

■■ Important Legal Terms and Their Meanings

Affidavit

A written statement confirmed by oath or affirmation, used as evidence in court.

Appeal

The process of asking a higher court to review the decision of a lower court.

Arbitration

A method of dispute resolution where an impartial third party makes a binding decision.

Bail

The temporary release of an accused person awaiting trial, sometimes on condition of a sum of money.

Burden of Proof

The obligation to prove one's assertion in a legal case.

Case Law

The law established by the outcomes of previous court decisions.

Defendant

An individual, company, or institution sued or accused in a court of law.

Injunction

A court order requiring a party to do or refrain from doing a specific act.

Jurisdiction

The official power to make legal decisions and judgments.

Litigation

The process of taking legal action; the process of suing someone.

Mediation

A process in which a neutral third party helps disputing parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

Plaintiff

A person who brings a case against another in a court of law.

Precedent

A previous case or legal decision that may be or (binding precedent) must be followed in subsequent similar cases.

Statute

A written law passed by a legislative body.

Subpoena

A document ordering a person to attend court as a witness.

Acquittal

A legal judgment that a person is not guilty of the crime with which they were charged.

Adjudication

The legal process of resolving a dispute or deciding a case.

Amicus Curiae

"Friend of the court"; a person who is not a party to a case who offers information or expertise.

Assault

An intentional act that creates a reasonable apprehension of imminent harmful or offensive contact.

Bankruptcy

A legal proceeding involving a person or business unable to repay outstanding debts.

Capital Punishment

The legally authorized execution of someone as punishment for a crime.

Common Law

Law derived from judicial decisions instead of statutes.

Contempt of Court

Disobeying or showing disrespect to a court or its officers.

Contract

A legally binding agreement between parties.

Copyright

The exclusive legal right to reproduce, publish, and sell creative work.

Criminal Law

The body of law related to crime and punishment.

Damages

Monetary compensation awarded by a court to a person injured by another's act.

Decree

An official order issued by a legal authority.

Defamation

The act of damaging someone's reputation by making false statements.

Embezzlement

Theft or misappropriation of funds placed in one's trust.

Felony

A serious crime usually punishable by imprisonment for more than one year.

Fraud

Wrongful deception for personal or financial gain.

Habeas Corpus

A legal writ requiring a person under arrest to be brought before a judge.

Indictment

A formal accusation initiating a criminal case.

Liability

Legal responsibility for one's actions or omissions.

Manslaughter

The unlawful killing of a human without premeditation.

Negligence

Failure to exercise the care that a reasonably prudent person would in similar circumstances.

Parole

The release of a prisoner before the full sentence is served under supervision.

Perjury

The offense of lying under oath.

Power of Attorney

A legal document authorizing someone to act on another's behalf.

Probation

A court-imposed sanction allowing a person to remain in the community under supervision.

Quash

To nullify or void, typically referring to a court decision or legal action.

Replevin

A legal action to recover personal property wrongfully taken or held.

Res Judicata

A matter already judged; prevents re-litigation of the same issue.

Statute of Limitations

The time limit within which legal action can be taken.

Testimony

A formal written or spoken statement given in court.

Trespass

Entering someone's property without permission.

Trust

A legal arrangement where one party holds property for the benefit of another.

Verdict

The decision of a jury or judge at the end of a trial.

Writ

A formal written order issued by a court.