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Colorado



Courts

At A



Glance



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# **Colorado Courts At A Glance**

Special thanks to State Court Administrator's Office  
Facilities Manager Joe Lopez for access to photos of  
county courthouses statewide.

## A Message from the Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court



Welcome to *Colorado Courts At A Glance!* Colorado's third branch of government, the Judicial Branch, is charged with two responsibilities: we resolve disputes and we supervise offenders on probation. Our busy state courts system has

four levels of courts: county, district, Court of Appeals, and Supreme Court. County courts handle more than 450,000 filings annually. The district courts handle more than 161,000 filings per year. The 16 judges of the Court of Appeals, sitting in panels of three, handle approximately 2,500 cases. The seven-member Supreme Court, in which all justices hear each case, disposes of more than 1,600 cases each year.

As we close out one millennium and enter another, the emphasis of all of the state courts is on offering the best possible customer service to everyone who interacts with our court system. This booklet provides an overview of Colorado's state courts and the justice system in order to help you, our "customer," better understand how the courts function and what rights you have in the courts. A more complete understanding of the justice system also will help you appreciate the important role an independent judiciary plays in protecting your constitutional rights. For more than 30 years, Colorado has used a merit-based selection system to choose the best people to serve as our judges.

The justice system works most effectively and fairly when all Coloradans are informed about its functions and responsibilities. We hope you will find this booklet useful and informative.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary J. Mullarkey".

Mary Mullarkey  
Colorado Supreme Court Chief Justice

## INTRODUCTION

Colorado's courts play important roles in your life. When you buy or sell goods or property, get married or divorced, have children, work, retire, drive a car, and even after you die, your state courts can protect your rights and can enforce your responsibilities. If you are the victim of a crime, are accused of committing a crime, or witness a crime, you may be required to appear in a Colorado court. You may also be called upon to serve as a juror, one of the most important privileges we all share as citizens.

In addition to state courts, there are federal courts in Colorado that deal with federal laws, such as bankruptcies and matters involving the United States Constitution. This booklet does not discuss federal courts. They are part of a parallel and entirely different judicial system.

This booklet is designed to answer questions that you, the people of Colorado, may have about your state judicial branch. The following few pages present an overview of the Colorado Judicial Branch – how it works and how it affects you. A glossary containing legal terms is provided in the back of the book.

## YOUR RIGHTS IN COURT

If you are arrested or charged with a crime, or even some types of traffic violations, you have certain constitutional rights. It is wise to exercise these rights even if you later decide to plead guilty to the charges.

What are these rights?

- You have the right to remain silent and to refuse to answer any questions asked by police officers and other officials about the event. Anything you say may be used against you.
- You have the right to have a lawyer represent you. If you cannot afford to pay for a lawyer, you can ask the judge to appoint one for you.
- You have the right to a public and speedy trial, either to a jury or to a judge only.
- You are not required to prove your innocence; instead, you are presumed innocent of any crime unless the district attorney (city attorney in a municipal court) presents sufficient evidence to prove your guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.
- You are entitled to testify in your own defense if you want to, but you cannot be forced to testify.
- You and your attorney may cross-examine any person who testifies against you.
- You are allowed to bring in witnesses, and the judge can order any person you want as a witness to appear in court.

If you are found guilty, you have the right to appeal. You also have the right to make a statement or present additional information to the judge at the time of sentencing. The judge decides the sentence unless the death penalty is a possibility.

Violations of private rights and duties are considered civil cases. Suits can be brought for such matters as the recovery of damages from negligence, breach of contract, or violation of civil rights. The court does not appoint attorneys in civil cases; however, legal aid services may be available for people who cannot afford a lawyer to represent them in civil matters.

Family law cases—involving such things as dissolution of marriage, child support, parenting plans, and dependency and neglect—also are considered civil cases. People who cannot afford legal representation for family law cases also may qualify for legal aid services or for court-appointed counsel.



## **TYPES OF COURTS**

Several different courts in Colorado handle various kinds of cases. These courts are:

### **MUNICIPAL COURTS**

Municipal (city) courts deal with violations of city laws committed within the city limits. Generally, these laws involve traffic, shoplifting, and offenses such as dog leash law violations and disturbances. For some cases, you may have the right to a jury trial and to tell your side of the story in municipal court. Municipal courts are not state courts; however, you may appeal a municipal court decision to a state court.

