



Superior Court of New Jersey - Law Division

How to Apply for a Court Order Directing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to Issue Title for a Vehicle

Who Should Use This Packet?

USE this packet:

If you are the purchaser of a motor vehicle who is **not** the titled owner and the titled owner (or seller) refuses to or is unable to convey title.

DO NOT use this packet if:

- (1) You are seeking title to an abandoned motor vehicle; or
- (2) The titled owner to the motor vehicle has lost or destroyed the title, or the title was stolen, and you are seeking a duplicate title in the same name as the prior title.

For these situations, contact the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (NJMVC) for a self-help packet to guide you through obtaining title.

Note: These materials have been prepared by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts for use by self-represented litigants. The guides, instructions, and forms will be periodically updated as necessary to reflect current New Jersey statutes and court rules. The most recent version of the [forms](#) will be available at the county courthouse or on the Judiciary's Internet site njcourts.gov. However, you are ultimately responsible for the content of your court papers.

Completed forms are to be submitted to the county where you are filing your case. They can be submitted via Judiciary Electronic Document System (JEDS), the mail, or in person (attorneys must file electronically via eCourts). Documents will be filed as of the date they are received.

Things to Think About Before You Represent Yourself in Court

Try to Get a Lawyer

The court system can be confusing, and it is a good idea to get a lawyer if you can. The law, the proofs necessary to present your case, and the procedural rules governing cases in the Law Division, Civil Part are complex. It is recommended that you make every effort to obtain the assistance of a lawyer. If you cannot afford a lawyer, you may contact the legal services program in your county to see if you qualify for free legal services. Their telephone number can be found online or in your local yellow pages under "Legal Aid" or "[Legal Services](#)."

If you do not qualify for free legal services and need help in locating an attorney, you can contact the bar association in your county. That number can also be found in your local yellow pages. Most county bar associations have a [Lawyer Referral Service](#). The County Bar Lawyer Referral Service can supply you with the names of attorneys in your area willing to handle your particular type of case and will sometimes consult with you at a reduced fee. There are also organizations of minority lawyers throughout New Jersey, as well as organizations of lawyers who handle specialized types of cases. Ask your county court staff for a list of lawyer referral services that include these organizations.

If you decide to proceed without an attorney, these materials explain the procedures that must be followed to have your papers properly filed and considered by the court. These materials do not provide information on the law governing your claims or defenses; information on the kinds of evidence you need to prove your claim; or information on other procedural and evidentiary rules governing civil lawsuits.

What You Should Expect If You Represent Yourself

While you have the right to represent yourself in court, you should not expect special treatment, help or attention from the court. The following is a list of some things court staff can and cannot do for you. Please read it carefully before asking court staff for help.

- We *can* explain and answer questions about how the court works.
- We *can* tell you what the requirements are to have your case considered by the court.
- We *can* give you some information from your case file.
- We *can* provide you with samples of court forms that are available.
- We *can* provide you with guidance on how to fill out forms.
- We *can* usually answer questions about court deadlines.
- We *cannot* give you legal advice. Only your lawyer can give you legal advice.
- We *cannot* tell you whether or not you should bring your case to court.
- We *cannot* give you an opinion about what will happen if you bring your case to court.
- We *cannot* recommend a lawyer, but we can provide you with the telephone number of a local lawyer referral service.
- We *cannot* talk to the judge for you about what will happen in your case.
- We *cannot* let you talk to the judge outside of court.
- We *cannot* change an order issued by a judge.

Keep Copies of All Papers

Make and keep copies of all completed forms and documents related to your case.

Overview

The Court does not have the authority to issue title. There are five (5) basic steps that you must follow to seek an order from the court to declare you the bona fide owner of a motor vehicle. Once the court issues an order declaring you the bona fide owner of the motor vehicle, you must then apply for title through the NJMVC.

1. Complete the following forms and send them to the court with a \$300 filing fee.
 - a. The forms are contained in this packet and include: (1) Verified Complaint; (2) Order to Show Cause (complete only the top portion above the words "THIS MATTER," the court will complete the rest). Include your best contact information including cell phone number and email address, if possible; and
 - b. A checklist is included for the remaining required items.
2. The court will return a filed copy of the Verified Complaint and Order to Show Cause with a docket number. The Order to Show Cause will have a specified time, date, and location for a court appearance.
3. **You must send a copy of the filed Order to Show Cause and Verified Complaint (copies that contain the docket number) to the Motor Vehicle Commission, Attorney General, and any other party(s) required by the court, via regular and certified mail, return receipt requested.**
4. Proof of service will be required by the court. Complete and sign the *Certification of Service* that explains how and when you sent the forms to the other parties. You must also provide a copy of the front and back of the green certified return signature receipt for each party served.
5. Appear at court on the specified date and time in the filed Order to Show Cause.

