

WHAT COURT STAFF CAN AND CANNOT DO FOR YOU

The Court, including the judge, the magistrate, clerk's office personnel, and all court staff, ***must remain impartial at all times***. This basic rule protects everyone coming to court, including you, from unfairness and injustice.

This rule means that no one connected with the court can take sides in any matter before the court. Court personnel will give the same type of limited information to people on both sides of a case, but cannot provide legal advice ***to anyone***. Please note the information provided by the parties or witnesses provide to court staff is not confidential.

The lists below explain what the court can and cannot provide to you.

What Court Staff CAN DO

1. **Court Staff can** provide you with the telephone number of the local lawyer referral service. The telephone number for the Clermont County Lawyer Referral is (513) 732-2050. They can also direct you to the Law Library where the Lawyer Referral Service is located.
2. **Court Staff can** explain and answer questions about how the court works. This is limited to very basic items such as court hours of operation, hearing schedules, and the type of proceeding on the docket.
3. **Court Staff can** provide you with general information about court rules, procedures, and practices. You may read the **Local Rules** of the court online or at the Law Library.
4. **Court Staff can** provide you information from your case file, including information as to when and where your next court hearing is, or provide certified copies of existing documents in your case.
5. **Court Staff can** review your papers for completeness by checking for signatures, notarization, correct county name, and correct case number.

What Court Staff CANNOT DO

1. **Court Staff cannot** provide legal advice or interpretations, or recommendations about what to do. Only a lawyer can give you legal advice. Staff can answer questions that call for factual information – these are generally questions that start with “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where.” They cannot answer questions that call for an opinion or guidance about what you should do – these are generally questions that start with “should,” “whether,” “how,” or “why.” For example, court staff can explain court rules and procedures, but they cannot suggest which of several available procedures you should follow. Court staff might be able to define a legal word or phrase that you are unfamiliar with, but they cannot tell you what steps to take in light of that definition.
2. **Court Staff cannot** advise you whether or not you should bring your case to court, what action you should file, or what steps to take while in court, or give you an opinion about what will happen after you present your case to the court. They cannot tell you how the magistrate or judge may rule in your case.
3. **Court Staff cannot** refer you to a specific attorney to represent you in your case.

4. **Court Staff cannot** advise you what to say in court, other than simple matters of courtesy such as “You should address the Court as ‘Your Honor’.”
5. **Court Staff cannot** let you talk to the judge or magistrate outside the courtroom. They also cannot talk to the judge or magistrate on your behalf about your case in any form. You may not arrange a meeting with the judge or magistrate, or send letters or emails that you want them to read outside of the other parties’ presence and/or knowledge. This type of communication is called **ex parte’ communication** (*off-the-record communication*), and is not permitted. This is for your protection also, as you would not want the opposing party to communicate outside your presence and knowledge.
6. **Court Staff cannot** fill out a form for you, or tell you what words to use in your court papers. Court staff may be able to provide a blank form for your use.
7. **Court Staff cannot** modify, update, or sign an Order/Decision or change an existing Order/Decision that has been signed by the magistrate and/or judge. They cannot explain the legal meaning or effect of a court Order/Decision to you.