

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Hamilton County

A plain-English map of divorce, dissolution, custody, support, protection orders, and adoption in Hamilton County: which court handles what, the forms, the fees, the deadlines, and what happens next.

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- 01 Find the right Hamilton County court before you touch a form.

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  - 02 See the real filing fees, required packets, and copy counts for each path.

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  - 03 Learn the local deadlines that catch people by surprise.

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  - 04 Know where free help exists — and when it makes sense to bring in a lawyer.

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## START HERE

# Use this guide like a map, not a textbook.

Family court feels smaller once you can name four things: your court, your path, your paperwork, and your next deadline. This guide walks you to all four, using Hamilton County's own rules, forms, and fees.

01

## Which court handles this?

In Hamilton County, three courts share family law. Domestic Relations handles married couples. Juvenile handles parents who never married, plus non-parent custody. Probate handles adoption.

02

## Do you agree, or is there a dispute?

Agreement changes everything. A signed deal opens the door to dissolution. A dispute, a missing spouse, or a safety risk points to divorce or a protection order.

## READ THIS FIRST

### This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Hamilton County, but it can't account for the facts of your situation. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client or create an attorney-client relationship. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

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## YOUR COURTS AT A GLANCE

# Three courts, one block of Broadway — and one across downtown.

Domestic Relations and Juvenile share the courthouse at 800 Broadway in Cincinnati. Probate sits a few blocks away in the William Howard Taft Law Center. Start with the right building and the right room.

**MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED**

## Domestic Relations Court

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, spousal support, property division, and protection orders.

800 Broadway, Cincinnati, OH 45202  
(513) 946-9150 · Mon–Fri 8:00–4:00

Docket Office: Room 3-46  
Clerk of Courts (DR): Room 3-47

**PARENTS NEVER MARRIED**

## Juvenile Court

Paternity, custody, parenting time, companionship, child support, and emergencies involving children.

800 Broadway, 1st Floor  
Clerk: (513) 946-9431 · Mon–Fri 8:00–4:00  
In-person filing cutoff: 3:30 PM  
Help Center: (513) 946-9440

**ADOPTION**

## Probate Court

Stepparent, kinship, private, agency, and adult adoptions.

William Howard Taft Law Center  
230 East Ninth Street, 9th & 10th floors  
(513) 946-3570  
E-filing: [efile.probatect.org](https://efile.probatect.org)

**E-FILING IS OPEN TO YOU**

You don't need a lawyer to e-file.

Hamilton County's e-filing portal accepts Domestic Relations filings from people without attorneys. Register once, then file from home.

[efiling.hamiltoncountycourts.org](https://efiling.hamiltoncountycourts.org)

(<https://efiling.hamiltoncountycourts.org/>)

E-filing help: (513) 946-5612

### The single most useful local fact

Almost nothing gets filed directly with the Clerk in Domestic Relations. Paperwork goes to the Docket Office in Room 3-46 first. Staff check it, tell you what's missing, and send you to the Clerk in Room 3-47 to pay and file. Going to Room 3-46 first saves you a wasted trip.

## HELP THAT COSTS LITTLE OR NOTHING

# You are not expected to figure this out alone.

Hamilton County funds real help for people handling their own cases. Use it early — these services exist exactly for the questions this guide can't answer about your facts.

Family Law Clinic (DR Court)	Free help with DR forms and procedure. Details on the court's Family Law Clinic page.
Juvenile Help Center	Free education and limited legal advice on custody, parenting time, and support. 800 Broadway, 1st Floor. (513) 946-9440.
Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati	Free civil legal aid for people with low income. (513) 241-9400.
Ohio Legal Help	Plain-language Ohio legal information and forms at <a href="http://ohiolegalhelp.org">ohiolegalhelp.org</a> — the resource the DR Court itself points to.
United Way 2-1-1	Free 24/7 hotline for childcare, counseling, food, and shelter referrals. Dial 2-1-1.
241-KIDS	24/7 hotline to report suspected child abuse or neglect: (513) 241-5437. In an emergency, call 911.

**BEFORE YOU GO DOWNTOWN**

- Bring a photo ID. First filings in DR Court must include a copy of your driver's license or state ID.
- Checks and money orders for DR filings are payable to CLERK OF COURTS. Cards work too, with a surcharge, and the cardholder must be present.
- The DR Questionnaire (Form 1.1) must be typed. Handwritten copies are sent back.
- Hearings can happen by Zoom. In DR Court, file Forms 8.1(B) and 8.1(C) together to ask to appear by video or phone.

**Fees change**

Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Every fee in this guide was verified from official court sources as of the date on the cover. Always confirm current amounts with the Clerk of Courts before you file.

## PART ONE

# Domestic Relations: ending or changing a marriage.

If you are married — or were — this is your court. The first question that shapes everything: do you and your spouse agree on all of it, or not?