Definitions of Words Used in This Packet

Certification – A certification is a written statement you make when you file your papers with the court in which you state that all the information contained in the papers is true to the best of your knowledge.

Docket Number - A docket number is the number the court assigns to your case so that it may be identified and located easily. Once you have a docket number, you must include it on all your communications with the court.

File - To file means to give the appropriate, completed and signed forms and fee to the court to begin the court's consideration of your case.

Final Judgment - The final judgment is a document signed by the judge which orders the name to be changed.

Lien Holder– A lien is a type of property claim. As related to a motor vehicle, a lien holder is a lending institution that holds title until the vehicle is paid for in full.

Order to Show Cause – An order from the court directing parties to appear at a specified time to present evidence related to the relief a party is seeking. As related to motor vehicle title, an order directing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission and Attorney General to present evidence related to your filing that seeks title to a motor vehicle.

Proof of Mailing - Proof of mailing is the green card you get back from the Post Office that proves that the material you sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, was received by the person to whom you sent it.

Pro Se - *Pro se* is a Latin term that means “on one’s own behalf.” A plaintiff or defendant in a lawsuit who does not have an attorney is said to be appearing *pro se*.

Return Date – the date indicated within the filed order to show cause that the court schedules for the parties to appear at court to determine whether to order the relief sought.

Verified Complaint - A verified complaint is a document in which you tell the court the facts of your case and state what relief you want the court to give you. You certify that the information is true to the best of your knowledge.

Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) – a unique code made up of 17 numbers and letters that identifies a vehicle.

The numbered steps listed below tell you what forms you will need to fill out and what to do with them. Each form should be typed or printed clearly on 8 ½ "x 11" white paper only. Forms may not be filed on a different size or color paper.

Steps to Obtain an Order Directing NJMVC to Issue Title

STEP 1: Complete the *Verified Complaint for Declaration of Ownership of Motor Vehicle* and top part of the *Order to Show Cause*

The *Verified Complaint for Declaration of Ownership of Motor Vehicle* explains to the court that you are in possession of the motor vehicle, how you got possession of the motor vehicle, why you cannot get title from the prior owner, and what efforts you have made to obtain title. Include specific details when completing this form. You should complete the caption (top portion) of the Order to Show Cause. This is the title of the case and your contact information. The bottom part of Order to Show Cause (starting where it reads "THIS MATTER") must be left blank and will be completed by the court.

STEP 2: Make your check or money order payable to *Treasurer State of New Jersey* in the amount of \$300.

The \$300 filing fee is made up of a \$250 complaint fee and a \$50 order to show cause fee.

Checklist: In Step 4 you will be directed to file your papers with the court.

Also attach:

_____ Detailed certification regarding how you obtained the vehicle and the issues you are having in obtaining title to the vehicle. Provide a copy of any documents you received from NJMVC directing you to file this court action.

_____ NJMVC Lien and Title Search - NOTE: This must be obtained directly from NJMVC. Searches may take several weeks to process. Request the search immediately to avoid delays with this application. In the event the car is titled out of state, you must obtain a lien/title owner search from the State where the vehicle titled.

_____ Copy of Bill of Sale/Proof of Purchase/Photo of the VIN

_____ VIN Search or other evidence evidencing vehicle was not stolen or salvaged – NOTE: This can be obtained through the local or State police. There is also an online VIN search tool by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) (<https://www.nicb.org/vincheck>).

_____ VIN etching or clear photograph of VIN

STEP 3: File your papers with the court.

You can file using the Judiciary Electronic Document Submission (JEDS), through mail, or by delivery. If you are filing by mail or delivery, send to the court the original and one copy of all the forms: Verified Complaint and Order to Show Cause along with a self-addressed stamped envelope and the filing fee. The court address can be found on the Judiciary's website, njcourts.gov. If you mail the papers, we recommend that you use certified mail, return receipt requested.

STEP 4: Request a Motor Vehicle Lien and Title Search from the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (NJMVC).

The NJMVC provides a form Title/Lien Search Request for all vehicle titles in New Jersey. All searches must be made directly through the NJMVC using their form available online at: <https://www.nj.gov/mvc/vehicles/liens.htm>. Provide the results to the court and include your docket

number. You can send them to the court through JEDS, through mail, or by delivery to the courthouse. Be sure to keep a copy for your records.

If the vehicle is titled outside of New Jersey, you must obtain a title and prior owner search from the motor vehicle agency of the State in which the vehicle is titled.

STEP 5: Send copies of the filed documents to the appropriate parties by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested.