### **COUNTY COURTS**

Every county in the state has a county court, with one or more county judges. These courts handle traffic cases and minor criminal matters, as well as civil actions involving no more than \$10,000 (\$15,000 as of September 1, 2001). You may have a jury trial in many types of county court cases. An appeal from a county court decision may be made to the district court.

Denver's court system, which will be explained later, differs from the courts in other counties.

### **SMALL CLAIMS COURTS**

Small claims courts are divisions of county court. Individuals are allowed to argue their own cases and to have speedy decisions on civil matters involving no more than \$5,000 (\$7,500 as of September 1, 2001). Court sessions are held during the day or evening to accommodate the public. There are no jury trials in small claims courts, and sometimes a magistrate hears the cases instead of a judge. No plaintiff may file more than two claims per month or 18 claims per year in small claims court.

### **DISTRICT COURTS**

Each county in the state has a district court. Both district and county courts are organized into judicial districts. However, unlike county courts, where there is at least one judge per county court, district judges are assigned to the judicial district and may serve more than one district court within that judicial district, particularly in rural areas of the state.

District courts have authority to handle many types of cases, including divorces, civil claims in any amount, juvenile matters, probate (estates), mental health, and criminal matters. You may appeal a district court decision to the Colorado Court of Appeals and/or to the Colorado Supreme Court.

### **WATER COURTS**

Colorado has seven water courts, one in each of the major river basins (South Platte, Arkansas, Rio Grande, Gunnison, Colorado, White, and San Juan Rivers). Water court is a division of district court, and the Supreme Court appoints a district court judge from within the water division to act as water judge. Other personnel include the clerk of the water court and a water referee. Water court has exclusive jurisdiction over water rights, their adjudication, and litigation concerning such rights. Thus, cases relating to the determination of water rights and the uses and administration of water resources are determined by water judges. There are no jury trials in water courts, and all appeals from water judges' decisions are filed directly with the Colorado Supreme Court.

### **DENVER COURTS**

Denver's court system differs from those in the rest of the state, in part because Denver is both a city and a county.

The Denver County Court functions as a municipal as well as a county court and is paid for entirely by Denver taxes rather than

by state taxes. Denver County Court judges are appointed by the mayor of the City of Denver.

Denver has the only separate juvenile court and separate probate court in the state. In other parts of Colorado, district courts handle juvenile and probate matters. The Denver juvenile and probate courts are state courts, along with Denver District Court.

## COURT OF APPEALS

The Colorado Court of Appeals, located in Denver, has 16 judges. One is chief judge. The court sits in divisions, each consisting of three judges. Divisions of this court sometimes go to various parts of the state to hear oral arguments in cases that have been appealed from the state trial courts.

Unlike the other courts discussed above, the Court of Appeals is not a trial court. The Court of Appeals usually is the first court to hear appeals of decisions made by Colorado district courts and Denver's probate and juvenile courts. In addition, it is responsible for reviewing the decisions of several state administrative agencies. Its determination of an appeal is final unless the Colorado Supreme Court agrees to review the matter.

## SUPREME COURT

The Colorado Supreme Court has seven justices. A chief justice is elected by the court from its membership. The chief justice is the chief executive officer of the state judicial branch of government.

The Supreme Court is the court of last resort or the final court in the Colorado court system. An individual who has appealed to the Court of Appeals and is still dissatisfied may ask the Supreme Court to review the case. In most situations, the Supreme Court has a right to refuse to do so. In some instances, individuals can petition the Supreme Court directly regarding a lower court's decision.

In addition to its legal duties, the Supreme Court has supervisory and administrative responsibilities. The Supreme Court has supervisory power over all other state courts and over all attorneys practicing law in Colorado. The following bodies assist the Supreme Court in its duties:

*The State Court Administrator's Office* serves as the administrative arm of the state courts system. The office prepares the annual budget and request for appropriation from the Colorado legislature; manages fiscal operations and purchasing; supervises personnel and payroll; maintains the Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR); and is responsible for computer operations, planning, internal fiscal and management audits, and training of judges and branch personnel.

*The Attorney Regulation System* provides the process for receiving and investigating complaints against attorneys through the Office of the Attorney Regulation Counsel. The Presiding Disciplinary Judge hears cases and determines appropriate discipline. An attorney disciplined through this process can appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

*The State Board of Law Examiners* reviews the educational, professional, ethical and moral qualifications of individuals who want to be lawyers in Colorado. The board recommends qualified applicants to the Supreme Court. The court uses those recommendations to determine who may practice law in Colorado.

