



CONTACT US:

-  41 N. Perry Street, Room 104,
Dayton, OH 45422
-  937-496-7623
-  Clerkhelpcenter@mcoho.org
-  Monday-Friday 8:30AM to 4:30PM

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LEGAL TERMINOLOGY

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TERMINOLOGY

LEGAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following legal terms and definitions are frequently used in court. The purpose of this brochure is to inform you with these legal terms to increase your level of understanding of the trial process.



Bailiff

A court attendant whose duties are to keep order in the courtroom and to have custody of the jury.

Cause of Action

The legal grounds on which a party to a lawsuit relies to get a verdict against an opponent.

Closing Argument

The final argument by an attorney on behalf of his client after all evidence has been produced for both sides.

Compliant

The first document (or pleading) in a civil case stating facts and demanding relief.

Contempt of Court

Any act calculated to embarrass, hinder, or obstruct a court in the administration of justice, or calculated to lessen its authority or dignity. Contempt are those committed in the immediate presence of the court; indirect is the term chiefly used with reference to the failure or refusal to obey a lawful order.

Counterclaim

An answer to the compliant, in which the defendant claims to be entitled to damages or other relief from the plaintiff.

Court Reporter

A stenographer who records and transcribes a verbatim report of proceedings in a court of law.

Defendant

The party against whom a criminal or civil action is brought

Deliberations

The discussions of the jury which occur after the judge has instructed them to retire to the jury room and consider their verdict.

Interrogatories

Written questions propounded by one party and served on an adversary, who must provide written answers thereto under oath.

Issue

A disputed question of fact which must be decided.

Jury Panel

All prospective jurors from which the trial jury is chosen.

Opening Statement

Before introducing and allowing evidence into the case, a lawyer tells the jury what the case is about and what evidence is expected to be brought in to prove that side of the case. Opening statements are not evidence.

Parties

The plaintiff and defendant in the case - also called the "litigants"

Plaintiff

The party who institutes a legal action.