## THE PATHFINDER QUESTION

## Do you both agree on everything?

Agreement means signed terms on property, debt, support, and — if you have children — parenting and child support. If you have that, dissolution is the calmer, faster path. If you don't, or you can't find your spouse, divorce gives the court a process to move forward anyway.

## In this part

- Dissolution — the agreement path
- Divorce — starting, or responding if you were served
- Temporary orders while the case is pending
- Custody, parenting time, and the parenting class
- Child support and spousal support
- Property and debt
- Legal separation and annulment
- Changing or enforcing orders after the decree
- Objections, appeals, and out-of-state orders
- Domestic violence protection orders

## PATH A

### Dissolution

You file together. Nobody is served, nobody is sued. The court reviews your signed agreement at one short hearing. In Hamilton County the case is built to finish in about 12 weeks.

## PATH B

### Divorce

One spouse files against the other. The court provides service, deadlines, temporary orders, and a trial if needed. Most divorces still settle — the process exists for when agreement is missing.

## DISSOLUTION

# Dissolution: ending a marriage you both agree to end.

A dissolution is a joint filing. You and your spouse sign a separation agreement that settles everything, file it together, and confirm it at one short hearing. You walk away with a decree — the court order that legally ends the marriage.

FILING FEE	COURT	HEARING	COURT'S TIMELINE
\$375 / \$325	Domestic Relations	30+ days out	About 12 weeks

## This path may fit if...

- You both agree the marriage should end.
- Property, debt, and support terms are settled and you're both ready to sign.
- If you have children: parenting and child support terms are settled too.
- You can both attend the final hearing.

## This path is NOT for you if...

- You disagree on even one issue — that's a divorce.
- You can't locate your spouse, or they won't participate.
- You need the court to order anything while the case is pending. Temporary orders aren't available in a dissolution.
- Pressure, hidden money, or safety concerns are in the picture. Slow down and get advice first.

## LOCAL RULE THAT SURPRISES PEOPLE

### Your decree is due on day one.

Since June 1, 2023, Hamilton County requires the decree and its supporting documents at the time you file the petition — not at the hearing. The Decree Office reviews your paperwork before the hearing and tells you what to fix.

## PARENTING CLASS FIRST

If you have minor children, both of you must finish a court-approved parenting class **BEFORE** you file a dissolution, and proof goes in with the petition. Class details are on the parenting page of this guide.

## DISSOLUTION · PAPERWORK

# What you fill out, and how to get it right.

Hamilton County publishes a checklist packet for each dissolution type. Every form below comes from the court's Forms & Procedures page or the Docket Office in Room 3-46. With children, the packet grows.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Petition for Dissolution (Form 17)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Starts the case. Signed by both spouses.
<a href="#">Separation Agreement (Form 19)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Your full written deal on property, debt, and support.
△ Heads up: Both signatures must be notarized. Don't sign until you're in front of the notary.		
<a href="#">Questionnaire (Form 1.1)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Basic case information for the court.
△ Heads up: Must be TYPED. Handwritten questionnaires are rejected.		
<a href="#">Waivers (Forms 9.3A and 9.2)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	<a href="#">Form 9.3A</a> waives formal service for both spouses. <a href="#">Form 9.2</a> is filed by each spouse without a lawyer.
<a href="#">Decree / Final Judgment (Form 18)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	The order the judge signs to end the marriage.
△ Heads up: Due at filing, with all decree documents — effective June 1, 2023.		

Reading on paper? Every form above is on the court's Forms & Procedures page: [hamiltoncountyohio.gov](https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php)  
([https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court\\_of\\_domestic\\_relations/forms\\_and\\_procedures.php](https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php))

## Mistakes that get packets sent back

- Handwriting the Questionnaire instead of typing it.
- Signing the Separation Agreement at home instead of before a notary.
- Filling in the case number, judge, or magistrate lines. Leave them blank — they're assigned at filing.
- Forgetting a copy of each spouse's driver's license or state ID.

## DISSOLUTION · THE WITH-CHILDREN PACKET

# With minor children, these forms go in too.

Every form name below links to the court's own copy. Both spouses' class certificates and photo IDs also go in the packet.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Children's affidavit (Form 2.1)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Identifies each minor child, their dates of birth, and their addresses. Must be notarized.
<a href="#">Health insurance affidavit (Form 7.16)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Reports both spouses' access to health insurance for the children. Must be notarized.
<a href="#">IV-D application (Form HC 7076)</a>	Tap the name · or Room 3-46	Application for child support services.
<p>△ Heads up: Required in every case with minor children — even when no support is ordered.</p>		
<a href="#">Health care order (Form 7.17 or 7.20)</a>	Tap a form · or Room 3-46	Use <a href="#">Form 7.17</a> if private health insurance is available. Use <a href="#">Form 7.20</a> if not.
<a href="#">Support worksheet + data form (CDR4905)</a>	Tap a link · worksheet online	Run the worksheet at <a href="https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov">ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov</a> . The data form sets up the support account.
<a href="#">Parenting plan — shared (Form 2.2) or sole (Form 21)</a>	Tap a form · or Room 3-46	File <a href="#">Form 2.2</a> with the <a href="#">Final Decree of Shared Parenting (Form 2.3)</a> , or <a href="#">Form 21</a> for a sole-custody plan.
<p>△ Heads up: The magistrate must approve the plan before the final hearing — generally within 5 business days.</p>		

