

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Athens County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Athens County: which court handles your case, what to file, what it costs, and when to get help.

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- 01** All three family-law courts share one courthouse. See which floor your case lives on.

 - 02** Know the difference between dissolution, divorce, juvenile custody, and probate adoption.

 - 03** Find the right form, the deposit, and the local rules that trip people up.

 - 04** Pick a next step that fits your budget, your timeline, and how much conflict there is.

START HERE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.

Family law gets easier once you name a few things: the court, the path, the paperwork, and your next step. This guide is built on those questions for Athens County.

01

Which court handles this?

The Domestic Relations Division hears divorce and dissolution. The Probate/Juvenile Court handles custody for parents who were never married, and adoption. All three sit in the same courthouse on Court Street.

02

Do we agree, or is there a fight?

Agreement changes everything. Dissolution and uncontested filings run on signed paperwork. If someone disagrees, misses deadlines, or safety is a worry, plan for a more protective path.

03

What should I gather first?

Gather any current orders and your income records. Add insurance details, the kids' birth certificates, school and parenting-time notes, and a short list of what you want the court to decide.

THIS GUIDE IS INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

It explains how things usually work in Athens County. It cannot cover the facts of your case. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

E-FILING DEPENDS ON THE COURT

On the divorce side, attorneys must e-file, and pro se filers may e-file or file on paper. The Probate/Juvenile Court has no e-filing. Check the deposit and forms before you file either way.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Four parts: Domestic Relations (divorce and dissolution), Juvenile Court (unmarried parents), Probate (adoption), and how Gavvl can help. The full contents are on the next page.

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QUESTION ONE

Which court is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one court. In Athens County all three courts share one building, just on different floors. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, spousal support, and dividing property and debt.

WHERE

4th floor. Judges McCarthy and Lang; Magistrate Bradford.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

Custody, parenting time, parentage, and child support for unmarried parents. Also abuse, neglect, and dependency.

WHERE

2nd floor. Judge Saunders.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus marriage licenses.

WHERE

2nd floor. Judge Saunders, same as Juvenile.

One building, different floors

All three courts sit in the Athens County Courthouse at 1 South Court Street. Domestic Relations is on the 4th floor, and the combined Probate/Juvenile Court is on the 2nd. Each keeps its own forms, fees, and clerk, so file with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

If you are married, ending the marriage runs through the Domestic Relations Division. The first real question is simple: can both spouses sign a full agreement?

WHERE YOU FILE	WITH CHILDREN	WITHOUT CHILDREN	RESIDENCY
Clerk, 4th floor	\$375	\$325	6 months in Ohio

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit. If no, divorce is the safer or required path. Agreement means more than wanting the case over. It means signed terms on property, debt, support, and parenting. Add child support if you have children.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together. They ask the court to approve a signed Separation Agreement. The court holds a hearing 30 to 90 days later. Both spouses must appear and confirm the agreement.

Divorce is a lawsuit.

One spouse files against the other. Use it when you do not yet agree. Use it when you cannot find your spouse, or when you need the court to decide something.

THE DEPOSIT DEPENDS ON CHILDREN

Athens charges \$375 for a divorce, dissolution, or legal separation with children, and \$325 without. The deposit goes toward your real costs. The balance is billed or refunded at the end. One spouse must live in Ohio six months before filing.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first. Then build the rest of the packet around it.

BOTH OF YOU MUST SHOW UP

A dissolution is fully agreed. You file together, and the court sets a hearing 30 to 90 days out. Both spouses must appear and confirm that they still want the dissolution and agree to the terms. If you do not agree on everything, you need a divorce instead.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Form 17 — Petition for Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Form 19 — Separation Agreement https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Form 18 — Decree of Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment entry the court signs
Affidavit of Income & Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Lists what you earn and spend
Parenting plan + support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children, plus a UCCJEA affidavit
DR-1 / DR-2 — Fee waiver forms https://www.co.athensoh.org/government/common_pleascourt/athens_county_clerk_of_courts_forms.php	Clerk forms (local)	Only if you ask to waive or delay the deposit

WITH CHILDREN**Parent class applies**

If you have children, both parents take a parent-education class within 60 days of filing. The court class costs up to \$10 per person, or you can take an approved online course at your own cost.

THE CLASS KEEPS YOUR CASE MOVING

No case goes to its final hearing until the class is done, unless the court excuses you. Register for the court class through Athens County Children Services at (740) 592-3061, extension 305.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk on the 4th floor. Athens uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. The financial and parenting affidavits go in with the Complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts the lawsuit; with or without children
Affidavit of Income & Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Notarized; filed with the Complaint
Affidavit of Property & Debt https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Lists what you own and owe
Parenting affidavits + worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; includes a UCCJEA affidavit
Motion and Affidavit for Temporary Orders https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	File if you want orders during the case

Filing by computer or on paper

Attorneys must e-file through the court's online system. Pro se filers can register and e-file too, file paper at the Clerk's window, or use the public computer in the Law Library. The e-filing fee is \$2 or 4 percent, whichever is more.

