

**§ 7A-222. General trial practice and procedure.**

(a) Trial of a small claim action before a magistrate is without a jury. The rules of evidence applicable in the trial of civil actions generally are observed. At the conclusion of plaintiff's evidence the magistrate may render judgment of dismissal if plaintiff has failed to establish a prima facie case. If a judgment of dismissal is not rendered the defendant may introduce evidence. At the conclusion of all the evidence the magistrate may render judgment or may in his discretion reserve judgment for a period not in excess of 10 days, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

(b) In a small claim action for summary ejectment, the magistrate shall render judgment on the same day on which the conclusion of all the evidence and submission of legal authorities occurs, unless the parties concur on an extension of additional time for entering the judgment and except for more complex summary ejectment cases, in which event the magistrate shall render judgment within five business days of the hearing. Complex summary ejectment cases include cases brought for criminal activity, breaches other than nonpayment of rent, evictions involving SECTION 8 of the Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. § 1437f) or public housing tenants, and cases with counterclaims.

(c) Notwithstanding G.S. 84-4, a party in a small claim action shall not be required to obtain legal representation. (1965, c. 310, s. 1; 1971, c. 377, s. 11; 2013-334, s. 1; 2017-143, s. 2(a).)