

## What is a "Guardian Ad Litem"?

A Guardian Ad Litem or "GAL" is someone the Judge chooses to help a person who cannot come to court or protect their rights.

## What does a GAL do?



In Housing Court, GALs work to help the person they are appointed to represent solve their Court case. This includes going to Court, getting help from agencies that offer services the person needs, and trying to work out an agreement with the landlord that protects the person's rights.

## What do I do if I think I, or someone I know, needs a GAL?

Tell the Judge! If the case has not been assigned to a Judge, tell the Clerk's Office.

## What should I do if I think I do not need a GAL but the Judge or someone else thinks I do?

Tell the Judge why you think you do not need a GAL.

## If the Court appoints a GAL for me, does that mean that the Judge believes that I am not competent?

No. When a Judge appoints a GAL, it is because the Judge thinks you cannot defend your rights and protect your interests by yourself.

## Can a GAL recommend a solution that I do not agree with?

Yes. While a GAL must think about your wishes before making a recommendation to the Judge, he or she may believe that your wishes are not in your best interest and recommend a solution you may not agree with. It is up to the Judge to decide.



## Does a GAL have the right to get involved in my personal affairs?

A GAL does not have the legal power to manage your personal affairs. He or she is simply responsible for helping you resolve your Housing Court case.

## What are examples of things a GAL cannot do?

A GAL cannot:

- let someone in to your apartment (only the Judge can order you to let someone in)
- sign papers for you to get back benefits
- agree for you to 1. remove a pet from your apartment, or 2. not allow a family member stay in your apartment, without the Judge's approval

## When does the GAL's work in my case end?

Before the GAL's work in a case can end, the GAL must:

- make sure the landlord completes any needed repairs
- apply and follow-up with DSS or charities to get help to pay any rent owed, or
- take any steps needed to make sure that you are able to follow through with your Court agreement

Once your case is over and you and the landlord have done what your Court agreement (settlement) states, the GAL's work in your case should end.

**If the Court appoints a GAL for me, what should I expect the GAL to do to help me in my Housing Court case?**

**GALs must:**

- **try to meet with you, either in court or at your home, if you cannot come to court**
- **speak with you about your case and find out what you would you like to see happen in your case**
- **find out whether you have any legal defenses or whether you may qualify for any social services that could help solve your case**
- **recommend a solution to the Judge that considers your wishes and is in your best interest**
- **tell the Judge if you agree or disagree with the solution he or she is recommending so that the Judge knows how you feel.**

**What if the GAL does not do any of these things?**



**You have the right to tell the Judge if the GAL does not do any of these things. Only the Judge has the power to tell the GAL what to do or to remove a GAL, if there is a problem.**

**Civil Court Locations**

Bronx County Civil Court  
1118 Grand Concourse  
Bronx, NY 10456

Kings County Civil Court  
141 Livingston Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

New York County Civil Court  
111 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10013

Queens County Civil Court  
89-17 Sutphin Boulevard  
Jamaica, NY 11435

Richmond County Civil Court  
927 Castleton Avenue  
Staten Island, NY 10310

Harlem Community Justice Center  
170 East 121<sup>st</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10035

**HON. FERN A. FISHER**  
**Deputy Chief Administrative Judge**  
**New York City Courts**  
**Director, New York State Courts Access to Justice Programs**



**The Judge says I need a**

**GUARDIAN**

**Ad**

**LITEM**

**(GAL)**

**What does that mean?**