The court will return to you a stamped filed *Verified Complaint* and *Order to Show Cause* with a docket number. The *Order to Show Cause* will set forth a date for when the parties are to appear at court. Send a copy of the *Order to Show Cause and Verified Complaint* (with the docket number) to the parties listed in the Certification of Service: the former owner/seller, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission, and any lien holders listed in the results of the Motor Vehicle Lien and Title Search. **Send these documents by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested.**

If you cannot serve the former owner/seller by delivering a copy of the papers (either in person or through the mail), complete the *Newspaper Notice* and send it to a newspaper of general circulation in the county where the former owner resides. The newspaper notice must be published for 3 consecutive weeks. The *Newspaper Notice* must be certified by the publisher and then filed with the court.

STEP 6: Complete the *Certification of Service*.

Fill out the *Certification of Service* and state the parties and addresses where you sent the documents. File the *Certification* with the court using the JEDS, through mail, or by delivery to the courthouse.

STEP 7: Attend court on the return date set by the court in the filed *Order to Show Cause*.

Bring with you to court the Bill of Sale/Proof of Purchase and a clear photo of the VIN of the motor vehicle.

Complaint and Proposed Form of Order for Action Seeking Title to Motor Vehicle

These forms are to be used **only** when a person seeking to obtain title to a motor vehicle has been instructed by the legal department at the Motor Vehicle Commission that a court order is necessary. Most requests for title can be handled through the agency procedures at the MVC. The number for the Motor Vehicle Commission's Special Title Unit is 609-292-6500, ext. 5064.

Plaintiff or Filing Attorney Information:

Name _____
NJ Attorney ID Number _____
Address _____

Telephone Number _____ ext. _____
Email Address _____

I/M/O OWNERSHIP OF

Year, Make, Model

VIN Number of Vehicle

Superior Court of New Jersey
____ Division, _____ Part
____ County
Docket Number: _____

**Verified Complaint for Declaration
of Ownership of Motor Vehicle**

Plaintiff, _____, residing at:
_____, SAYS:

1. I have been in continuous possession of _____ vehicle,
VIN: _____ for the past _____. During that time the vehicle was not in
use.
2. I acquired possession of the above-described vehicle in the following manner:

3. I cannot obtain a title from the previous owner of the vehicle or the New Jersey Motor Vehicle
because:

4. I made a diligent effort to locate the owner of the vehicle including initiating a Motor Vehicle
Commission search to locate the owner of the vehicle. This effort (check one)
 failed to locate the former owner/ located the former owner. I have attached the results of
that search to my verified complaint.
5. I have checked with the local/State police/ National Insurance Crime Bureau and have confirmed
that the above-referenced vehicle has not been reported as stolen. Attached is a copy of the
report received.
6. I want to restore the vehicle to running condition and to register and insure it for operation on the
road.

7. I have been instructed by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to obtain a court order declaring me the owner of this vehicle so that title may be issued to me.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff asks the Court to consider the evidence presented and declare ownership of the vehicle in my name.

Date

Signature

Print Name

Verifying Certification

I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are false, I am subject to punishment.

Date

Signature

Print Name

Attachments:

1. Certification of Inquiry effort to locate the owner
2. Negative stolen vehicle report

Plaintiff or Filing Attorney Information:

Name _____

NJ Attorney ID Number _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____ ext. _____

Email Address _____

I/M/O OWNERSHIP OF

Year, Make, Model

VIN Number of Vehicle

Superior Court of New Jersey
____ Division, _____ Part
____ County

Docket Number: _____

**Civil Action
Judgment Directing Title to Issue**

THIS MATTER having been brought before the court on the application by _____, to be declared the owner of _____ vehicle, VIN: _____ and the court having considered the testimony and evidence submitted and being satisfied that a diligent searches for the true owner and the title have been made, and being further satisfied that, if a lien has been found, Plaintiff has been unable to obtain a lien satisfaction, and having considered the absence of objection to the relief requested by any party claiming a superior interest and being satisfied that Plaintiff is entitled to have title to the above-described vehicle issued directly to them.

It is **ORDERED**, this ____ day of _____, 20__, that:

1. _____ to be declared the owner of _____ vehicle, VIN: _____.
2. The declared owner shall pay to New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission all appropriate statutory fees.

