment of Fees*, [TF-920](http://www.courtrecords.alaska.gov/webdocs/forms/tf-920.pdf).

**For Non-TrueFiling Users:** Make two copies of the complaint and all attachments – one for you and one for the other party. File the **original** complaint and all attachments at the courthouse and pay the [filing fee](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/courtfees.htm). If you cannot afford the fee, complete *Request for Exemption from Payment of Fees*, [TF-920](http://www.courtrecords.alaska.gov/webdocs/forms/tf-920.pdf).

3. The clerk will open your case with your complaint*.* The clerk will issue a [Summons](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/glossary.htm#summons) and sometimes a [Standing Order](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/glossary.htm#standing). You will also be given a case number. If you filed for a *Request for Exemption from Payment of Fees*, the procedure may be different. Check with your local court.

4. **Serve** the other party, which means delivering a copy of everything you filed with the court. Serve the other party with

* a copy of the complaint and all attachments that you filed, and
* the summons, and
* the standing order (if there is one).

Serve these documents by certified mail, with restricted delivery and return receipt, **or** by a process server. See <http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/serve.htm> or *How to Serve a Summons*, [CIV-106](http://www.courtrecords.alaska.gov/webdocs/forms/civ-106.pdf), for more information.

5. Now you wait. The other party has 20 days after being served (40 days if they were served outside the United States) to file a response, called an “answer.” If you get the green card or other receipt for certified mail back from the post office, keep it in a safe place. If you used a process server, keep their return of service in a safe place. Either of these documents is called a “proof of service.”

After 20 days pass from the date the other party was served (this is the date signed for on the certified mail receipt from the post office, or indicated as served on the return of service from the process server) and the other party does **not** file an answer, you may file for a[default.](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/glossary.htm#default) This means you are going to finish your case without the other party being involved. For more information, read the [default section](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/shcdefault.htm).

If the other party files an answer, the case will go forward as a contested matter and be set on for trial.

**THINGS TO REMEMBER:**

1. Always serve the other party with copies of everything you file in court. Once the case is open, service is different than in Step 4 above. Read more at [ak-courts.info/tfservice](https://courts.alaska.gov/efile/faq.htm#other-party).
2. Always have your case number handy when calling the court so that court staff can help you more quickly.
3. Keep your *Proof of Service* in a safe place.

For more information, call the Family Law Self-Help Center’s Helpline (907) 264-0851 or (866) 279-0851 (outside of Anchorage) or visit [ak-courts.info/family](http://courts.alaska.gov/shc/family/selfhelp.htm).