

How to Appeal Your Ticket in Chicago

Getting a ticket can be expensive and frustrating, with unpaid tickets leading to many problems down the road (higher premiums, vehicle impoundment, license suspensions). Luckily **67%** of contested tickets from the 20th ward are thrown out after an administrative hearing. In this document you will find information about the process of appealing your ticket, and what steps to take to ensure you have the best chances of winning your appeal.

The Appeal Timeline:

There are multiple different time windows and notices within the process of appealing a ticket, and they can be hard to keep track of. This timeline should help you keep track of whether you are still eligible to submit your appeal.

- Day 0: This is the date the ticket was issued, referred to as the first Notice of Violation.
- Day 7: If your appeal has not been received by this date, you will receive a second Notice of Violation.
- Day 21: If your appeal has still not been received by this date, you will receive a Notice of Determination. This is a notification that you have been ruled as liable by default. You can still petition this judgement by appearing in person within 21 days of this notice.
- Day 42: If you have appeared in person to petitioned the default decision by this date, then you have fully forfeited your rights to appeal the ticket. You are officially deemed liable and the full penalty of the fine will be attributed to you.

Appealing by Mail:

You have the option to appeal your ticket by mail as long as it will be received within 21 days of the first Notice of Violation (see *The Appeal Timeline*). To have the best chances of winning your appeal, your mailed statement should include the following:

1. A formal letter with facts that establish your defense (see *Building Your Statement*)
 - a. Keep the letter concise but make sure to include all relevant details
2. Include complete and legible copies of your evidence
 - a. Evidence might include: photographs, affidavits, your registration, official vehicle theft or recovery reports, or any other relevant documents
 - b. Include your 10 digit ticket number on each item of evidence
 - c. Your evidence will not be returned so make sure to send copies
3. Use the envelope from your ticket or a Notice of Violation, they are pre-addressed
 - a. Fill in the bubble indicating “Contest By Mail”
 - b. If using the Notice of Violation envelope, include the stub of your ticket
 - c. If you do not have any of these envelopes the address can be found in *Appendix.A*

Appealing in Person:

If you wish to appeal your ticket in person, you have 21 days to request a hearing. There are three ways you can request an in person hearing:

1. Call the City of Chicago's Ticket Helpline (312-755-7275)
2. Submit your request online (<https://erequest.cityofchicago.org/EHearingWeb/home.do>)
3. Mail your request to the Department of Finance
 - a. Fill in the bubble indicating "In-person Hearing"
 - b. If using the Notice of Violation envelope, include the stub of your ticket
 - c. If you do not have any of these envelopes the address can be found in *Appendix.A*

You will receive a notice in postal mail with a window of time you may arrive for your hearing. This will be the first date of a week, you may appear any day of that week where the hearing facility is open (hours included in *Appendix.B*). When you appear for your hearing, make sure to bring all relevant evidence.

You can think of traffic court hearings in Chicago as informal trials held by hearing officers that act as judges. The judge will present the city's case first, arguing why you should be considered guilty for this violation given information from a police officer or traffic camera. After they finish, the judge will ask you to present your defense (see *Building Your Statement*). Follow these guidelines to present your case effectively:

1. Rehearse your statement ahead of time
2. Remember to address the judge formally, use "Your Honor" or "sir/ma'am"
3. Be respectful to all court staff
4. Do not interrupt other speakers
5. Dress formally

If the hearing officer does not rule in your favor, you do have the right to appeal to a judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County within 35 days of your hearing.

Building Your Statement:

You can think of receiving a ticket as a police officer charging you with a violation, where the act of appealing the ticket is you defending yourself to a hearing officer. The hearing officer will hear from the officer accusing you of the violation, as well as your defense of their accusations. The judge decides the status of your appeal on the soundness of your defense, so it's important to build it carefully. Here are some tips to build the best statement for your appeal:

1. Start your statement by introducing yourself and stating your intent

eg: "Your Honor, my name is _____ and I am here today to contest citation # _____ which I received on _____."

2. Use an allowable defense for your violation

- a. The Municipal Code of Chicago has a list of allowed defenses depending on your violation. For your appeal to be considered, quote one of these defenses.

- i. For a list of defenses applicable for most traffic tickets, see *Appendix.C*
- ii. To see a complete list of defenses, go to <https://www.chicago.gov/> and search for "contesting tickets"

eg: "I'm contesting this citation because _____."

- b. Most of these defenses are reasons why the violation is not applicable. Elaborate why the violation is not applicable to you and support it using evidence.

eg: "I could not have known I was parked illegally, the relevant signs were obstructed by a tree. Let me direct your attention to this photograph..."

3. Dispute or introduce doubt on the claims made against you

- a. You are innocent until proven guilty, which means the city must clear a burden of evidence to find you guilty. You can dispute the claim by introducing uncertainty on the officer's testimony.

eg: "The officer did not have a sufficient view of my car because of _____"

- b. Police officers are generally given benefit of the doubt, so having evidence to support your claim is essential

eg: A picture or diagram of the demonstrating some obstruction

4. Close by thanking the judge

eg: "Thank you for your time, I appreciate your consideration on this matter."

Appendix:

A. Address to mail your ticket appeal:^[1]

City of Chicago
Department of Finance
P.O. Box 88292
Chicago, IL 60680-1292

B. Operating hours of hearing facilities:^[1]

NOTE: Hearing facilities will be closed on legal City holidays

Neighborhood Hearing Facilities:
2006 E. 95th Street
4445 N. Pulaski
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM (Monday - Friday)

Central Hearing Facility:
400 W. Superior Street
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM (Monday - Friday)
Boot Hearings:
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM (Saturdays)

C. A list of defenses for most parking and compliance tickets^[1]

NOTE: Find a complete list at <https://www.chicago.gov/> and search for “contesting tickets”

1. The respondent was not the owner or lessee of the cited vehicle at the time of the violation;
2. The cited vehicle or its state registration plates (license plates) were stolen at the time of the violation;
3. The relevant signs prohibiting or restricting parking were missing or obscured;
4. The relevant parking meter was inoperable or malfunctioned through no fault of the respondent;
5. The facts alleged in the parking or compliance violation notice are inconsistent or do not support a finding that the specified regulation was violated (e.g., motorists may contest a city sticker violation if they have resided in Chicago for less than 30 days or the cited vehicle was purchased in the last 30 days; tinted windows comply with the medical use requirement of 625 ILCS 5/12-503(g); the residential parking permit was issued to a delivery, service, or repair vehicle or home health care provider doing business with or assisting a resident of the zone; etc.);
6. The illegal vehicle condition did not exist at the time of the compliance violation;
7. The compliance violation has been corrected prior to adjudication of the charge; provided, however, that this defense shall not be applicable to compliance violations involving display of the City wheel tax license emblem (vehicle or City sticker) under Section 9-64-125; to compliance violations involving motor vehicle exhaust systems under subsection (a)(2) of Section 9-76-140; to compliance violations involving registration plates under subsection (a) of Section 9-76-160; to compliance violations involving display of registration plates, temporary registration or temporary permits under subsection (f) of Section 9-76-160; or to compliance violations relating to glass coverings or coating under Section 9-76-220.

[1] : Department of Finance. (2021, December 4). *City of Chicago :: Services*. [chicago.gov. https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fin/provdrs/parking_and_redlightcitationadministration/svcs.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fin/provdrs/parking_and_redlightcitationadministration/svcs.html)