

# Docket Alarm™

## PACER API Specification

Version 1 Draft

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## A. Introduction

### *Description*

This documentation describes Docket Alarm’s Application Programming Interface (API).

**WARNING: This is a draft specification subject to change. Do not rely on this document for production applications. To ensure this API is only used experimentally, it has been rate-limited, meaning that simultaneous calls will be rejected.**

### *Background*

Federal court cases are organized into “dockets.” A new court docket is created whenever a person sues another, files for bankruptcy, is prosecuted for a crime, or appeals a judgment. During a case, every time a document is filed with the court, the document appears on the docket. Every time the court issues an order, it also appears on the docket. Typical cases have anywhere from a few docket entries to over a thousand.

A docket entry usually consists of a date, a short summary, and optionally, a PDF document associated with the entry. Below is an example of a docket entry, taken directly from the PACER system:

|            |                     |   |
|------------|---------------------|---|
| 05/15/2012 | <a href="#">420</a> | Transmitted Record on Appeal as to Marcelino Ahumada Vargas to US Court of Appeals re <a href="#">406</a> Notice of Appeal - Final Judgment (Attachments: # <a href="#">1</a> Index - Clerk's Record)(dac)<br>(Entered: 05/15/2012) |
|------------|---------------------|---|

The docket entry above contains a date, an electronic document with a filing number of 420, and docket text. The docket entry also contains one attachment and a notice of when the document was entered into the PACER system.

## Features

Docket Alarm's API allows computer programs to access the court's system and download docket information. There are currently four functions available:

- `login` Log into the Docket Alarm API.
- `searchpacer` Search PACER for dockets.
- `getdocket` Get current information for a given docket.
- Retrieving documents associated with the docket.

## Unexposed Features

Docket Alarm is capable of more features than those exposed in the API. For example, tracking dockets, emailing dockets, and some additional search related functions are not accessible through the API. We welcome all feedback on requested features. Please send questions and comments to [admin@docketalarm.com](mailto:admin@docketalarm.com).

## B. Calling Conventions

### Making API Calls

API calls are made to the following base address:

**<https://www.docketalarm/api/v1/>**

The headings below indicate the type of call that should be made (i.e., GET or POST) and the path for the function that is to be called.

*Warning: All calls should be made with HTTPS, otherwise login credentials may be intercepted.*

### Processing Return Data

All calls return a HTTP 200 message. For the calls to `login`, `searchpacer`, and `getdocket`, the message body is encoded as JSON. For retrieving documents, the message body is encoded as a binary PDF file. All JSON responses have the following parameters:

- `success` true or false.
- `error` If success is false, this describes the error.

Also note that all dates that are returned are in the form `mm/dd/yyyy` and all parameters which contain dates must be in the same format.

## C. POST login/ - Authentication

Before making any API calls, you must log into the API with a username and password. The login API call returns a `login_token`, which is used as a GET parameter to all subsequent requests. The `login_token` is active for approximately 30 minutes, after which a new call to `login` must be made.

*Note: If you do not have a Docket Alarm account, create one at [www.docketalarm.com](http://www.docketalarm.com). You will need to either enter a valid credit card or your PACER credentials to download PACER documents.*

### Parameters

- `username` The username associated with the Docket Alarm account.
- `password` The password associated with the username.

### Return Values

If the username or password is invalid, an error will be generated. Otherwise, it will return:

- `login_token` A token, in hexadecimal, valid for the next 30 minutes. This token must be supplied as a GET parameter for all future API calls.

### Example

Below is an example of a successful login request and response.

Request:

```
POST https://www.docketalarm.com/api/v1/login/  
username=foo%40example.com&password=aaa
```

Response:

```
200  
{  
  u'login_token': u'839dbcf5fa7768ea912341011ba754c354bc75792494804fb6f56538',  
  u'success': True  
}
```

## D. GET searchpacer/ - Searching for Dockets

Search PACER dockets using one of several search criteria.

### Parameters

- `login_token` The authentication token.
- `client_matter` The client or matter code used to bill the particular search. Maximum length is 50 characters.
- `party_name` (Optional) The name of the party you wish to search.
- `court_region` (Optional) Limits results to cases filed in the given region. See Appendix A for valid values.
- `date_filed_start` (Optional) Limits results to cases filed on or after the given date.
- `date_filed_end` (Optional) Limits results to cases filed on or before the given date.
- `page` (Optional) Page through results by specifying a page number. Before jumping to a page, the search must be run at least once.
- `case_type` (Not exposed) (Optional) Limit search results to a particular case type. Acceptable values are: Appellate, Bankruptcy, Civil, Criminal, and Multi-District Litigation. Leaving no value will search all case types.
- `nature_of_suit` (Not exposed) (Optional) Limit search results to particular lawsuit types. See Appendix B for valid values.
- `ssn_tid` (Not exposed) (Optional) The nine digit social security number or Federal tax identification number of a party to the lawsuit. Only valid when searching Bankruptcy cases.
- `ssn4` (Not exposed) (Optional) The last four digits of the social security number of a party to the lawsuit. Only valid when searching Bankruptcy cases and where `party_name` is provided.