IF YOUR SPOUSE WILL NOT RESPOND

That is an uncontested, default-style divorce. The case can move ahead on your evidence. Service can be by publication if you cannot find your spouse, and you pay the newspaper directly for that.

TEMPORARY ORDERS

Getting orders while the case runs.

A divorce can take months. Temporary orders set the rules in the meantime — things like temporary support or who stays in the home.

How it works here

Under Local Rule 24.03, you ask by motion and a sworn affidavit under Civ.R. 75. The court can set temporary custody, parenting time, support, and exclusive use of the home. Any restraining order must be mutual, so it binds you too.

When orders take effect

Temporary custody, exclusive use of the home or a car, and restraining orders can take effect right away on filing. Other temporary orders take effect 14 days after service. Each order says which parts are immediate.

OBJECTING, AND A KEY LIMIT

The other party can object with a motion and counter-affidavit within 14 days (Civ.R. 75(N)(2)). One limit to know: the court will not issue ex parte temporary orders when both spouses already have lawyers in a related matter. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support in a divorce.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. The right words help you read the forms and talk to the court.

SOLE CUSTODY

Residential parent and legal custodian

One parent is the residential parent and legal custodian. The other parent usually has parenting time. Ohio does not use the words “full” or “primary” custody.

SHARED PARENTING

A shared parenting plan

Both parents share rights and duties under a written plan. Shared parenting is not the same as equal time. The schedule is whatever the plan or order says.

The parenting class

In any divorce, dissolution, or legal separation with children, both parents take a parent-education class within 60 days. The court class is run with Athens County Children Services and costs up to \$10 per person.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Athens County Child Support Enforcement Agency handles support. Reach it at (740) 593-5046. Support is collected by income withholding, and paid through the state, not directly between parents.

THE REST OF A DIVORCE

Spousal support, property, and other paths.

Beyond custody and child support, a divorce sorts out spousal support and divides what you own and owe.

Spousal support

The court can order one spouse to support the other for a set time. Ohio weighs income, the length of the marriage, health, and other factors. There is no fixed formula.

Property and debt

Ohio divides marital property and debt fairly. Fair does not always mean a 50-50 split. Property you brought into the marriage may count as separate.

Legal separation and annulment

Both are filed in the Domestic Relations Division. Legal separation uses the same deposit tiers as a divorce. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

A note on retirement accounts

If a divorce divides a retirement account, it usually takes a separate order, a QDRO or a DOPO, to split the account with the plan. Athens charges \$125 for each one. Getting the wording right matters, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing an Athens County order.

Life changes after a case ends. Post-decree motions stay in the same Domestic Relations case that issued your decree.

MODIFY OR RE-OPEN**\$275**

To change custody, parenting time, or support after the decree

CONTEMPT RE-OPEN**\$175**

To enforce an order that is not being followed

FILE A FOREIGN JUDGMENT**\$200**

To bring an out-of-state order into Athens County

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, you file a motion to modify in your original case. Support enforcement can also run through the child support agency. A contempt motion is the tool when an order is being ignored.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

A parent who plans to move should follow Ohio's relocation notice rules before moving. Ask the Clerk's Legal Department at (740) 592-3242 which form your decree needs and how far ahead to file it.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and remote hearings.

Athens County offers ways to settle disputes. It also offers ways to take part without always coming to the courthouse.

Mediation

The court can send a parenting dispute to mediation to help parents reach an agreement. Mediation is never used to decide a protection order, on either the divorce or juvenile side.

Guardians ad litem

In a contested custody case, the court can appoint a guardian ad litem to look into the children's needs and speak to their best interests.

Appearing by Zoom

On the divorce side, you can ask to appear by video. File the Clerk's Motion to Appear by Zoom. Some pretrial conferences may also be held by phone.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Two minutes to a clear next step.

Gavvl's Find My Service quiz gives you a recommendation and your payment options. Or talk with our team about full or limited-scope help in Athens County.

Find My Service · gavvl.com/find-my-service

Get started · gavvl.com/start

Call · (844) 694-2885

Email · support@gavvl.com

PROTECTION ORDERS

When safety comes first.

