GENERAL

motion to stay eviction florida

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Eviction can feel like a looming storm, especially when the legal paperwork seems complex and the stakes are high. In Florida, tenants who believe they are being evicted unfairly or who need more time to resolve the issue have a powerful tool at their disposal: the motion to stay eviction. This article provides a thorough, step by step overview of what a motion to stay eviction is, when and how to file it, the legal requirements, and practical tips for both tenants and landlords. Whether you're a tenant looking to protect your home or a landlord aiming to understand the process, read on to learn how Florida's eviction laws work and how a motion can make all the difference.

Understanding Florida Eviction Laws

Florida's eviction process is governed primarily by Chapter 83 of the Florida Statutes, which outlines the procedures for both residential and commercial tenants. The key stages of a typical residential eviction case are:

- Notice to Vacate – The landlord must provide a written notice (usually 15 or 30 days, depending on the reason for eviction).
- Petition Filing – If the tenant does not comply, the landlord files an eviction petition with the local circuit court.
- Court Hearing – Both parties present evidence; the judge decides whether to grant the eviction.
- Writ of Eviction – If the court rules in favor of the landlord, a writ of eviction is issued, allowing the sheriff to remove the tenant.

While the process may seem straightforward, Florida law offers several defenses and remedies for tenants, one of which is the **motion to stay eviction**. This motion can temporarily halt the eviction proceedings, giving the tenant more time to resolve underlying issues such as unpaid rent, repair disputes, or potential violations of the lease agreement.

What Is a Motion to Stay Eviction?

A motion to stay eviction is a formal request filed with the court asking the judge to pause or suspend the eviction proceedings. In Florida, this motion is typically filed under the *Florida Rules of Civil Procedure* and is intended to:

- Prevent Immediate Eviction – Allows the tenant to remain in the property while the dispute is resolved.
- Provide Time for Negotiation – Gives both parties time to negotiate a settlement or lease renewal.
- Address Legal Deficiencies – Enables the tenant to correct procedural errors that might have been made by the landlord.
- Protect Tenant Rights – Ensures that the tenant's rights under Florida law are not violated during the eviction process.

It's important to note that a motion to stay eviction does not guarantee that the eviction will be dismissed. Instead, it temporarily halts the process, giving the tenant a breathing room to address the issue at hand.

Legal Basis for the Motion

Florida law permits tenants to file a motion to stay eviction under Rule 1.420 of the Florida Rules of Civil Procedure, which allows a party to request a stay of proceedings for reasons such as:

- Pending Settlement – When the parties are negotiating a resolution.

- New Evidence – Discovery of new evidence that could affect the case outcome.
- Procedural Deficiency – Errors in the landlord's filing that violate procedural requirements.
- Protection of Rights – Situations where the eviction might infringe on the tenant's constitutional or statutory rights.

When Should You File a Motion to Stay Eviction?

Timing is crucial. The earlier you file, the better your chances of securing a stay. Below are common scenarios where a motion to stay eviction is appropriate:

1. Unpaid Rent Dispute – If you owe rent but have a legitimate reason (e.g., repair issues, wage garnishment, or a recent medical emergency), you can file a motion to stay while you negotiate payment.
2. Lease Violations by Landlord – If the landlord has breached the lease (e.g., failed to maintain the property), you can request a stay while you document the violations.
3. Pending Court Orders – If another court case is affecting your tenancy (e.g., a family court order or a separate civil case), a stay may be necessary.
4. Legal Representation – If you are currently seeking legal counsel and need more time to prepare your defense.
5. Medical or Family Emergencies – Situations that make it impractical to move out immediately (e.g., a serious illness, pregnancy, or childcare issues).
6. Disputed Eviction Notice – If you believe the eviction notice was served improperly or the required notice period was not observed.

Keep in mind that a motion to stay is not a guaranteed shield. The court will weigh the merits of your request against the landlord's interest and the overall fairness of the proceedings.

How to File a Motion to Stay Eviction in Florida

Below is a step by step guide to filing a motion to stay eviction. While the process can vary slightly by county, the core steps remain consistent across Florida courts.

Step 1: Gather Documentation

Collect all relevant documents that support your request, including:

- Original eviction notice and any correspondence with the landlord.
- Lease agreement and any amendments.
- Proof of rent payments (bank statements, checks, receipts).
- Repair requests, maintenance logs, or photos showing property deficiencies.
- Medical records or other evidence of emergencies.
- Any prior court orders or legal documents related to your tenancy.