### Return Values

- `search_results` A list of dictionaries where each dictionary is specified in the following section.
- `page_max` Only 50 search results are returned per search. If there are more items, then this variable will be set to the number of pages containing data.

### Search Results

Each search result is a JSON dictionary object with the following key value pairs

- `title` The title of the case
- `court` The name of the court handling the case.
- `docket` The docket title of the case.
- `date_filed` The date the case was filed.
- `nature_of_suit` (Not exposed) The nature of the suit.
- `date_terminated` (Not exposed) (Optional) If the case was terminated, this value returns the date.

### Example

This is an example a request for searching for a party named Vargas in Arkansas:

```
GET https://www.docketalarm.com/api/v1/searchpacer/?court_region=Arkansas&login_token=46aa
. . . bf756c2&party_name=Vargas&client_matter=&page=2
```

If the request succeeds, the server will respond with the following (abbreviated):

```
200
{
  u'page_max': 4,
  u'search_results': [ { u'date_filed': u'05/26/2010',
                        u'court': u'Arkansas Western District Court',
                        u'docket': u'5:2010-cr-50046',
                        u'title': u'USA v. Vargas-Leonardo - Erik Vargas-Leonardo'},
                      . . .
                      { u'date_filed': u'09/27/2006',
                        u'court': u'Arkansas Western District Court',
                        u'docket': u'4:2006-cr-40020',
                        u'title': u'USA v. Pineda et al - Raul Vargas-Canela'}],
  u'success': True
}
```

## E. GET `getdocket/` - Retrieving a Docket

Download docket information for a case.

### Parameters

- `login_token` The authentication token.
- `client_matter` The client or matter code used to bill the particular search. Maximum length is 50 characters
- `court` The name of the court, obtained from `searchdockets`.
- `docket` The docket identifier, obtained from `searchdockets`.

### Return Values

- `info` A dictionary structure containing basic information about the case, not including the docket and parties. See the section below.
- `docket` A list of docket entries. Each entry object is described in the section below.
- `parties` A list of parties to the case. Each object in the list is described in the section below.

### Info

- `title` The title of the case.
- `date_filed` The date the case was filed.
- `judge` (Optional) The judge presiding over the case. This value may not be present if a judge has yet to be assigned.
- `magistrate` (Optional) The magistrate judge presiding over the case. Again, this value may not be present.
- `demand` (Not exposed) (Optional) The type of demand made by the plaintiff.
- `cause` (Not exposed) (Optional) The cause of action.
- `date_terminated` (Not exposed) (Optional) If the case was terminated, this value returns the date.
- `nature_of_suit` (Not exposed) (Optional) The nature of the suit.

### Docket Entry

Each entry in a docket is a dictionary with the following key-value pairs corresponding to the docket entry.

- `contents` The html contents of the docket entry. The html has is scrubbed for potentially dangerous tags and only innocuous style related tags are returned. For example:  
`Unopposed MOTION to Continue <i>Jury Trial</i> by Marcelino Ahumada Vargas (Tarver, Christophe) (Entered: 09/02/2010)`
- `date` The filing date of the docket entry, e.g., 10/26/2010.
- `entry_date` The date the document was entered into PACER. This date is often the same day as the filing date, but can be later, occasionally much later, as well.
- `number` (Optional) If the docket entry has a document associated with it, then it will also be given a filing number. Filing numbers are integers.

- `link` (Optional) If the docket entry has a document associated with it, then this link will point to the location of the file.
- `exhibits` (Not exposed) (Optional) A list of exhibits that are associated with the docket entry, not including the main filing.

### Parties

- `name` The name of the party to the case.
- `type` The type of party to the case, e.g., Plaintiff, Defendant, etc. See Appendix C for a list of valid values.
- `counsel` (Not exposed) (Optional) A list of attorneys representing the party. Each attorney is represented with a dictionary structure.

### Counsel (Not Exposed)

The counsel data structure contains information on the attorney representing the party. It includes the attorney's name, law firm, role in the case, and contact information.

