

# Petition to Remove Mechanics' Lien

Owners of real estate sometimes find that a contractor has recorded a mechanics lien on their property, and failed to remove it. Contractors and subcontractors can record mechanics' liens against a piece of real property for work they do on that property. Although the lien automatically becomes invalid if the claimant does not foreclose within 90 days of recording, the lien will still appear on the title until it is released in writing or by court order.

# **Templates and Forms**

- Demand Letter to Release Mechanics' Lien Template RTF (https://saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petition-torelease-demand.rtf)
- <u>Civil Case Cover Sheet (CM-010) (https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/cm010.pdf)</u>
- Notice of Petition to Release Mechanics' Lien Template RTF (https://saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petitionto-release-notice.rtf)
- Petition to Release Mechanics' Lien Template RTF (https://saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petition-to-release-petition.rtf)
- Order to Release Mechanics' Lien Template RTF (https://saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petition-to-releaseorder.rtf)
- Proof of Service of Petition to Remove Mechanics' Lien Template RTF (https://saclaw.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petition-to-release-pos.rtf)

If, after 90 days, the contractor or subcontractor does not release the lien upon request, the owner of the property may petition the court for a release order (also called expunging the lien). <u>California Civil Code</u> (<u>CC) §§ 8480-8488</u> (http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=CIV&division=4.&title=2.&part=6.&chapter=4.&article=7.). The court will award the prevailing party his or her reasonable attorneys' fees, so you may wish to hire an attorney to do this. <u>CC § 8488(c). (http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=CIV&sectionNum=8488.)</u>

If you choose to file this *Petition* without an attorney, or cannot find an attorney to take the case, this Guide will help you do it yourself. It outlines the steps, and includes sample forms.

#### I need the lien gone right away!

You can obtain release of a lien right away by recording a lien release bond, guaranteeing payment if the claimant later prevails in court. CC § 8424

(http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=CIV&sectionNum=8424.) .

Contact your general contractor, if any, or a surety bond agent for information. For more info, see §10.60 of *California Civil Practice: Real Property Litigation*, KFC 140 .Z9 .C34.



#### **Related Step by Step Guides**

- Serving Documents by Mail (https://www.saclaw.org/resource\_library/serving-documents-by-mail/)
- Personal Service
   (https://www.saclaw.org/resource\_library/personal-service/)

# **Step by Step Instructions**

## 1. Ask the claimant to release the lien

Mail the lien claimant a written demand to remove the lien. Send the request by registered or certified mail, express mail, or overnight delivery. Send it to the claimant's address as shown on any of the following: (1) the preliminary 20-day notice, (2) the records of the Contractor State License Board, (3) the contract on which the lien is based, or (4) the claim of lien itself. CC § 8482.

A customizable template for the Demand for Release may be downloaded from this link:

• Demand for Release of Mechanics' Lien (https://www.saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sbs-petition-to-release-demand.rtf)

You may want to include a blank <u>Release of Mechanics' Lien (https://www.saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/form-release-of-mechanics-lien.pdf)</u> to make it easy for the claimant to fill out and record.

Keep a copy of your Demand for Release of Mechanics' Lien and the certified, registered, or other receipt as proof of your request. You will attach this to your Petition if the claimant does not voluntarily remove the lien.

You must wait at least 10 days after mailing before filing your Petition, to give the lien claimant time to comply. CC § 8482.

# 2. Obtain a certified copy of the lien

You will need to attach this to your Petition. You can obtain a certified copy at the county recorder's office. In Sacramento this is located at 3636 American River Drive, Ste. 110, Sacramento, 916-874-6334.

#### 3. Prepare the required court documents

There is no Judicial Council form for this procedure. Instead, the relevant documents must be typed on 28-line pleading paper. Customizable templates may be downloaded from these links:



- Petition for Release of Property from Lien (https://saclaw.org/resource\_library/petition-to-remove-mechanics-lien/sbs-petition-to-release-petition/)
- Notice of Hearing (https://saclaw.org/resource\_library/petition-to-remove-mechanics-lien/sbs-petition-to-release-notice/)
- Proposed Order (https://saclaw.org/resource\_library/petition-to-remove-mechanics-lien/sbs-petition-to-release-order/)
- Proof of Service of Petition to Release Mechanics Lien by Mail (https://saclaw.org/resource\_library/petition-to-removemechanics-lien/sbs-petition-to-release-pos/)

In addition, one Judicial Council form is required for all new cases, including this *Petition*:

• Civil Case Cover Sheet (CM-010) (https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/cm010.pdf)

Sample filled-in forms with instructions are available at the end of this guide.