A domestic violence civil protection order (DVCPO) can order someone to stay away. It can also set temporary custody and support. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	EX PARTE HEARING	FULL HEARING	HEARD BY
\$0 to petitioner	Same day	About 7–10 court days	DR Magistrate

How it works here

DVCPO petitions are filed in the Domestic Relations Division and heard by the Domestic Relations Magistrate under R.C. 3113.31. There is no filing fee. A judge or magistrate can issue a same-day ex parte order when there is an immediate danger.

What the order can do

A full hearing follows, usually within 7 to 10 court days. A final order can last up to five years. It can order no contact, stay-away terms, temporary custody, use of the home, and firearms limits.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW

If you or your children are in danger right now, call 911. A protection order is a civil court process, not an emergency response.

PART TWO

Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.

Were the parents never married? Then custody, parenting time, and child support are decided in the Probate/Juvenile Court, before Judge Saunders.

Three ways to establish parentage

Parents can sign a form called an Acknowledgment of Paternity, often at the hospital. The child support agency can also order a DNA test and set paternity on its own. Or a parent can file a court case that settles parentage, custody, and support at once.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint to establish parentage https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Names the legal father of the child
Complaint for allocation of rights https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Asks the court to set custody and parenting time
Parenting time and support requests https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Sets a schedule and child support
Child Support Worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when support is at issue

COSTS AND FILING

The Probate/Juvenile Court is on the 2nd floor, Juvenile line (740) 592-3256. A custody, visitation, or parentage case costs \$115 to file, and a later motion costs \$66. There is no e-filing on this side, but fax filing is allowed for papers that do not need a fee.

AFTER A JUVENILE ORDER

Changing orders and CPS cases.

Juvenile orders can change as children grow. Some cases move fast.

Modifying a juvenile order

To change custody, parenting time, or support, you file a motion in the existing case. The fee is \$66. Support changes can also start through the child support agency at (740) 593-5046.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Court. To report suspected abuse or neglect, call Athens County Children Services at (740) 592-3061, or the state hotline at 1-855-642-4453.

A NOTE FOR UNMARRIED PARENTS

The Juvenile Court does not require the parent-education class or use a fixed parenting-time schedule the way the divorce side does. A judge or magistrate can still order a class in your case. Confirm any case-specific rule with the Juvenile Court at (740) 592-3256.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Court, before Judge Saunders.

There is one cost detail worth knowing before you start.

PLAN FOR A LARGER DEPOSIT

The Probate local rule sets the adoption deposit at not less than \$700 for a stepparent or independent adoption (and \$150 for an agency adoption). The court's online page just says to call. Confirm the current amount with Probate at (740) 592-3251 before you file.

STEPPARENT OR INDEPENDENT**\$700+**

Deposit; a refund follows if you overpay

AGENCY ADOPTION**\$150+**

Lower deposit when an agency is involved

RELEASE OF ADOPTION INFO**\$50**

A later petition to open records

1**File the petition in Probate**

File the Petition for Adoption with the child's information and the required consents, or the grounds to excuse consent.

2**Address consent**

The other parent's consent is usually needed. The court can waive it if a parent had no contact, or gave no support, for the year before filing.

3**Complete the home study**

The court may order a home study. For stepparent cases it is often shorter and simpler than for other adoptions.

4**Attend the hearing**

If the court says yes, it signs a final decree. A new birth certificate can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Athens County.

Gavvl is a modern Ohio family-law firm serving all 88 counties. We pair skilled lawyers with easy-to-use tech and clear pricing. You choose how much help you need.

FULL REPRESENTATION

An attorney handles the whole case

From the first consult through final orders: strategy, every filing, all court dates, and negotiating. Best for contested, complex, or high-conflict cases. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

LIMITED-SCOPE (FLAT FEE)

Hire us for specific tasks

Pay a flat fee per service — drafting and filing, one hearing, advice, or document review. Best for uncontested cases and tighter budgets. Not built for high-conflict cases that need steady advocacy.

Ways to pay

Your options depend on the service model. Limited-scope work has the widest range: pay in full, Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later. Gavvl Direct is an in-house plan with no credit check. Financed amounts carry 19% annual interest, compounded monthly. We work out your exact payment when you enroll.

START IN TWO MINUTES

Take the Find My Service quiz at gavvl.com/find-my-service. You get a recommendation and your payment options. Or call (844) 694-2885. Consultations are low-cost.

BEFORE YOU GO

Important disclosures.

Please read these notes about how to use this guide.

INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

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FEES AND PROCEDURES CHANGE

The court information in this guide was verified as of June 11, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Athens County courts before you file.

AWARDS AND REVIEWS

Any awards, ratings, and reviews reflect the experiences of other clients and the opinions of rating organizations. They are not a guarantee or prediction of the outcome of your case. Every case is different.

JURISDICTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

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