### Example

This is an example of a request for a particular criminal docket in Arkansas Eastern District Court:

```
GET https://www.docketalarm.com/api/v1/getdocket/?docket=4%3A2010-cr-00188&login_token=46ad
. . . &court=Arkansas+Eastern+District+Court&client_matter=
```

If the request succeeds, this will be the result (abbreviated):

```
200
{
  u'case_info': { u'date_filed': u'08/03/2010',
                 u'judge': u'Judge Susan Webber Wright',
                 u'magistrate': None,
                 u'title': u'USA v. Vargas et al'},
  u'docket': [ { u'contents': u'OPINION AND ORDER . . . (Entered: 08/01/2012)',
                 u'date': u'8/1/2012',
                 u'entry_date': u'8/1/2012',
                 u'link': u'/cases/Arkansas_Eastern_District_Court/4--2010-cr-
                        00188/USA_v_Vargas_et_al/docs/427.pdf',
                 u'number': 427},
                . . .
                { u'contents': u'COMPLAINT . . . (Entered: 07/16/2010)',
                  u'date': u'7/15/2010',
                  u'entry_date': u'7/16/2010',
                  u'link': None,
                  u'number': 1}],
  u'parties': [ { u'name': u'Marcelino Ahumada Vargas',
                  u'type': u'Defendant'},
                { u'name': u'USA', u'type': u'Plaintiff'}],
  u'success': True
}
```

## F. GET - Retrieving a Document

Retrieving documents is done with a GET call to the `link` supplied in the docket entry relative to Docket Alarm's hostname. One must still send the authentication `login_token` as a GET parameter in order to properly retrieve the document. Rather than returning JSON, the call returns the binary PDF document.

### **Example**

If the link in the docket entry is as follows:

```
cases/Arkansas_Eastern_District_Court/4--2010-cr-00188/USA_v_Vargas_et_al/docs/425.pdf
```

Then, to download the document, make the following call:

```
GET https://www.docketalarm.com/cases/Arkansas_Eastern_District_Court/4--2010-cr-00188/USA_v_Vargas_et_al/docs/425.pdf?login_token=[authentication token]
```

The result should be a binary PDF document.



## G. Appendices

### ***Appendix A: Court Regions***

The following is a list of valid values to use for regions.

- First Circuit
- Second Circuit
- Third Circuit
- Fourth Circuit
- Fifth Circuit
- Sixth Circuit
- Seventh Circuit
- Eighth Circuit
- Ninth Circuit
- Tenth Circuit
- Eleventh Circuit
- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Guam
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi

- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Puerto Rico
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virgin Islands
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

### ***Appendix B: Nature of Suit***

The nature of suit functionality is currently unexposed. If this feature is believed to be necessary, please contact a Docket Alarm representative.

### ***Appendix C: Party Types***

The following are the types of parties that may appear in a District Court case, both civil and criminal.

- ThirdParty Defendant
- ThirdParty Plaintiff
- Appellant
- Amicus
- Arbitrator

- Counter Claimant
- Counter Defendant
- Claimant
- Consol Third Party
- Defendant
- Consol Third Party Plaintiff
- Consol Claimant
- Consol Counter Claimant
- Consol Counter Defendant
- Consol Cross Claimant
- Consol Cross Defendant
- Consol Defendant
- Consol Plaintiff
- Creditor
- Cross Claimant
- Cross Defendant
- In Re
- Defendant
- Appellee
- Garnishee
- Debtor-in-Possess
- Interpleader
- Intervenor
- Intervenor Defendant
- Intervenor Plaintiff
- Interested Party
- Mediator
- Movant
- Material Witness
- Objector
- Petitioner
- Plaintiff
- Receiver
- Respondent
- Special Master
- Taxpayer
- Trustee
- Custodian
- 3rd Pty Defendant
- 3rd Party Plaintiff

The following are the types of parties that may appear in a Bankruptcy case.

- Accountant
- Appraiser
- Attorney
- Auctioneer
- Auditor
- Assistant U.S. Trustee
- Assistant United States Trustee
- Broker
- Counter-Claimant
- Counter-Defendant
- Consultant
- Creditor
- Cross-Claimant
- Creditor Committee
- Creditor Committee Chair
- Cross Defendant
- Debtor
- Debtor In Possession
- Defendant
- Examiner
- Financial Advisor
- Foreign Representative
- Interpleader
- Intervenor-Defendant
- Interested Party
- Interim Trustee
- Intervenor
- Intervenor-Plaintiff
- Joint Debtor
- Judge
- Liquidator
- Mediator
- Non-Filing Spouse
- Consumer Privacy Ombudsman
- Health Care Ombudsman
- Other Professional
- Plaintiff
- Petitioning Creditor

- Partner
- Realtor
- Respondent
- Special Counsel
- Stockholder
- Surveyor,
- Successor Trustee
- Trustee
- U.S. Trustee
- United States Trustee
- Witness