*The Public Defender Commission* is a body of lawyers and citizens that appoints the State Public Defender for five-year terms. The commission may also discharge the State Public Defender for cause.



## JUDGES

Colorado's population increases every year. As a result, the number of cases filed in the courts increases every year. Colorado judges work hard to cope with the increased number of cases so individuals may have prompt court hearings. This is not an easy task.

Judges do their best to move cases through their courts as fast as possible while still making certain that everyone has a fair hearing. The sheer number of cases sometimes makes this difficult. With the approval of the Chief Justice, Senior Judges who retire from service are used to assist local courts with case backlogs, and to fill in for judges during vacations and emergencies.

Trial judges have many responsibilities in addition to being in the courtroom and presiding over trials. The judges frequently must meet with lawyers to discuss and decide questions of law that are involved in a case, and must spend considerable time researching legal matters and writing orders and opinions. Trial judges also have the responsibility of advising people of their constitutional rights when they are charged with a crime.

To ensure that there is an adequate number of judges to handle cases in a timely manner, the state court system will occasionally request the addition of new judges to the trial courts in the districts where they are most needed. Only the legislature has authority to add new judges to the state system.

Judges on the Court of Appeals and the justices on the Supreme Court do not handle trials. They decide an appealed case by reading the printed record of the trial and by considering written "briefs" and hearing the arguments of the lawyers on both sides. They research and review the law involved in the case and then write opinions, most of which are published and become part of the common law of Colorado.

## HOW DOES A JUDGE BECOME A JUDGE?

A judge must be a special person: fair, just and knowledgeable in the law. How do judges attain their places on the bench?

The people of Colorado passed a constitutional amendment in 1966 which provides that state judges be appointed rather than elected on a political ticket. Now, when a vacancy occurs in a state court, a judicial nominating commission interviews applicants and recommends two or three individuals to the Governor for consideration. The Governor then appoints one of these as a judge to fill the vacancy.

Every judicial district has a nominating commission. Each judicial nominating commission consists of three attorney members and four non-attorney members. The non-attorneys are appointed by the Governor, and the attorneys are appointed jointly by the Governor, Supreme Court Chief Justice and Attorney General. Every nominating commission has one more non-lawyer than there are lawyers, and no political party may have a majority of more than one on a commission. A state commission recommends individuals for the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court vacancies. The state commission is composed of one lawyer and one non-lawyer from each congressional district, plus a non-lawyer member at-large.

The Colorado Constitution requires each judge to stand for retention election after serving a full term. Voters select "yes" if they wish to grant the judge another term in office or "no" if they think the judge should not be retained in office.

Initially, a judge serves a two-year provisional term before standing for retention and then serves a full term. A county judge serves a four-year term; a district judge, a six-year term; a Court of Appeals judge, an eight-year term; and a Supreme Court justice, a ten-year term. All judges must retire by age 72.

## JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE

In 1988, the Colorado General Assembly created Judicial Performance Commissions for the purpose of providing voters with fair, responsible, and constructive evaluations of trial and appellate judges and justices seeking retention in general elections. The results of the evaluations also provide judges with information that can be used to improve their professional skills.

The State Commission on Judicial Performance develops evaluation techniques for district and county judges, justices of the Supreme Court, and judges of the Court of Appeals. Criteria include: integrity; knowledge and understanding of substantive, procedural, and evidentiary law; communications skills; preparation, attentiveness, and control over judicial proceedings; sentencing practices; docket management and prompt case disposition; administrative skills; punctuality; effectiveness in working with participants in the judicial process; and services to the legal profession and the public.

Each judicial district has its own 10-member Judicial Performance Commission. The Governor and Chief Justice each appoint one attorney and two non-attorneys. The President of the Senate and Speaker of the House each appoint one attorney and one non-attorney.

The State Commission is responsible for evaluating the performance of judges of the Court of Appeals and the justices of the Supreme Court. Its members are appointed in a similar manner.

Narrative profiles and recommendations concerning retention are available at least 45 days before each general election for those judges subject to the retention vote. The information is available on the judicial website and is published in the Colorado legislature's *Blue Book of Ballot Issues*, which is mailed to each voter household prior to the election.

## COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

The Colorado Commission on Judicial Discipline oversees the ethical conduct and behavior of state court judges, justices, and senior judges. Created in 1966, the commission is composed of 10 members: four citizens, two attorneys, two district court judges, and two county court judges. The citizen and attorney members are appointed by the Governor and must be approved by the Colorado Senate. The judge members are appointed by the Colorado Supreme Court. Commission members serve staggered four-year terms.

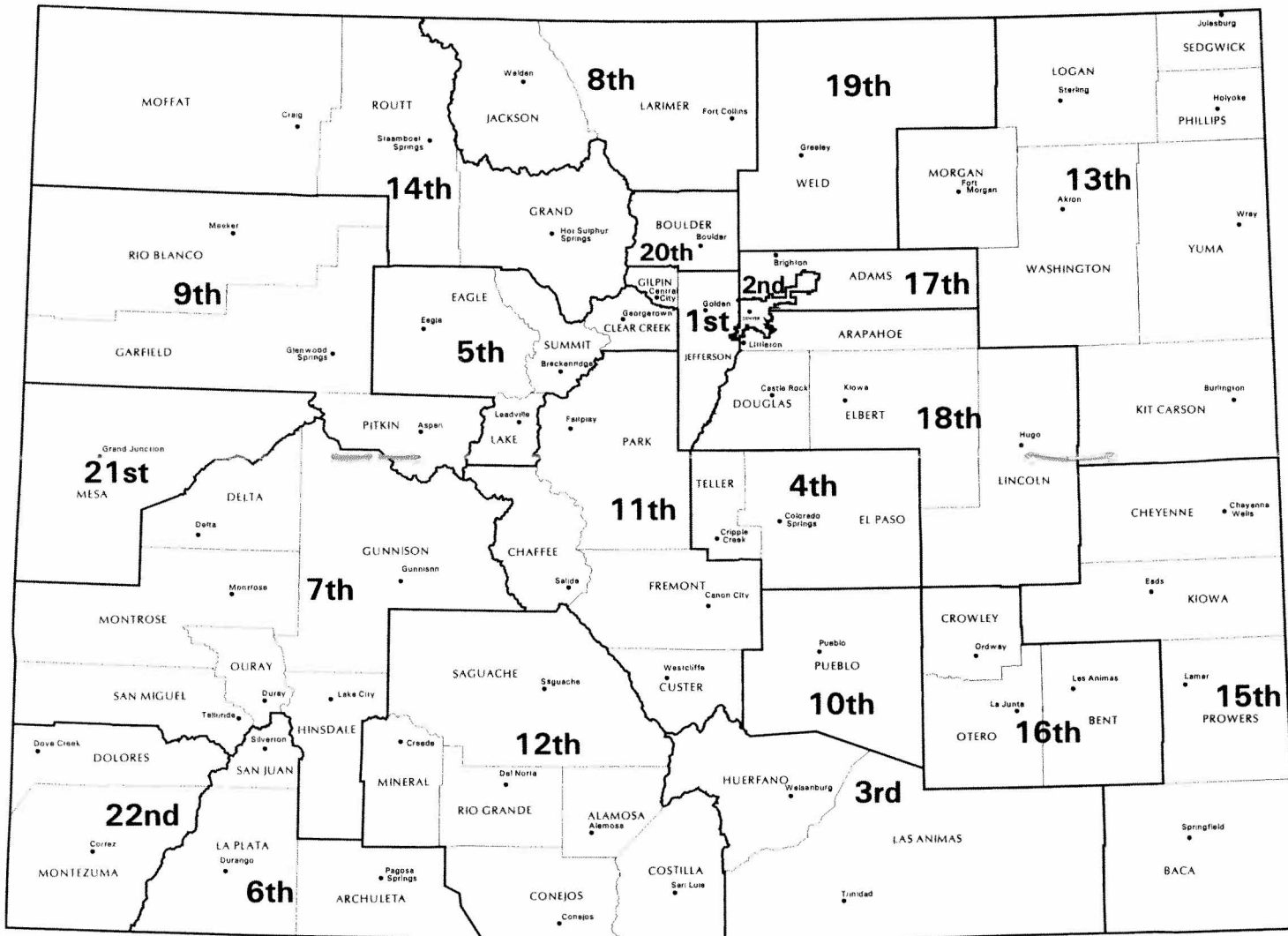
The commission does not have jurisdiction over Denver County Court or municipal court judges. Complaints against these judges go to the mayors of the respective cities.

