



Does Hiring a Lawyer Increase Your Settlement? What 308,317 Federal Injury Cases Show

Original analysis of 308,317 records from the Federal Judicial Center, FY2010–FY2025 (cases terminated Oct. 1, 2009 – Sept. 30, 2025). Published October 22, 2026. <https://settlementinsight.com/research/injury-lawsuits-with-vs-without-a-lawyer>

Of 284,080 federal personal injury cases in which the plaintiff had a lawyer, 56.8% ended in a settlement, against 9.6% of 24,237 cases brought by plaintiffs without a lawyer, fiscal years 2010–2025, outside multidistrict litigation. Represented cases settled 5.9× as often. Courts dismissed 59.0% of the self-represented cases and 18.3% of the represented ones. The figures show an association, not the effect of hiring a lawyer: lawyers choose which cases to take.

56.8%

Federal injury cases with a lawyer that settled, outside MDL

9.6%

Injury cases without a lawyer that settled, outside MDL

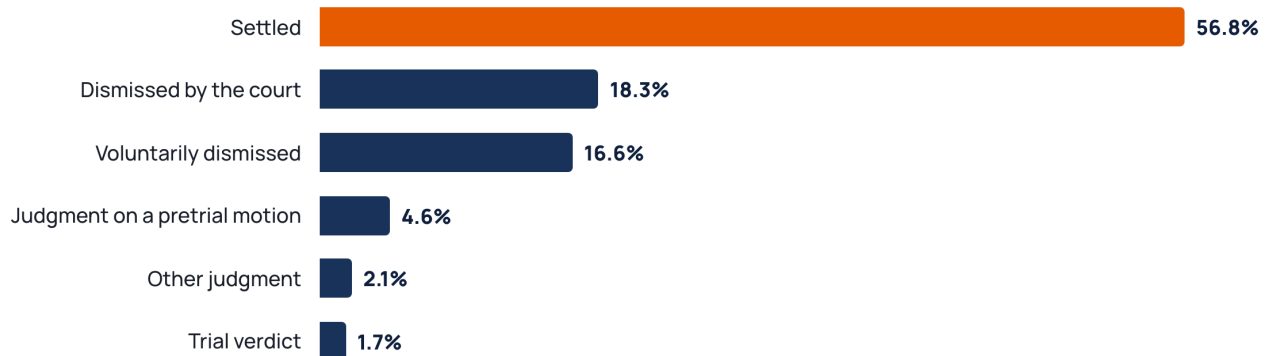
59.0%

Injury cases without a lawyer dismissed, outside MDL



How federal injury cases ended, FY2010–FY2025, outside MDL

With lawyer



Source: Settlement Insight analysis of data from the Federal Judicial Center
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Key findings on injury lawsuits with and without a lawyer

1. **Settlement 5.9× as often with a lawyer.** Outside multidistrict litigation, 56.8% of represented injury cases ended as settled, against 9.6% of cases filed pro se. Counting voluntary dismissals as well, the shares are 73.3% and 17.0%.

2. **Most pro se cases were dismissed.** Courts dismissed 59.0% of cases brought without a lawyer, 3.2× the rate for represented plaintiffs (18.3%). Another 17.1% ended in a judgment on a pretrial motion.
3. **Car accident cases: 62.4% vs. 19.9%.** In motor vehicle injury cases, 62.4% of represented plaintiffs settled, against 19.9% of the 1,584 cases brought without a lawyer.
4. **The gap holds in every case type.** In all 13 personal injury case types and in each of the 16 fiscal years, represented cases settled more often than pro se cases.
5. **Trials are rare either way.** Only 1.7% of represented cases and 0.6% of pro se cases ended in a trial verdict. Represented plaintiffs won 47.8% of the 4,761 verdicts with a recorded winner; pro se plaintiffs won 27 of 152.

How we measured

The data come from the Federal Judicial Center's Integrated Database (IDB) of federal civil cases, data file cv88on dated August 26, 2026, downloaded by Settlement Insight on October 9, 2026 and analyzed on October 22, 2026. We read the raw file because the field that records pro se parties is not in our database tables. The file is tab-delimited with quoted text fields; a few hundred party names contain a tab inside quotes, so we parse it as quoted CSV to keep every column in place. Field codes follow the FJC civil codebook.