# 4. Copy and assemble the documents

Make four (4) copies of your documents. One of these copies is to be served on the claimant; the original and the other three copies are to be filed with the court. Staple each of the copies, but leave the original unstapled. Sacramento County Superior Court uses an electronic filing system in which documents are scanned in electronically. Stapled originals are not accepted because the staple will jam in the scanner, damaging both the document and the scanner.

Note: You will have exhibits attached to your Petition (a certified copy of the Claim of Lien and a copy of the Demand for Release with proof of mailing).

# 5. File your documents, pay filing fee, and ask clerk for hearing date

File your documents at the filing window at 813 Sixth Street (Hall of Justice) in downtown Sacramento. While you are there, the clerk will assign you a department and a hearing date within the next 30 days (<u>CC § 8486</u> (<u>https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=8486.&lawCode=CIV</u>). Because the clerk may have a number of dates available, be sure to bring your schedule with you so you can choose a date that works for you. Fill this in on all copies of the Notice of Hearing and file the original and three copies of that as well. Make sure that you receive a stamped copy of each document to serve on the lien claimant, and a copy for yourself.

As of the date of this guide there is a \$435 filing fee, unless your fees are waived. Current fees can be found on the <u>Sacramento County Court Fee Schedule (https://www.saccourt.ca.gov/fees/docs/fee-schedule.pdf)</u>. If you qualify for a fee waiver, you may file a request with the court. For more information, see our step-by-step guide on "<u>Fee</u> <u>Waivers (https://www.saclaw.org/resource\_library/fee-waiver/)</u>."</u>



# 6. Have the Petition and other documents served

At least 15 court (business) days before the hearing: Have someone (NOT YOU) serve a court-stamped copy of all documents on the lien claimant, either in person or by certified or registered mail (return receipt requested). You can use any of these addresses: (1) the address on the preliminary 20-day notice, (2) the records of the Contractor State License Board, (3) the address on the contract on which the lien is based, or (4) the claim of lien itself.

If you serve by mail, you are required to serve the notice 15 *court* days before the hearing, plus five *calendar* days for mail time. If you do not, the court will deny your petition.

The person who is serving your papers for you must complete a customizable Proof of Service of Petition to Release Mechanics Lien by Mail. You can download a template of this form from the link in Step 3, above.

Photocopy the certified or registered mail receipt. Write "Exhibit A" on the bottom of the copy, and staple the copy to the Proof of Service. Make at least two copies.

File the original Proof of Service, and two copies, with the Court. Make sure this is done at least a few days before the hearing.

# 7. Tentative Ruling: Review ruling at 2 pm, request hearing before 4 pm if needed

Pursuant to Local Rule 1.06 (http://www.saccourt.ca.gov/local-rules/docs/chapter-01.pdf), the judge in Dept. 53 or 54 reads the papers ahead of time and posts a tentative ruling by 2:00 p.m. the **court day before the hearing**. You then have two hours to request oral argument, if you choose to do so. Unless one party requests oral argument, the tentative ruling will automatically become the actual ruling.

You may read the tentative ruling online, or may call Department 53 (916-874-7858) or Department 54 (916-874-7848) to hear it. For more information, see the <u>Sacramento County Superior Court's Tentative Ruling</u> Information. (http://www.saccourt.ca.gov/civil/motions-hearings-tentative.aspx)

Closely review the tentative ruling. Since you are asking the Court to issue an order removing the lien, you are looking for your Petition to be "GRANTED." If the court does not grant your request, your Petition will be "DENIED." Even if your Petition is granted, be sure to read the tentative ruling very carefully, since it may contain other important information or instructions.

**If you are not happy with the tentative ruling,** and wish to present oral argument in front of the judge, you must call all opposing counsel and/or self-represented parties, and also call the Law and Motion Oral Argument Request Line at (916) 874-2615 before 4:00 p.m. that same day. State that you are requesting oral argument on the motion. **If you do not do this, your hearing will be canceled.** Be aware that the judges very rarely change their tentative rulings.

If you are happy with the tentative ruling, you do not need to do anything unless the tentative ruling orders



you to appear, or the other side calls you and the court before 4:00 p.m. that same day to request oral argument. If that happens, you should go to the court hearing and be prepared to argue your case. If neither party requests oral argument by 4:00 p.m., the court will simply make the tentative ruling the order of the court, and no oral argument will be permitted. If a party requests oral argument, the court will make its ruling after the oral arguments, either in court or by mail a few days later.

