

finement in a local jail. Felony violations are typically more serious and punishable by incarceration in a prison or by death.

**Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).** Most courts provide the option for parties to mediate civil disputes. Attorneys or mediators will meet with disputing parties to help them arrive at a solution that can be the basis of a court order.

**Jury Service.** A jury hears the evidence presented and renders an impartial verdict. Citizen involvement on juries is crucial to the integrity of the justice system.

**Witness.** A witness is one who testifies under oath to what he or she saw, heard, or otherwise observed. The judge exercises control over the mode and order of interrogating witnesses and presenting evidence so as to (1) make the interrogation and presentation effective for the ascertainment of the truth, (2) avoid needless consumption of time, and (3) protect witnesses from harassment or undue embarrassment. Evidence Rule 611(A)

## **JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS**

**Judges are experienced attorneys.** Judges must be attorneys who have passed the Ohio Bar Exam and practiced law for at least six years. This minimum standard applies to all judges, except for county court judges, who must have at least two years of experience in the practice of law.

**Judges are elected.** Judges are elected to six-year terms on a nonpartisan ballot.

**Judges continuing judicial education.** All Ohio judges have earned an undergraduate degree and an advanced degree in law. Judges also must participate in continuing judicial education.

**Judges adhere to strict codes of conduct.** Judges are required to comply with specific rules of professional responsibility and "Judicial Canons."



### **Visit Your County Courthouse**

There are 88 counties in Ohio and each county seat has a courthouse and at least one Court of Common Pleas judge. Depending on population and workload, some counties have many judges to serve their population.

**CONTACT YOUR LOCAL COURT OR JUDGES AT:**

Prepared by:

**OHIO JUDICIAL CONFERENCE**

The Ohio Judicial Conference was created by statute (ORC 105.91) and is staffed to support and serve all Ohio judges.

**For more information, contact:**

OHIO JUDICIAL CONFERENCE  
65 South Front Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3431

800-282-1510

[www.ohiojudges.org](http://www.ohiojudges.org)



# OHIO COURTS

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## A CITIZENS GUIDE



# THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Ohio Constitution establishes three separate and co-equal branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. At the core of the judicial branch are the Ohio courts and the judges who preside over those courts.

## Ohio's Court System

### APPELLATE COURTS

#### Supreme Court of Ohio

There is one Supreme Court of Ohio, with a Chief Justice and six associate justices. Most cases come before the Supreme Court on appeal from the Courts of Appeals and other state bodies like the Board of Tax Appeals, and the Public Utilities Commission. The Supreme Court determines which cases to hear.

#### Courts of Appeals of Ohio

Ohio has 12 Courts of Appeals districts. When a party is dissatisfied with the outcome at the trial court, the party can appeal that decision to the appellate court in that region of the state.

### TRIAL COURTS

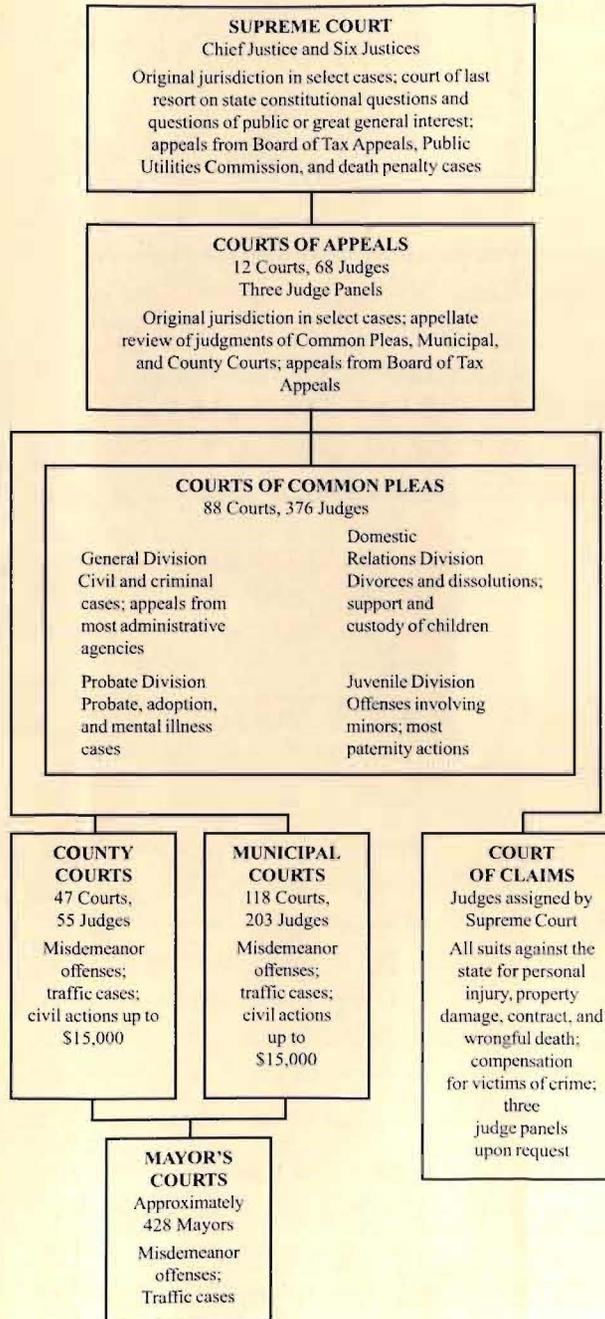
#### Courts of Common Pleas

The work of the Courts of Common Pleas is divided into four divisions:

- General Division**—civil and criminal cases, where judges and/or juries determine the facts of a case and apply the appropriate rules of law.

## Ohio's Court Structure

Including Organization and Jurisdiction



- Domestic Relations Division**—divorce, dissolution of marriage, child custody, and spousal support cases.
- Juvenile Division**—civil or criminal cases involving minors, civil cases of abuse or neglect, dependency, and paternity.
- Probate Division**—cases such as adoption, mental illness, institutional confinement, estates, trusts and wills.

### Municipal and County Courts

Counties, cities, villages, and townships have municipal and/or county courts. These courts handle most of the misdemeanor and traffic cases as well as some civil actions. In addition, most domestic violence and DUI cases are handled by municipal and county courts.

### MAYOR'S COURTS

Some cities, villages, and townships have a Mayor's Court. These courts do not have juries and handle local misdemeanor and traffic cases.

### TERMINOLOGY

**Civil Cases.** Civil disputes bring people into the courtroom as a plaintiff or as a defendant. Families may come into court for a divorce or dissolution of a marriage, to finalize an adoption, to seek guardianship or legal custody, or for many other reasons. Sometimes individuals will ask the court to help them resolve a personal injury matter or a conflict with another party, like a conflict between a contractor and a home owner.

**Criminal Cases.** Defendants come to court as a result of being charged with violating Ohio law. A misdemeanor violation is one that is relatively minor and generally punishable by a fine or con-