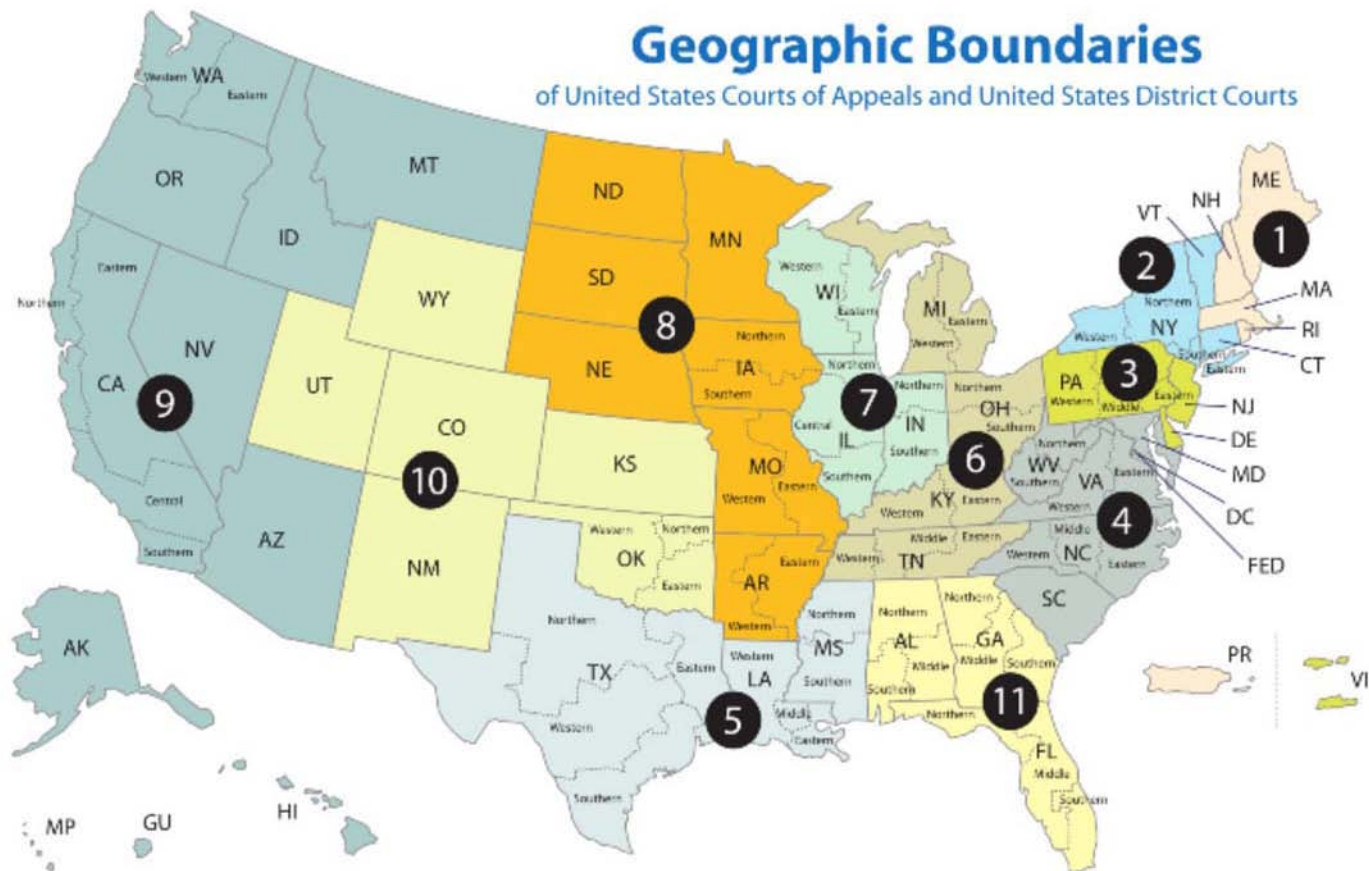


Federal Court System

The Federal Court System consists of three tiers: trial courts called U.S. District Courts, appeals courts called U.S. Courts of Appeal and the U.S. Supreme Court.

U.S. District Courts

There is at least one U.S. District Court in each state. The number of courts depends on the population of the state.



U.S. District Courts

U.S. District Courts are where lawsuits in the Federal System begin.

In order to have a case heard in this court you need one of two things:

- Diversity of Citizenship + a claim for at least \$75,000

Or

- A Federal Question

Diversity of Citizenship + \$75,000

Diversity of Citizenship means that all of the plaintiffs are citizens of different states than all of the defendants. The \$75,000 requirement means that the lawsuit is being brought for at least \$75,000

For example, could this lawsuit be heard in Federal Court?

Plaintiffs

Betty – NY

Bob – NY

Peter – Penn

Defendant

American Air - NY

Diversity of Citizenship + \$75,000

Plaintiffs

Betty – NY

Bob – NY

Peter – Penn

Defendant

American Air - NY

No, this lawsuit could not be heard in Federal Court. Bob and Betty are from the same state as the Defendant, American Air, so there is no diversity. It does not matter how much money the lawsuit involves. This lawsuit would have to be heard in state court.

Federal Question

The second option for a lawsuit beginning in Federal Court is to have a controversy that includes a question arising from the U.S. Constitution.

For example, a lawsuit involving a First Amendment right such as freedom of speech or religion could be heard in Federal Court. It does not matter what amount of money is involved, only that there is a constitutional issue.

U.S. Court of Appeals

There are 13 Courts of Appeals in the U.S.

If you lose in the U.S. District Court you may appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals. These courts are concerned only with issues of law, not fact. The losing party can appeal to them only if he or she can show that an error was made in the trial court judge's application of the law.

U.S. Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court is the nation's highest court. It is located in Washington D.C.

The U.S. Supreme Court can hear appeals from all U.S. Courts of Appeals as well as from each state's highest courts, as long as a questions of federal law of U.S. Constitution is involved.