
§ 5.2

Court Titles

Local Jurisdictions

Every state and federal jurisdiction is made up of trial and appellate courts. The titles and numbers of the courts vary. There are local trial courts, statewide trial courts, and federal trial courts. All serve the same purpose: to hear evidence, apply the law, and reach a verdict. Local courts (such as county courts) usually hear matters involving smaller amounts of money or minor criminal infractions. Statewide trial courts consider more substantial suits with claims above a minimum set by state statute, as well as more serious criminal offenses.

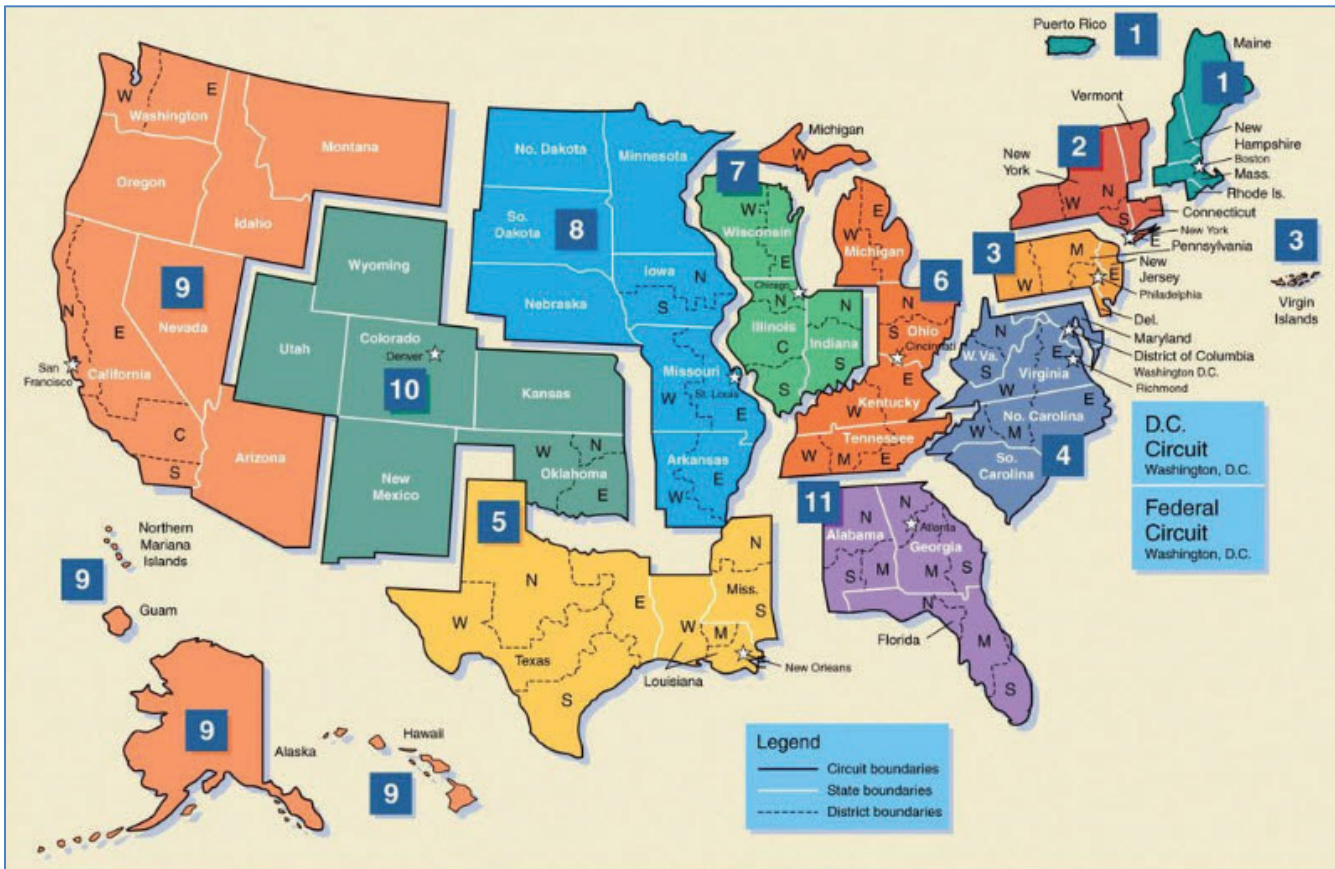
Federal Court Titles

A federal trial court is always called a *United States District Court*. Every state has at least one district, and many states have multiple federal districts. For example, because of its relatively low population, Colorado has only one federal district, the District of Colorado (abbreviated D. Colo.).

North Carolina, however, has three federal districts: the Eastern District of North Carolina (E.D.N.C.), the Middle District of North Carolina (M.D.N.C.), and the Western District of North Carolina (W.D.N.C.).

There is one intermediate federal appellate court, the United States Courts of Appeal, organized into 13 circuits (11 geographical circuits, the D.C. Circuit, and the Federal Circuit).

Federal Circuits are collections of federal Districts. For instance, the Districts of Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, Kansas, and Wyoming collectively form the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Any appeal from those federal trial courts must be brought to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals.



United States Federal Circuits (with associated United States Districts)

State Court Titles

Most states have two courts at the appellate-level. The first (sometimes referred to as an intermediate appellate level court) is usually titled a court of appeals, such as the Colorado Court of Appeals.

The upper level appellate court is usually called a supreme court, such as the New Mexico Supreme Court. A few states refer to the highest court by other titles, such as the highest court in New York, which is titled the New York Court of Appeals.

A few states have only one appellate level court, the state supreme court. In those states, any appeal from the trial level must proceed directly to the state supreme court. Since every case has an automatic right to at least one appeal, a very heavy burden is borne by those tribunals.

To locate the titles and structure of courts in your state, simply login to the Internet and Google the following search query: state court system in (your state)