



What Does That Mean?

Advanced Courthouse Definitions



The **Defendant** is a person charged with a criminal offense that is facing trial, or the party being sued in a civil case.

The **Plaintiff** is the party who brings a civil suit in a court of law or a person who is suing an individual or a group.

The **Miranda Rule** is a doctrine stating that a suspect in police custody must be informed of certain constitutional rights before being interrogated. The rights include the right to remain silent, to have an attorney present, and to have an attorney appointed if you cannot afford one. If the rule isn't followed, any information gathered during the interrogation cannot be used in a trial.

The **District Attorney** is a public official who is elected to represent the state in criminal cases in a particular judicial district.

An **Arraignment** is the initial step in a criminal prosecution whereby the defendant is brought before the court to hear the official charges and to enter a plea.

A **Plea** is a formal reply or answer to the charges the accused is facing. An example of a plea is either guilty or not guilty.

A **Hearing** is a judicial session, usually open to the public, held for the purpose of deciding issues of fact or of law, sometimes with witnesses testifying.

Voir Dire is the legal terminology for the process of preliminary examination of potential jurors to decide whether or not they are qualified and suitable to serve on a jury.

A **Motion** is a written or oral application requesting the court to make a specified ruling of order.

Time Served is often referred to during the sentencing phase of a trial. It is the time in which a defendant has spent in jail before being found guilty in a court of law. After the defendant is sentenced, he/she may receive credit for time served, which is then deducted from their total sentence.

A **Plea Bargain** is a negotiated agreement between a prosecutor and a criminal defendant whereby the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser offense, or to one of multiple charges in exchange for some concession by the prosecutor, usually a more lenient sentence or a dismissal of other charges.