# 8. Attend the hearing, if necessary

If you or the other party notify each other and the court that they plan to attend the hearing, you have the option of attending in person or by video or telephone using Zoom.

*In person:* Go to 813 Sixth St., in downtown Sacramento, in plenty of time to arrive before your hearing starts. Leave early if you will need to find parking, since the courthouse does not have a parking lot. The nearest pay lot is at the corner of 7th and G, at least a 5-minute walk away. When you arrive at the Hall of Justice, go to the second floor and enter the courtroom (Dept. 53/54). Check in with the staffer seated by the door.

Using Zoom: instructions are listed on your tentative ruling. Be sure to log on a bit early.

What to expect: Since you are the petitioning party, the judge will ask you to explain your request first, then ask the opposing party to respond. The judge will usually decide immediately whether whether to grant the motion or not, but may "take it under consideration" and mail out their ruling a few days later.

# 9. Record the signed order releasing the lien at the County Recorder's office

If the judge signs the Order, obtain a certified copy from the court clerk. Record the certified copy at the County Recorder's office. This extinguishes the lien.

# **For More Information**

#### On the Web

The Contractors' State License Board offers a number of useful and informative guides, pamphlets, and forms for consumers, including "<u>What if a Mechanics Lien is Filed on Your Property?</u> (https://www.cslb.ca.gov/Consumers/Legal\_Issues\_For\_Consumers/Mechanics\_Lien/If\_A\_Mechanics\_Lien\_Is\_Filed\_Against\_You.aspx)."

The California Land Title Association has a series of "Consumer Library" articles on its website, including one on mechanics' liens: "Title Reporter Series #7: Mechanics' Liens (https://www.clta.org/page/Reporter7)."

# At the Law Library

**California Forms of Pleading and Practice** KFC 1010 .A65 C3 (Ready Reference) Sections 361.32 and 361.163 deal with petitions for the release of mechanics liens.



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Electronic Access: On the Law Library's computers, using Lexis Advance.



# Samples

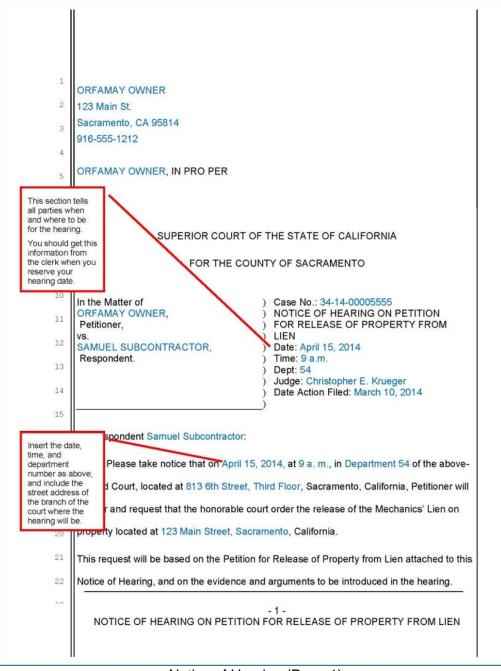
# **Civil Case Cover Sheet**

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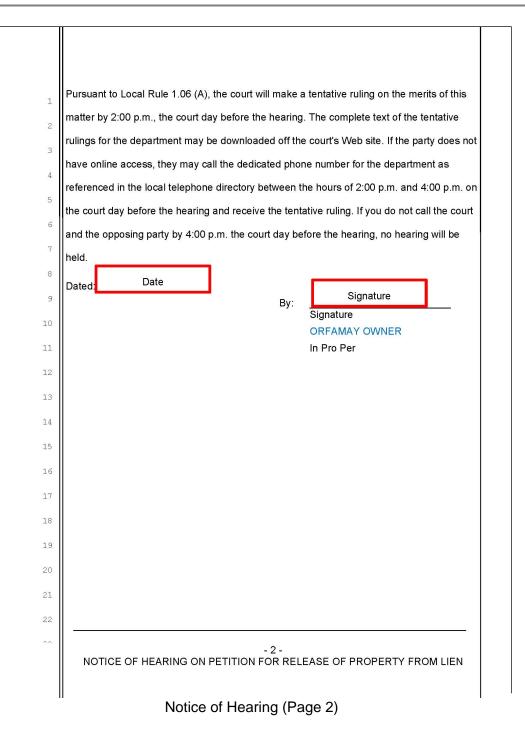


