



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Criminal Justice

1. What is an arrest?

An arrest is when a law enforcement officer takes someone into custody because they are suspected of committing a crime. This usually means the person is not free to leave.

2. What is confinement?

Confinement refers to the act of keeping someone in custody, such as in jail or prison, after arrest or conviction.

3. What is pretrial detention?

Pretrial detention is when a person is held in jail while awaiting trial, often because they are either unable to make monetary bail, or considered a flight risk or a danger to the community.

4. What is the difference between jail and prison?

- **Jail** is typically run by local authorities and holds people awaiting trial or serving short sentences (usually under one year).
- **Prison** is operated by the state or federal government and houses individuals convicted of more serious crimes and serving longer sentences.

5. What is a warrant?

A warrant is a legal document issued by a judge or magistrate that authorizes law enforcement to take a specific action, such as making an arrest or searching property.

6. What is a failure to appear (FTA)?

FTA means a person did not show up for a scheduled court hearing. This can result in additional charges and a bench warrant for arrest.

7. What is the use of force?

Use of force refers to the amount of effort required by law enforcement to compel compliance from an unwilling subject. It can range from verbal commands to physical restraint or weapons, depending on the situation.



8. What is the difference between civil and criminal court cases?

- **Civil cases** involve disputes between people or organizations (e.g., lawsuits, contracts, property).
- **Criminal cases** involve actions considered harmful to society as a whole and are prosecuted by the state (e.g., theft, assault, murder).

9. What is the county circuit court?

The county circuit court is a trial-level court in Florida that handles felony criminal cases, civil cases involving large sums, family law, probate, and juvenile matters.

10. What is the appellate court?

An appellate court reviews decisions made by lower courts to determine if legal errors occurred. It does not hold a new trial but examines the procedures and outcomes of the original case.

11. Who are judges and what do they do?

Judges are legal elected or appointed officials who oversee court proceedings. They ensure laws are followed, make rulings, and sometimes determine guilt or innocence and sentencing.

12. What is criminal defense?

Criminal defense is the legal representation and advocacy provided to individuals accused of crimes to protect their rights and ensure a fair trial.

13. What is prosecution?

Prosecution is the legal process by which the government, through a prosecutor or state attorney, charges and tries individuals accused of committing crimes.

14. What is the difference between state and federal cases?

- **State cases** involve violations of state laws and are handled in state courts.
- **Federal cases** involve violations of federal laws or crimes that cross state lines and are handled in federal courts.



Juvenile crime refers to illegal acts committed by individuals who are under the age of 18. These can include minor offenses (like truancy or curfew violations) or serious crimes (like theft, assault, or drug offenses). Juvenile offenders are typically processed through the **juvenile justice system**, which focuses more on rehabilitation than punishment.

Key features of juvenile crime:

- Handled in **juvenile court**, not adult court (in most cases).
- Records may be sealed or expunged once the individual becomes an adult.
- The goal is to provide guidance, education, and support rather than impose long-term penalties.

What is Juvenile Protection?

Juvenile protection refers to laws, services, and court interventions designed to ensure the safety, well-being, and legal rights of children and teenagers. It includes both preventing harm to youth and providing appropriate support when they are victims or at risk.

Juvenile protection may involve:

- **Child welfare services** for abuse, neglect, or unsafe living conditions.
- **Court-ordered supervision**, foster care, or counseling.
- Legal measures to ensure **fair treatment** of juveniles within the justice system.
- Programs that address education, mental health, and family support to reduce future risk.

Juvenile Crime vs. Adult Crime: Key Differences

Category	Juvenile Crime	Adult Crime
Age Range	Under 18 (in most cases)	18 and older
System	Juvenile Justice System	Adult Criminal Justice System
Focus	Rehabilitation and education	Punishment and public safety
Court Type	Juvenile Court	Criminal Court



Category	Juvenile Crime	Adult Crime
Terminology	"Delinquent act" or "offense"	"Crime" or "criminal offense"
Sentencing	Diversion, probation, counseling, detention	Fines, probation, jail, prison
Privacy	Records often sealed or expunged	Records typically public
Detention Facilities	Juvenile detention centers or treatment programs	Jails and prisons
Right to Jury Trial	No automatic right to a jury trial in many states	Right to trial by jury guaranteed
Parental Involvement	Parents/guardians often required to be involved	Not applicable

Role of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

The **Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)** is the state agency responsible for managing juvenile justice services and programs across Florida. Its mission is to increase public safety, reduce juvenile delinquency, and strengthen families through prevention, intervention, and treatment.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Prevention Services:** Offers community-based programs aimed at preventing youth from entering the justice system.
- **Diversion Programs:** Provides alternatives to formal prosecution for first-time or low-risk offenders.
- **Detention Services:** Manages secure detention facilities for youth awaiting court proceedings.
- **Residential Commitment Programs:** Operates longer-term facilities where juveniles receive education, therapy, and rehabilitation.
- **Probation and Reentry:** Supervises youth in the community and supports their return to school, family, and work life after custody.

Guiding Principles:

- Treat youth fairly and respectfully.
- Promote accountability, while addressing underlying issues like trauma, education gaps, or substance use.
- Engage families and communities in the rehabilitation process.



15. What is the difference between police and sheriff?

Both police and sheriffs are law enforcement officers, but they serve different roles based on jurisdiction and responsibility:

- **Police Departments** are city or municipal agencies. Officers are responsible for enforcing laws within city limits, responding to emergencies, conducting investigations, and maintaining public order.
- **Sheriff's Offices** are county-level agencies. Sheriffs are elected officials who typically manage the county jail, provide court security, serve legal documents (like subpoenas), and patrol unincorporated areas of the county.

Key Differences:

- **Jurisdiction:** Police operate within city boundaries; sheriffs cover the entire county, especially areas not served by local police.
- **Leadership:** Police chiefs are appointed; county residents elect sheriffs.
- **Responsibilities:** Sheriffs often have additional duties, such as managing jail facilities and providing security in courtrooms.

16. What is the Public Defender?

The Public Defender is a court-appointed attorney who provides legal defense for individuals who cannot afford to hire a private lawyer. Public Defenders work to ensure that people accused of crimes receive a fair trial and that their constitutional rights are protected. They are typically assigned to represent clients in criminal cases, including juvenile cases.

17. What is the State Attorney?

The State Attorney, also known as the prosecutor or district attorney in some states, is a government lawyer who represents the state in criminal cases. The State Attorney's Office is responsible for reviewing evidence provided by law enforcement, filing formal charges, negotiating plea agreements, and presenting cases in court to seek convictions.

18. What is Dependency Court?

Dependency Court is a specialized court that handles cases involving child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Its primary goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of children who may be at risk in their home environment. The court may order protective services, foster care, or reunification plans depending on the case.



19. What is Drug Court?

Drug Court is a specialized court program designed for individuals charged with non-violent drug-related offenses. Instead of traditional sentencing, participants enter a structured treatment program that includes regular drug testing, counseling, and court check-ins. The goal is to reduce recidivism by addressing the root causes of addiction.

20. What is Jury Selection and Why is it Important?

Jury selection is the process by which attorneys and the court choose a group of citizens to serve on a jury during a trial. This process ensures that the defendant receives a fair trial by an impartial group of peers. Jurors are questioned to uncover potential biases and are selected or dismissed accordingly.

Serving on a jury is a civic duty and essential to the justice system. A diverse and impartial jury helps uphold the principles of justice and fairness in court proceedings.