



# MJEB STUDY AID



## 42 Pa.C.S. §1515 – JURISDICTION OF MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES (MDJs)



Defines what an MDJ can and cannot hear.  
Many exam questions try to confuse MDJ jurisdiction with Common Pleas or Philadelphia Municipal Court jurisdiction.



### WHAT AN MDJ CAN HEAR

#### 1 SUMMARY OFFENSES

Examples:

- Speeding
- Stop sign violations
- Disorderly conduct
- Harassment (summary grading)
- Public drunkenness
- Game Code violations
- Dog Law violations



An MDJ may conduct trials and impose a sentence for summary offenses. (Justia)

#### 2 LANDLORD-TENANT MATTERS

MDJs hear:

- Evictions
- Possession actions
- Unpaid rent claims
- Security deposit disputes



These cases arise under the Landlord and Tenant Act. (Justia)

#### 3 CIVIL CLAIMS UP TO \$12,000

Current jurisdictional limit:

**\$12,000**

excluding interest and court costs. (Justia)

Examples:

- Breach of contract
- Property damage
- Unpaid loans
- Consumer disputes
- Replevin (return of property)



#### 4 CRIMINAL PRELIMINARY MATTERS

MDJs handle:

##### PRELIMINARY ARRAIGNMENTS

Where:

- Charges are explained
- Bail is considered
- Counsel rights discussed

##### PRELIMINARY HEARINGS

The MDJ determines whether a prima facie case exists.



##### IMPORTANT:

The MDJ is not determining guilt or innocence.

The question is:

Is there enough evidence to send the case to Common Pleas Court? (Pennsylvania Criminal Lawyers)



### WHAT AN MDJ CANNOT HEAR



Felony Trials

X No



Misdemeanor Jury Trials

X No



Civil Cases Above \$12,000

X No



Divorce Cases

X No



Custody Cases

X No



Probate Matters

X No

These belong in Common Pleas Court. (Buzgon Davis Law Offices)



### EXAM TRAP: PRELIMINARY HEARING

Many candidates think:

"Since witnesses testify, the MDJ decides guilt."

**WRONG.**

The MDJ only determines whether sufficient evidence exists to hold the defendant for court. (Pennsylvania Criminal Lawyers)



### QUICK MEMORY AID: S-L-C-P

- S** = Summary offenses
- L** = Landlord-Tenant
- C** = Civil claims ≤ \$12,000
- P** = Preliminary hearings & arraignments



#### IF YOU SEE:

- Felony Trial
- Divorce
- Custody
- Probate
- Civil claim > \$12,000

**YOUR MJEB ANSWER IS USUALLY: "OUTSIDE MDJ JURISDICTION"**

### EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS (ANSWERS BELOW EACH QUESTION)

1 An MDJ has original jurisdiction over:

- A. Felony jury trials
- B. Divorce actions
- C. Summary offenses
- D. Appeals from Common Pleas

Answer: C (Justia)

2 A plaintiff files a claim for \$9,500 in property damage. Which court may hear the matter?

- A. Supreme Court
- B. Commonwealth Court
- C. Magisterial District Court
- D. Superior Court

Answer: C (Justia)

3 A plaintiff seeks \$25,000 for breach of contract. An MDJ should:

- A. Hear the case
- B. Transfer or dismiss for lack of jurisdiction
- C. Conduct a jury trial
- D. Reduce damages automatically

Answer: B (Pennsylvania Code & Bulletin)

4 At a preliminary hearing, the MDJ determines:

- A. Whether the defendant is guilty
- B. Whether the Commonwealth proved beyond a reasonable doubt
- C. Whether a prima facie case exists
- D. Appropriate sentence

Answer: C (Pennsylvania Criminal Lawyers)

5 An MDJ may conduct an eviction proceeding.

- A. True
- B. False

Answer: A (Justia)

6 Which matter is outside MDJ jurisdiction?

- A. Speeding citation
- B. Disorderly conduct summary offense
- C. Civil claim for \$8,000
- D. Divorce action

Answer: D

7 The monetary limit for most MDJ civil actions is:

- A. \$5,000
- B. \$10,000
- C. \$12,000
- D. \$15,000

Answer: C (Justia)

8 An MDJ hearing a felony preliminary hearing may:

- A. Convict the defendant
- B. Sentence the defendant
- C. Decide guilt
- D. Hold the defendant for court

Answer: D (Pennsylvania Criminal Lawyers)

9 Which statement is MOST correct?

- A. MDJs conduct felony jury trials.
- B. MDJs hear only traffic offenses.
- C. MDJs have limited jurisdiction defined by statute.
- D. MDJs may hear any case under PA law.

Answer: C (Justia)

10 A tenant refuses to vacate after proper notice. The landlord's first court filing is generally made in:

- A. Superior Court
- B. Commonwealth Court
- C. Supreme Court
- D. Magisterial District Court

Answer: D (palawhelp.org)

### MJEB "GOTCHA" QUESTIONS

11 A defendant is charged with aggravated assault (felony). Can the MDJ conduct the trial?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Answer: B

The MDJ may conduct the preliminary hearing but not the felony trial.

12 A plaintiff files for \$11,950 plus costs and interest. Does the MDJ have jurisdiction?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Answer: A

The \$12,000 limit excludes interest and costs. (Justia)



### ONE-LINER FOR THE EXAM

"MDJs decide summary cases, landlord-tenant matters, civil disputes up to \$12,000, and whether criminal cases should proceed to Common Pleas—but they do not conduct felony or jury trials." (Justia)