The commission has the constitutional authority to investigate any of the following acts:

- willful misconduct by a judge, including misconduct which, although not related to judicial duties, brings the judicial office into disrepute or is prejudicial to the administration of justice;
- willful or persistent failure of a judge to perform judicial duties, including the incompetent performance of judicial duties;
- intemperance, including extreme or immoderate personal conduct, recurring loss of temper or control, abuse of alcohol, or the use of illegal narcotics or dangerous drugs;
- any conduct on the part of a judge that constitutes a violation of the Colorado Code of Judicial Conduct; or
- a disability, which is or is likely to become permanent, that interferes with the performance of judicial duties.



# JUDICIAL DISTRICTS OF COLORADO

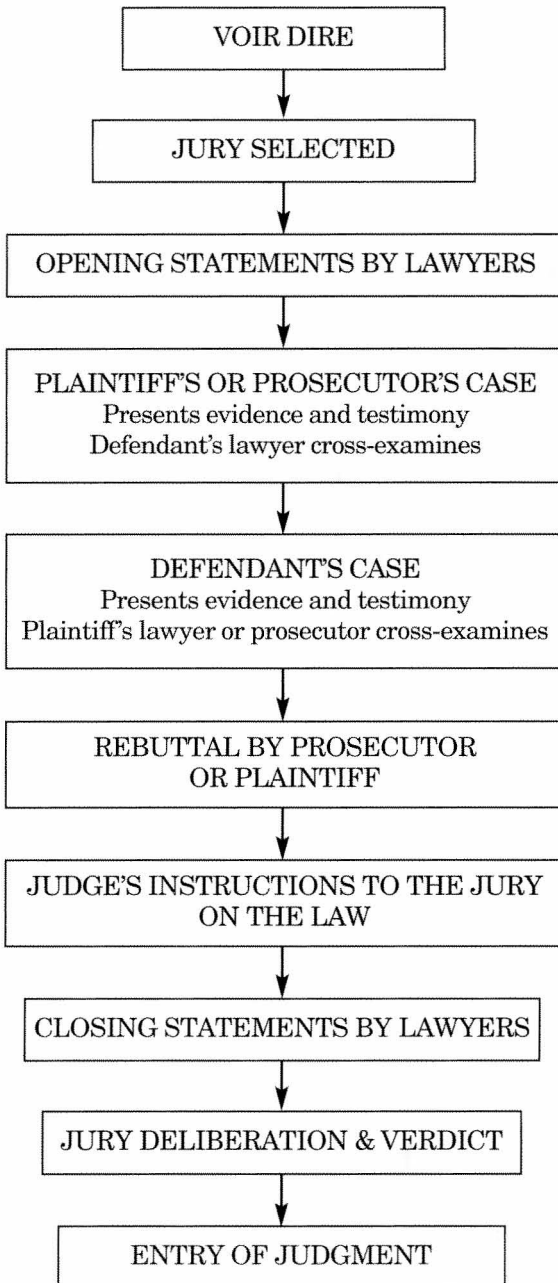


● County Seat

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## ANATOMY OF A COLORADO JURY TRIAL



## THE JURY SYSTEM

The jury system is an important part of the court process in Colorado. Persons accused of crimes have a right to trial by jury. Parties to a civil suit may choose to have their case decided by a jury.

Jurors are selected at random from a computerized list of names taken from voter and driver's license registration records. Juror summonses are then sent to the people selected, informing them when and where they are to appear for jury service.



About 95 percent of all jury trials in the world take place in the United States. Those who have served as jurors often express a feeling of pride in and respect for our system of justice and an appreciation for the opportunity to be part of the judicial process.

Efforts to streamline the jury system are continuing. Jurors in Colorado serve for only one day or one trial in any calendar year. Employers must pay regular employees who are serving as jurors their regular wages (or up to \$50 per day) for the first three days of the trial. Unemployed jurors may claim a reimbursement for expenses. The state pays \$50 per day to all jurors after the third day.

The opportunity to serve on a jury allows you to become a better informed and more responsible citizen and to learn more about your courts and the law.

## THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The State of Colorado has three branches of government: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. The Colorado Constitution defines each branch's responsibilities. The constitution also guarantees many specific legal rights to all Coloradans and provides for the establishment of state courts. Courts are part of the Judicial Branch of government, and their major function is to resolve disputes.

### CIVIL DISPUTES

Colorado's courts have power (called "jurisdiction") to decide two kinds of disputes – civil and criminal. Civil cases usually involve conflicts between private citizens, such as disputes over contracts, wills, personal injuries, or family law matters. Government departments, agencies, and officials may also be involved in civil cases. In deciding civil cases, judges often must interpret laws made by the Legislative Branch or rules made by government departments or agencies that are part of the Executive Branch.

Litigation is only one way to resolve legal disputes; other methods are called alternative dispute resolution, or ADR. There are two basic types of ADR: (1) negotiation, in which the parties have control of the decision-making, and (2) adjudication, in which a neutral person makes the decision.

Mediation is the most commonly used negotiation type of ADR. In mediation, a trained neutral third party helps the parties reach a resolution, but the parties make the actual decision. Arbitration is the most common adjudication type of ADR. Arbitration is like an informal trial where a third party neutral hears evidence and arguments from the parties and then makes a binding decision (called an award). An award made through binding arbitration can be appealed only for very limited reasons.

### CRIMINAL CASES

Criminal cases in state trial courts involve charges or violations of certain laws enacted by the Colorado General Assembly, the Legislative Branch. Criminal charges are filed by government attorneys, called district attorneys, on behalf of the people of the State of Colorado. Some criminal charges – called indictments – are filed by grand juries, but this procedure is seldom used in Colorado state courts.

The Colorado General Assembly establishes the definition of crimes and sets the penalties that trial judges may impose on convicted criminals. The Judicial Branch is responsible for the state courts and probation services. The Colorado Department of Corrections – a department of the Executive Branch – is responsible for the state prison system and community corrections facilities. Parole – also under the Department of Corrections – is responsible for supervising convicted criminals after they are released from the state prison system. The Governor has constitutional power to change the sentences of convicted criminals.

City (also called "municipal") governments are similar in organization to the state government. City councils pass ordinances that control the behavior of individuals within the city limits. City attorneys may file charges when certain ordinances have been violated, and trials on such charges are held in a municipal court before a municipal judge. Municipal courts are not part of the state court system, but the procedures are very similar to those followed in state courts.



### CRIMINAL SENTENCES

Whenever a defendant in a criminal case pleads guilty to or is found guilty of a criminal charge, the judge must sentence the defen-

dant according to the law. Before any defendant is sentenced (except in traffic or other less serious criminal matters), the judge is given a report from the probation department. This report contains information about the defendant and recommendations from the probation department and other professionals involved in the case as to the sentence that should be imposed.

A defendant may be sentenced to serve a stated period of time in a correctional facility. The Department of Corrections decides in which institution the defendant will serve the sentence.

Upon the recommendation of a district attorney, the judge may postpone sentencing a defendant for a stated period of time after the defendant enters a plea of guilty. If the defendant is a law-abiding citizen for that time, the judge may dismiss the case and the criminal record of the defendant may be erased. This is called a "deferred sentence."

A defendant may be granted probation. If this is done, the judge places the defendant under the supervision of the probation department instead of imposing a sentence to a correctional institution. Most defendants who receive probation are first-time offenders involved in non-violent crimes. Payment to the victim for any losses (called "restitution") is usually a requirement of probation. A defendant who violates probation or a deferred sentence may be sent to a correctional facility.

Defendants who are sent to a correctional facility may be released before their sentence is fully served by being granted parole by the State Board of Parole. Defendants on parole must keep the parole officer advised of all their activities for the time required by the board. Defendants who violate conditions of parole may be returned to a correctional facility.

## PROBATION

Each judicial district has a probation department that is managed by a chief probation officer.

The mission of probation is two-fold: supervision of offenders sentenced to community programs and protection of the community. Supervision includes counseling, referral of defendants to treatment facilities, collection of restitution, drug and alcohol testing, and home detention. Special needs offenders are referred to specialized programs. These programs are designed for female offenders, sexual perpetrators, and drug offenders. Certain high-risk offenders are referred to intensive supervision probation programs, which may include home monitoring. Defendants who fail to comply with conditions of probation can be returned to court.