Judge of the Superior Court

Plaintiff or Filing Attorney Information:

Name _____
NJ Attorney ID Number _____
Address _____

Telephone Number _____ ext. _____
Email Address _____

I/M/O OWNERSHIP OF

Year, Make, Model

VIN Number of Vehicle

Superior Court of New Jersey
____ Division, _____ Part
____ County
Docket Number: _____

**Civil Action
Order to Show Cause**

THIS MATTER having been opened to the Court by _____, appearing pro se, on notice to the Motor Vehicle Commission, the Attorney General’s Office, and _____, and the Court having reviewed the pleadings submitted by Plaintiff in support of the Order to Show Cause, and the Court having considered the equities and relief request by Plaintiff(s), and for good cause shown:

It is on this ____ day of _____, 20__, **ORDERED** that:

1. The Motor Vehicle Commission, the Attorney General’s Office, _____, and any other person or entity claiming title to or an interest in a motor vehicle described as: _____ vehicle, VIN: _____, show cause before the Superior Court, _____ Division, at the _____ County Civil Courthouse at: _____, on the ____ day of _____, 20__, at _____ am/ pm why an order should not be entered in favor of the Plaintiff declaring the Plaintiff as the owner of the aforementioned motor vehicle and directing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to issue title therefore.
2. A copy of this Order to Show Cause and the Verified Complaint be served upon the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission, the Attorney General’s Office, and any other party who may claim title to or have an interest in the aforementioned vehicle within ____ days of the date hereof. Said service to be made by certified mail, return receipt requested, and by regular mail, or by personal service.
3. If the Plaintiff is unable to serve by personal or substituted service, then the Plaintiff shall cause a Notice to be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which Plaintiff lives once per week for three consecutive weeks within ____ days of the date hereof.
4. A person or entity claiming title to or an interest in the aforementioned vehicle shall serve and file an Answer, answering affidavit or motion within ____ days of the date of service by the Plaintiff of the aforesaid papers; and

5. If a person or entity claiming title to or an interest in the aforementioned vehicle fails to serve and file an Answer, within the time set forth herein, judgment by default may be entered against him or her for the relief sought in the Verified Complaint.
6. The Plaintiff must file with the court their proof of service of the pleadings on the defendant(s) no later than three (3) days before the return date.
7. Take notice that the Plaintiff has filed a lawsuit in the Superior Court of New Jersey seeking title to a motor vehicle. The verified complaint attached to this order to show cause states the basis of the lawsuit. If you dispute this complaint, you, or your attorney, must file a written answer, an answering affidavit or a motion returnable on the return date to the order to show cause and proof of service before the return date of the order to show cause.

These documents must be filed with the Clerk of the Superior Court in the county listed above. A directory of these offices is available in the Civil Division Management Office in the county listed above and online at njcourts.gov. Include a \$_____ filing fee payable to the *Treasurer State of New Jersey*. You must also send a copy of your answer, answering affidavit or motion to the Plaintiff's attorney whose name and address appear above, or to the Plaintiff, if no attorney is named above. A telephone call will not protect your rights; you must file and serve your answer, answering affidavit or motion with the fee or judgment may be entered against you by default.

8. If you cannot afford an attorney, you may call the Legal Services office in the county in which you live or the Legal Services of New Jersey Statewide Hotline at 1-888-LSNJ-LAW (1-888-576-5529). If you do not have an attorney and are not eligible for free legal assistance, you may obtain a referral to an attorney by calling one of the Lawyer Referral Services. A directory with contact information for local Legal Services Offices and Lawyer Referral Services is available in the Civil Division Management Office in the county listed above and online at njcourts.gov.

Judge of the Superior Court

Plaintiff or Filing Attorney Information:

Name _____

NJ Attorney ID Number _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____ ext. _____

Email Address _____

I/M/O OWNERSHIP OF

Year, Make, Model

VIN Number of Vehicle

Superior Court of New Jersey

Division, _____ Part

County

Docket Number: _____

**Civil Action
Certification of Service**

On _____ I served copies of the Order to Show Cause and Verified Complaint on:

Former Owner:

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex
25 Market St., P.O. Box 80
Trenton, NJ 08625

New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission
Special Title Unit
P.O. Box 017
Trenton, NJ 08666

Lien Holder (if any)

by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested. I also published a notice once for three consecutive weeks

on _____ in _____ newspaper, as evidenced by the attached affidavit of publication.

I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are false, I am subject to punishment.

Date

Signature

Print Name

Newspaper Notice

(Use if personal or substituted service cannot be made on the putative/former owner)

Newspaper Name _____

Address _____

I/M/O OWNERSHIP OF

Year, Make, Model

VIN Number of Vehicle

Please take notice that the Court has established _____ as the return date of hearing for an Order to Show Cause, sought by Plaintiff, _____, wherein I am seeking an Order directing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to issue Certificate of Title to the above-described vehicle in my name.

Objection to this application must be sent to the Court at the following address:

Court Name _____

Court Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Your Name _____

Your Address _____

City, State, Zip _____