Personal injury cases are the nature-of-suit codes 310, 315, 320, 330, 340, 345, 350, 355, 360, 362, 365, 367, 368. A case counts in the fiscal year of its termination date, from fiscal 2010 through fiscal 2025. When the same case (district, office, docket number, filing date and origin) appears in more than one annual data file, we keep the record from the most recent file and use its termination date and fields; 27,372 duplicate records were dropped. We exclude cases with a multidistrict litigation (MDL) docket number, meaning any value other than blank or -8 (738,987) and cases whose origin code marks an MDL transfer or MDL case (171,552); 135,162 of the latter are asbestos cases in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania that carry no MDL number. The filter cannot catch every MDL case: before July 2016 the origin code had no value for cases filed directly in the MDL court, and thousands of such cases without an MDL number remain in the count, most of them product liability suits in the Southern District of Illinois. Of the remaining 406,396 terminations, we also leave out transfers to another district or MDL court (disposition codes 0 and 10, 60,977), remands to state court or a federal agency (26,121), bankruptcy stays (365) and statistical closings (10,616), which do not end a case. That leaves 308,317 final resolutions. A case that was reopened after it closed gets a new record with its own filing date and origin code, so a few thousand cases that ended twice in the period are counted once for each termination.

A plaintiff is without a lawyer when the pro se field shows at least one pro se plaintiff (PROSE 1 or 3); all other cases count as represented (PROSE 0 or 2). Settled is disposition code 13; dismissed by the court is DISP 2, 3, 14 (want of prosecution, lack of jurisdiction, other dismissal); judgment on a pretrial motion is code 6; trial verdicts are codes 7 to 9. Other judgments (default, consent, arbitration award and the codebook's other judgment) are shown separately. Counting only cases with an MDL docket number as MDL and treating the other-judgment code as a dismissal, the shares would be 63.9% versus 13.9% settled and 18.1% versus 62.8% dismissed, with the large asbestos group included.

To check our counts, we recounted the published fiscal 2025 totals of the U.S. Courts. For civil filings of all case types with a pro se party on either side (pro se codes 1 to 3, including cases where only a defendant was pro se), we count 90,841 against 89,971 in Table C-13, 1.0% higher. For motor vehicle personal injury terminations (codes 350 and 355) in diversity cases, we count 5,329 against 5,333 in Table C-4, 0.08% lower.

Checked against published figures

- U.S. district courts, civil cases filed with a pro se party, all case types, fiscal year 2025 (12 months ending Sept. 30, 2025): published 89,971, our count 90,841 (0.97% apart). [Table C-13. U.S. District Courts—Civil Pro Se and Non-Pro Se Filings, by District, During the 12-Month Period Ending September 30, 2025](#)

- U.S. district courts, civil cases filed, all case types, fiscal year 2025: published 303,563, our count 303,625 (0.02% apart). [Table C-13. U.S. District Courts–Civil Pro Se and Non-Pro Se Filings, by District, During the 12-Month Period Ending September 30, 2025](#)
- Motor vehicle personal injury cases (NOS 350 and 355) terminated in fiscal year 2025, diversity jurisdiction: published 5,333, our count 5,329 (0.08% apart). [Table C-4. U.S. District Courts–Civil Cases Terminated, by Nature of Suit and Action Taken, During the 12-Month Period Ending September 30, 2025](#)
- Motor vehicle personal injury cases (NOS 350 and 355) terminated in fiscal year 2025, United States cases: published 894, our count 893 (0.11% apart). [Table C-4. U.S. District Courts–Civil Cases Terminated, by Nature of Suit and Action Taken, During the 12-Month Period Ending September 30, 2025](#)

Limitations

- The comparison shows an association, not the effect of hiring a lawyer. Lawyers decide which cases to take, so plaintiffs who sue on their own may include many whose claims no lawyer accepted. The records do not measure the strength of a claim or the size of the injury.
- The data cover federal district courts only. Injury claims filed in state courts and claims settled before any lawsuit are not included.
- The records do not show settlement amounts. The amount field is not used uniformly by the district courts, and the Administrative Office advises against analyzing it.
- The pro se field reflects the latest record of a case. The FJC notes that it may change over the life of a case and has no data quality control checks, so a plaintiff who had a lawyer for part of a case may be counted either way.
- The settled code is a lower bound: some voluntary dismissals and some dismissals on other grounds follow a private settlement that the record does not capture. Courts can still update records for cases that ended in fiscal 2025.

Data files

- [Calibration: our FJC counts vs. U.S. Courts Tables C-13 and C-4, FY2025](#) (CSV, 4 rows)
- [Settlement, dismissal and trial outcomes by injury case type and plaintiff representation, FY2010-FY2025](#) (CSV, 14 rows)
- [Federal personal injury case outcomes by fiscal year of termination and plaintiff representation, FY2010-FY2025](#) (CSV, 16 rows)
- [Injury case outcomes by basis of jurisdiction and fee status, with and without a plaintiff's lawyer, FY2010-FY2025](#) (CSV, 7 rows)
- [How federal personal injury cases ended, with and without a plaintiff's lawyer, FY2010-FY2025](#) (CSV, 6 rows)

How to cite

Goldberg, L. (2026). Injury Lawsuits With vs. Without a Lawyer — settlement, dismissal and trial outcomes of federal personal injury cases by plaintiff representation (FY2010–FY2025) [Data set]. Settlement Insight. <https://settlementinsight.com/research/injury-lawsuits-with-vs-without-a-lawyer>

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