Another function of probation is to provide assessments and pre-sentence information to the court. Pre-sentence investigation reports, or PSIs, are prepared to present information necessary for the judge to sentence the offender. PSI reports typically contain information regarding details of the current offense; circumstances of the victim, such as restitution; the offender's criminal record and social background; and recommendations for sentencing. If the offender is granted probation, these reports are also helpful to the supervising probation officer in assisting in the development of case planning. If the offender is to be incarcerated, the report is forwarded to the Department of Corrections or Department of Institutions, where it is used in the diagnostic and placement process. Eventually, it may be reviewed by the parole board if the offender applies for parole.

Over the years, alcohol and drug-related traffic offenses have increased dramatically. In Colorado, almost half of all traffic fatalities are

alcohol related. Contained in each probation department is the Alcohol and Drug Driving Safety program (ADDS). It is staffed with Alcohol and Drug Evaluation Specialists who evaluate and recommend treatment for defendants convicted of alcohol or drug-related driving offenses. These evaluators make treatment recommendations based on information gathered in an interview, validated assessment instruments, and treatment placement criteria. Due to the complexity of substance abuse problems, evaluators work to refer offenders to programs that best address their needs. These referrals are most often to weekly outpatient groups, individual therapy, or daily outpatient sessions.

More chronic problems and addictions may require more intense treatment. Often, substance abusers cannot stop using drugs or alcohol on their own, so they must be hospitalized. An evaluator may assist with this process. To augment treatment and promote abstinence, antabuse treatment or urinalysis is often recommended.

## ADMINISTRATION

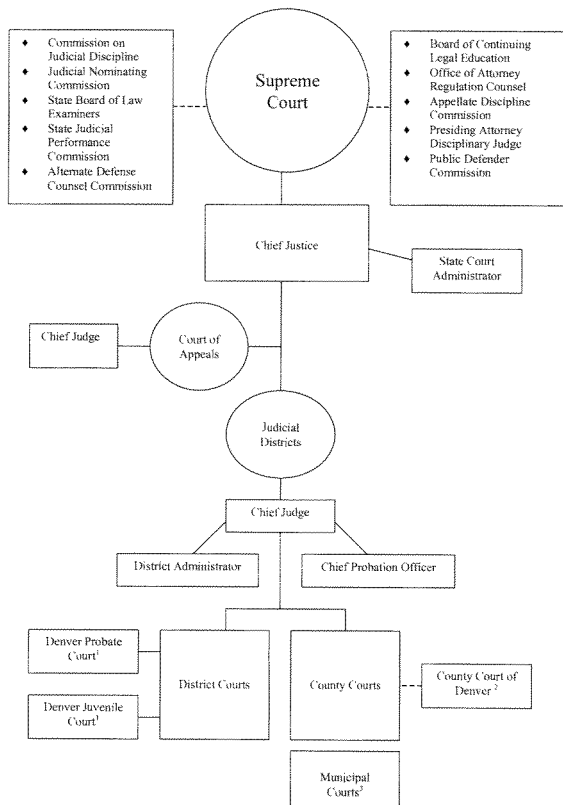
The Colorado Judicial Branch, with more than 250 judges and 2,800 support staff members, is centrally administered by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. To assist the Chief Justice, the Supreme Court appoints the State Court Administrator. Judicial districts are supervised by chief judges, who are appointed by the Chief Justice. The chief judge within each district appoints a district administrator, a chief probation officer, and clerks of court to assist in the management of the district.



Innovative business techniques and new procedures are constantly under evaluation for possible introduction throughout the branch at all levels in order to improve efficiency and to make the courts more accessible to the citizens of Colorado.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Colorado court system consists of the Supreme Court, an intermediate Court of Appeals, district courts and county courts. Each county has both a district court and a county court. Special probate and juvenile courts created by the Colorado Constitution exist in the City and County of Denver. Colorado statutes also authorize locally funded municipal courts with jurisdiction limited to municipal ordinance violations.



- 1 - Exclusive to the City and County of Denver. In the rest of the state, the district court is responsible for juvenile and probate matters.
- 2 - The Denver County Court functions as a municipal as well as a county court and is separate from the state court system.
- 3 - Created and maintained by local government but subject to Supreme Court rules and procedures.

# GLOSSARY

Law has a special language. Some familiar words have a different meaning when used in connection with our courts. This list will help you understand them.

**ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)** A way to resolve legal disputes that involves such methods as mediation or arbitration, as a way to avoid actual litigation in court. ADR is generally less expensive and less time-consuming and can be less adversarial than litigation.

**APPEAL** A request to take a case to a higher court for review. No new evidence may be introduced during the appellate process; the reviewing court considers whether errors occurred during the prior proceedings.

**APPELLATE JURISDICTION** The power of a court to review a case that has already been tried by a lower court.

**BRIEF** A written document presented to the court by a lawyer to serve as the basis for argument.

**CAPITAL CASE** A criminal case in which the death sentence may be imposed.

**CIVIL MATTERS** Matters or cases pertaining to the private rights of individuals.

**COMMON LAW** The law of a country based on custom, usage, and the decisions of courts.

**CONTEMPT OF COURT** The punishable act of showing disrespect for the authority or dignity of a court.

**CONVICTION** The finding that a person is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of committing a crime.

**COUNSEL** A lawyer or a group of lawyers.

**COURT OF RECORD** A court in which a permanent record of proceedings is made.

**CRIMINAL MATTERS** Matters or cases concerned with the acts considered harmful to the general public that are forbidden by law and are punishable by fine, imprisonment, or death.

**DAMAGES** Money claimed by, or ordered paid to, a person who has suffered injury due to the fault of someone else.

**DEFENDANT** A person sued or accused.

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY** A lawyer elected or appointed in a specified judicial district to serve as a prosecutor for the state in criminal cases.

**DOCKET** A list of cases to be tried by a court.

**DOMESTIC RELATIONS** Refers to dissolution of marriage (divorce), custody of children and their support, maintenance (alimony), and property division.

**EVIDENCE** A fact presented before a court, such as a statement of a witness, an object, etc., that bears on or establishes a point in question.

**FELONY** A crime punishable by death or by imprisonment in a state penal institution.

**GRAND JURY** A jury of 12 to 23 citizens that investigates accusations concerning crimes. If there is sufficient evidence, the jury may return an indictment. Used more often in federal court than in state courts.

**INDICTMENT** A formal accusation against a person by a grand jury, based upon probable cause that the person committed a crime.

**INFORMATION** A formal accusation of crime, based on an affidavit of a person allegedly having knowledge of the offense.

**JEOPARDY** Exposure to possible conviction, such as being on trial in court.

**JURISDICTION** The legal power to hear and decide cases; the territorial range of such power.

**JURY** A group of people who swear or affirm to hear evidence, to inquire into the facts in a case, and to give a decision in accordance with their findings.

**JUVENILE CASES** Cases involving delinquent children (under 18 years of age), children needing oversight, and dependent or neglected children (including abused children).

**MENTAL HEALTH CASES** Cases involving actions in which a mentally ill person is committed to a hospital or other institution for treatment. A guardian may be appointed to handle the person's affairs.

**MISDEMEANOR** A less serious criminal offense punishable by a sentence of one year or less.

**OPINION** A formal statement by a judge or justice hearing a case.

**ORDINANCE** A law passed by a city or town legislative body.

**PLAINTIFF** A person who brings a suit in a court of law.



**PRE-SENTENCE INVESTIGATION REPORTS** Reports by probation officers that present information necessary for the judge to sentence the offender.

**PROBATE MATTERS** Matters or cases having to do with wills or estates.

**PROBATION** An alternative form of sentencing for one convicted of a crime. After the convicted person agrees to behave properly, the person is placed under the supervision of a probation officer, rather than being put in jail or prison.

**PROSECUTOR** A lawyer who represents the government in bringing legal proceedings against an alleged wrongdoer.

**PUBLIC DEFENDER** A lawyer employed by the government to represent an accused person who cannot afford to hire a lawyer.

**RESTITUTION** The act of making good or of giving the equivalent for any loss, damage, or injury.

**SENTENCING** When the defendant is brought before the court for imposition of the punishment, such as fines and costs, time in jail, or probation.

**SUBPOENA** A written legal order directing a person to appear in court.

**SUMMONS** An official order to appear in court in a criminal case. In civil cases, it is a notice that a case has been filed and that an answer is required.

**TESTIMONY** A statement made under oath by a witness or a party to establish a fact.

**WARRANT** A writ or order authorizing an officer to make an arrest, search, or to perform some other designated act.