Step 2: Draft the Motion

Your motion should be clear, concise, and include the following elements:

1. Caption – Court name, case number, parties' names, and case title.
2. Introduction – Briefly state your intent to file a motion to stay eviction.
3. Legal Basis – Cite Rule 1.420 and any relevant Florida statutes.
4. Facts – Provide a factual background that explains why a stay is necessary.
5. Argument – Explain how the eviction would be unjust or harmful and why a stay is appropriate.
6. Conclusion – Request that the court grant the motion to stay and provide a reasonable timeframe.

7. Signature – Sign the motion and include your contact information.

Below is a simplified template you can adapt:

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF [COUNTY] FLORIDA

Case No.: [Case Number]

In re: [Tenant Name] vs. [Landlord Name]

Motion to Stay Eviction

To the Honorable Judge:

1. I, [Tenant Name], hereby request that the court grant a stay of the eviction proceedings in the above named case. This motion is filed pursuant to Rule 1.420 of the Florida Rules of Civil Procedure.

2. The facts of this case are as follows: [Insert brief facts].

3. I request a stay because [Explain reasons].

4. Therefore, I respectfully request that the court issue an order granting a stay of [Number] days from the date of this motion.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

[Printed Name, Address, Phone, Email]

Step 3: File the Motion

File the motion with the clerk of the circuit court where the eviction case is pending. You will need to provide:

- Original motion and any supporting documents.
- Copy of the eviction petition.
- Proof of service on the landlord (e.g., a signed acknowledgment).
- Applicable filing fee (check the local court's fee schedule).

Most Florida courts offer online filing through their e filing portals. If you prefer in person filing, bring the documents to the clerk's office.

Step 4: Serve the Landlord

After filing, you must serve a copy of the motion to the landlord (or their attorney) according to Florida's service rules. Typically, this is done via:

- Certified mail with return receipt.
- Personal delivery by a process server.
- Electronic service, if permitted by the court.

Keep a copy of the service receipt for your records.

Step 5: Attend the Hearing

Once the motion is filed, the court will schedule a hearing. Prepare for the hearing by:

- Reviewing your motion and supporting documents.
- Preparing a brief oral argument.

- Arranging any witnesses or experts (e.g., a plumber or medical professional).
- Being ready to answer questions about your tenancy and the reasons for the stay.

The judge will decide whether to grant the stay, and if so, for how long. A typical stay might last 30 days, giving you time to negotiate or resolve the underlying issue.

Key Legal Requirements for a Motion to Stay Eviction

Florida courts evaluate motions to stay based on specific criteria. Understanding these requirements can improve your chances of success.

1. Good Faith

The court expects that the tenant is acting in good faith. If you are filing the motion to avoid responsibility for unpaid rent or to conceal wrongdoing, the court may deny it.

2. Valid Grounds

Grounds for a stay must be legitimate and documented. Common valid grounds include:

- Pending settlement negotiations.
- New evidence that could alter the case outcome.
- Procedural errors by the landlord.
- Protection of constitutional or statutory rights.
- Health or safety concerns.

3. Reasonable Timeframe

Courts are more likely to grant a stay that is not excessively long. A stay of 30 to 60 days is typical. If the stay is too short, you may not have enough time to address the issue; if it is too long, the landlord may argue it is unreasonable.

4. Proper Service

All parties must be properly notified. Failure to serve the landlord can result in the motion being dismissed.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Even well intentioned tenants can run into trouble if they overlook certain details. Here are common mistakes and how to prevent them:

- Missing the Deadline – The court will not consider a motion filed after the eviction is scheduled for the next hearing. File promptly.
- Inadequate Documentation – A motion with no evidence or proof is likely to be denied. Attach receipts, photos, or affidavits.
- Failing to Serve the Landlord – Courts require proof of service. Use certified mail or a professional process server.
- Overreaching Claims – Claiming a stay for reasons unrelated to the eviction (e.g., personal grievances) will not hold up.
- Ignoring Legal Advice – Consult a tenant rights attorney if you are unsure about the process. Many local legal aid organizations offer free consultations.

What Happens After a Stay Is Granted?

Once the court grants a stay, the eviction process is paused. However, the stay does not mean the eviction is over.

It simply provides a temporary pause. Here’s what you should do next:

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