# **Notice of Hearing**



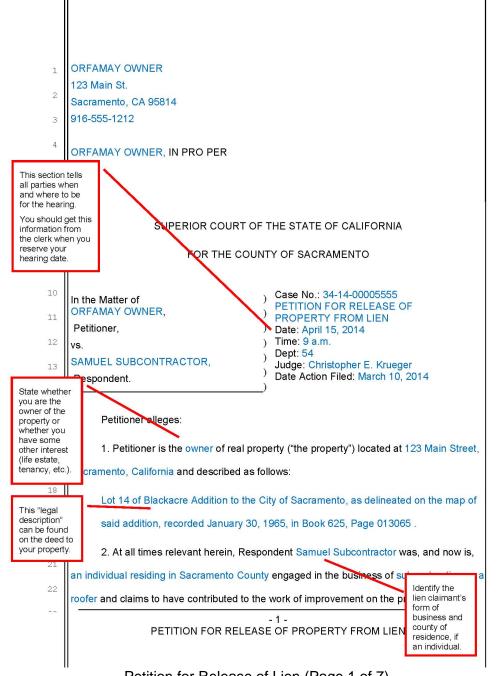
Notice of Hearing (Page 1)





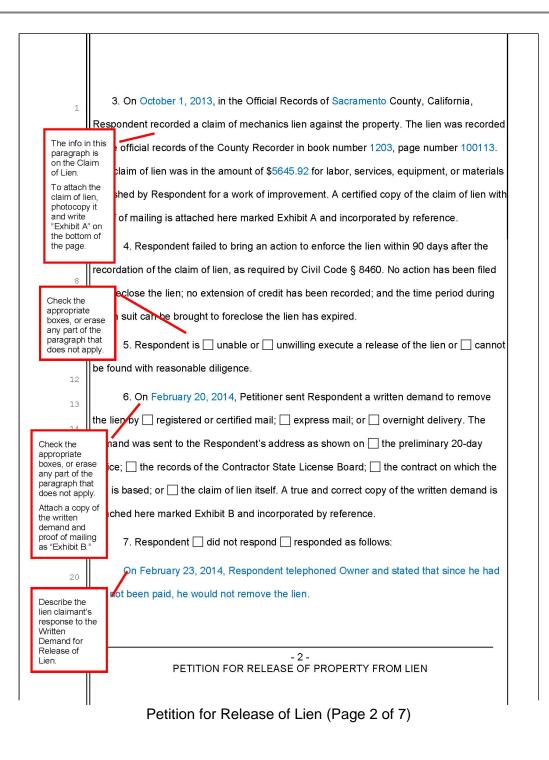


## Petition for Release of Lien

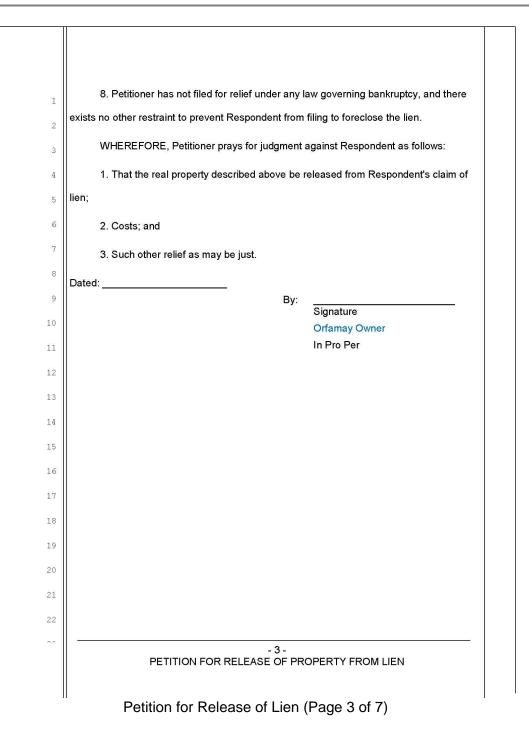


Petition for Release of Lien (Page 1 of 7)

