

Legal Terms

Acquittal -- A verdict in a criminal trial in which the defendant is found not guilty of the charge.

Appeal -- A legal action in which a litigant asks a higher court to review and reverse a lower court's decision.

Appellant -- The litigant who brings the appeal.

Bail -- A thing of value -- for example, money or the deed to a house -- given to the court to ensure a defendant's appearance in court. If the defendant appears at all court proceedings as required, the bail is returned at the end of the case, subject to all outstanding costs being paid. If the defendant fails to appear as required, the bail may be kept by the court.

Bench -- The place where the judge sits. It also is another word for the court itself.

Bench trial -- A trial decided by a judge instead of a jury.

Burden of proof -- The duty of a litigant to prove or disprove an allegation in court.

Case Law -- The body of law created by judges' written opinions.

Conviction -- A verdict in a civil or criminal trial in which the defendant is found guilty of the charge.

Damages -- Money awarded to a plaintiff in a civil case. Damages are assessed against the defendant who is found by the jury or judge to have been responsible for the plaintiff's injuries. See *Injury*.

Defense Attorney -- The lawyer who represents the defendant in any legal proceeding.

Docket -- A list of cases on a court's calendar, or schedule.

Evidence -- The information used in court to prove or disprove an allegation.

Hearing -- A court proceeding in which evidence is presented to determine facts that are in dispute.

Hung jury -- A jury that is deadlocked and cannot agree on a verdict.

Indictment -- A formal, written accusation issued by a grand jury charging someone with a crime. An indictment is not proof of a crime.

Injury -- Any legal harm, wrong or damage done to a person's body, property, rights or reputation, and that the law recognizes as deserving of redress.

Jury -- See Petit jury.

Jury Charge -- The judge's address to the jury after all testimony has been heard in a trial. The charge explains the law that the jury is to apply in deciding on a verdict.

Lawsuit -- A civil action brought in court in which a plaintiff seeks a remedy provided by the law, such as damages.

Litigant -- Someone who is a party to litigation. The litigant can be the side bringing the lawsuit or the side being sued.

Litigation -- A legal dispute between parties argued in a court.

Mistrial -- A trial that is terminated by the judge before a verdict is returned. For example, a judge might declare a mistrial if the jury is deadlocked and cannot reach a decision.

Opinion -- The written explanation of a court's decision in a matter.

Petit Jury -- A group of citizens summoned to and sworn by the court to hear evidence and render a verdict in a trial.

Plaintiff -- The party who has initiated the litigation.

Plea bargain -- An agreement between a criminal defendant and a prosecutor in which the defendant admits having committed a crime. In return, the prosecutor asks the judge to impose a less severe sentence than had the defendant been convicted at a trial. The judge is not bound by the terms of a plea bargain. A plea bargain ensures that a guilty defendant is punished.

Prosecutor -- The lawyer who represents the State or City in a traffic/criminal case.

Settlement -- An agreement between the plaintiff and defendant in a civil case to resolve the dispute without a trial.

Sentence -- The punishment a judge imposes on a person convicted of a crime.

Statutory law -- Laws, or statutes, enacted by legislatures, such as the Ohio State General Assembly or the United States Congress.

Subpoena -- An official notice requiring someone's appearance in court.

Testify -- The act by which a witness offers testimony in court.

Testimony -- Statements made by witnesses in court.

Verdict The decision of the jury in a jury trial, or of the judge in a bench trial.

Witness -- Someone who offers evidence in court.