

LEGAL TERMS

Words Defined

Acquittal—A court decision of not guilty

Affidavit—A written statement made by a witness that is sworn to be true

Bailiff—The court official who maintains order in the courtroom

Bench trial—A trial conducted by a judge only; no jury

Burden of proof—The requirement to prove a disputed fact in court

Charge to the jury—Instructions to the jury by the judge

City ordinance—A law passed by a city, or county government that may be prosecuted as a crime

Class C misdemeanor—A crime punishable by fine only

Closing arguments—An attorney's last remarks to the jury, a summary of his or her case that calls the jury's attention to important testimony

Contempt of court—Willful disregard for orders made by the judge

Counsel—The legal representative of another; an attorney

Court clerk—Manages the court and handles paperwork

Crime—An act which the legislature has made unlawful by passing a statute declaring all future such acts to be illegal

Criminal case—A case in which someone is charged in court with having violated a criminal statute

Cross-examination—The questioning of a witness by the attorney representing the opposing side

Defendant—The person being charged with a crime in court

Defense attorney—The attorney representing the defendant

Direct examination—The questioning of a witness by the attorney who called him or her to testify

Evidence—Proof presented in court through witness testimony or exhibits

Felony—A crime for which a person can be sent to a state or federal prison; typically punishable by more than one year in prison

Judge—The person who decides questions of law, rules on objections, and instructs a jury at the close of a case

Judicial branch—The governmental branch that interprets law and resolves disputes

Juror—A citizen who serves on a jury which decides the outcome of a court case

Misdemeanor—A crime punishable by fine and/or up to one year in jail

Motion—Application in court made by a lawyer to obtain a rule in favor of his or her client

Municipal courts—Courts created by the Texas Legislature in each incorporated city of the State that hear violations of city ordinances and Class C misdemeanors that occur within the city limits

Not guilty—The determination in a criminal case for the defendant; not enough proof to find the defendant committed the crime

Objection—When an attorney for one side feels the other attorney has violated a rule of evidence

Opening statement—A statement made by both sides at the beginning of the trial, which gives a brief introduction of what each side intends to prove

Overrule—When the judge disagrees with an objection made by one of the attorneys in court

Perjury—Knowingly telling a lie in court after having sworn to tell the truth

Prosecutor—A lawyer who handles the criminal case on behalf of the State or city

Reasonable doubt—The degree of proof required for a determination of guilt in a criminal trial

Rebuttal—An additional argument given by the prosecution after the defense has presented its closing argument

Subpoena—A court order to appear as a witness in a trial

Sustain—When the judge agrees with an objection that is made by one of the attorneys

Summons—An order to serve as a potential juror in court

Testimony—Evidence presented under oath by witnesses at a trial

Verdict—The decision made by a judge or jury as to the outcome of a trial

Voir dire—The process of selecting a jury; from a French phrase meaning “to see and to say”

Witness—A person who testifies in court