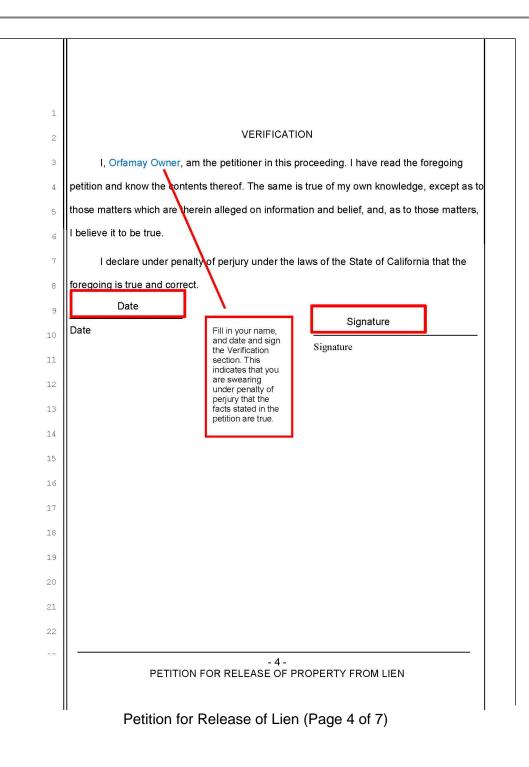














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Petition for Release of Lien (Page 5 of 7)



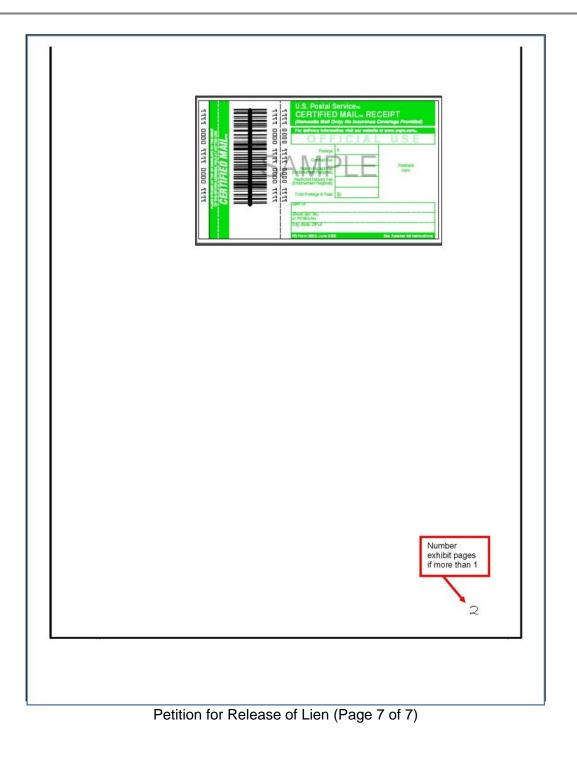
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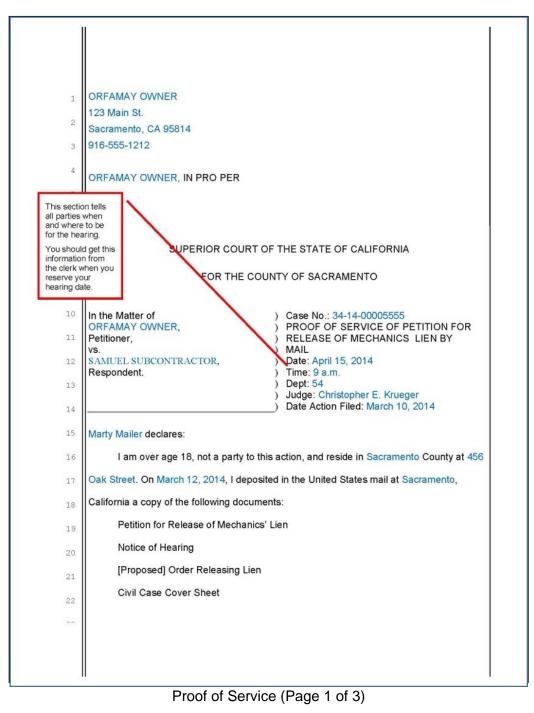
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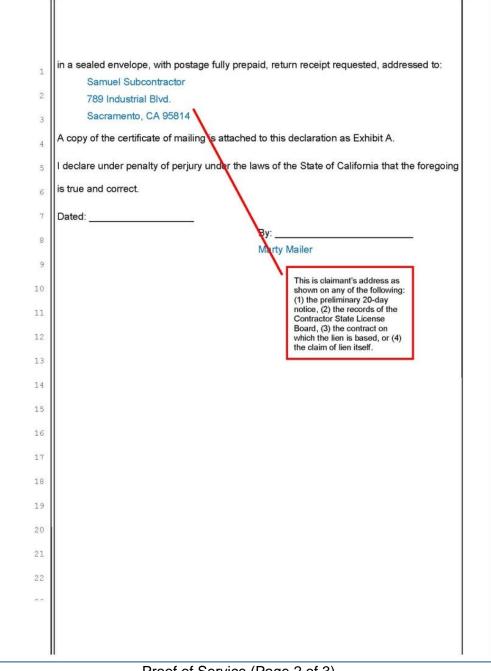


# **Proof of Service**





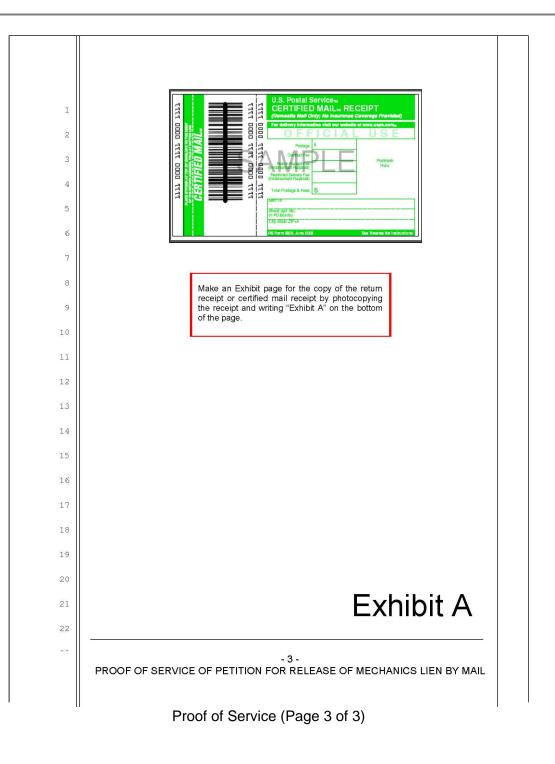
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Proof of Service (Page 2 of 3)

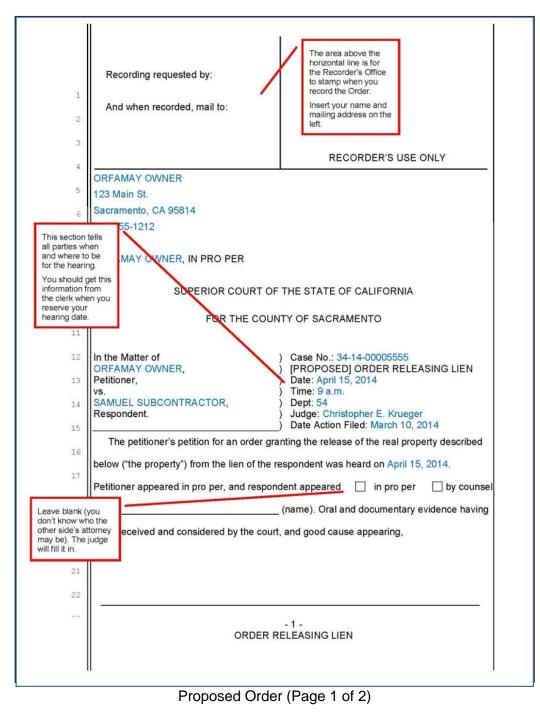


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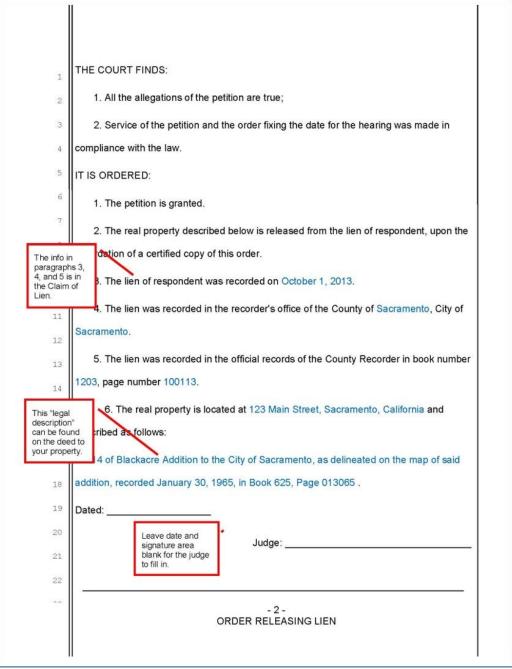




# **Proposed Order**







Proposed Order (Page 2 of 2)