Reading on paper? These forms live in Section 2 of the court's Forms & Procedures page: [hamiltoncountyohio.gov](https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php)  
([https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court\\_of\\_domestic\\_relations/forms\\_and\\_procedures.php](https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php))

## DISSOLUTION · COST AND PROCESS

# What it costs, where it goes, and what happens next.

## FILING FEE · WITH CHILDREN

**\$375.00**

Cash, check to CLERK OF COURTS, money order, or card (surcharge applies).

## FILING FEE · NO CHILDREN

**\$325.00**

Same fee with or without spousal support.

## PARENTING CLASS

**\$35–\$49**

Per parent, if you have minor children. Required before filing.

Copies: bring the original signed forms plus three sets of copies. Only one copy of the Questionnaire and one copy of each ID is needed. Fees verified as of May 31, 2026 — confirm with the Clerk before filing.

## Filing in person

1. Take everything to the Docket Office, Room 3-46, 800 Broadway, 3rd floor. Staff check the packet and flag anything missing.
2. Complete the classification form they give you, then go next door to the Clerk in Room 3-47.
3. Pay the fee. The Clerk assigns your case number, keeps the originals, and stamps your copies.
4. Return one stamped set to the Docket Office. You leave with your judge, magistrate, hearing date, and room — set at least 30 days out.
5. Before the hearing, the Decree Office reviews your decree paperwork and contacts you about any fixes. All fixes must be done before the hearing.

## THE FINAL HEARING

Both of you must show up — briefly.

The hearing is short. The magistrate confirms your information, the validity of the agreement, and that you both still want the dissolution. The marriage is not over until the decree is filed with the Clerk; you'll get a postcard when it's journalized.

## PREFER TO E-FILE?

Register at the e-filing portal, choose your dissolution case type, and upload the packet. If the Decree Office rejects a document, a Review tab appears in your account — fix it and resubmit online instead of driving downtown.

DIVORCE

# Divorce: two doors into the same case.

Every divorce starts one of two ways: you file the complaint, or you receive one. Both doors lead to forms, and both put a clock in motion. Find your door first.

<p><b>A</b> You need to start the process</p> <p>You file a complaint. In plain terms, the complaint opens the case with the court and says what you're asking for. Hamilton County issues an automatic restraining order against both spouses at filing — standard orders against draining accounts, canceling insurance, or hiding assets. It's not a reflection on either of you.</p>	<p><b>B</b> You received papers</p> <p>You file an answer — it officially makes you part of the case. If you want the court to hear your own requests, file a counterclaim with it. “Service” means the day the documents were formally delivered to you, not the day you first heard about the case.</p>
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ANSWER DEADLINE	FROM	SOURCE	MISSED IT?
28 days	Date of service	Ohio Civ.R. 12(A)	Get advice now

**IF YOU WERE SERVED**

**Don't wait for the hearing date to act.**

Find the deadline, save every page including the envelope, and write a short timeline of what happened. If the packet includes a request for temporary orders, your clock may be even shorter — see the temporary orders page. Don't rely on a promise that the case is “on hold.”

**Answer and counterclaim forms**

Hamilton County uses the Supreme Court of Ohio uniform forms here: Answer Form 11 and Counterclaim Form 9 with children; Answer Form 10 and Counterclaim Form 8 without. Filing an answer alone is allowed; filing a counterclaim requires the full set of supporting documents for your case type.

## DIVORCE · STARTING THE CASE

# The complaint packet, and where you're allowed to file.

Hamilton County publishes a packet for each divorce type. The core forms below appear in nearly all of them; the Docket Office checklist for your exact situation controls.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Complaint (Form 7 with children / Form 6 without)</a> <a href="https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php">https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php</a>	Forms & Procedures page or Room 3-46	Opens the case and states what you're asking for.
<a href="#">Affidavit of Property and Debt (Form 4.1)</a> <a href="https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php">https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php</a>	Forms & Procedures page or Room 3-46	Lists what you own and owe.
<a href="#">Affidavit of Income and Expenses (Form 7.3)</a> <a href="https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/Documents/Government/Courts/Court%20of%20Domestic%20Relations/Local%20Rules/7-3%20Affidavit%20of%20Income,%20Expenses%20and%20Financial%20Disclosure.pdf">https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/Documents/Government/Courts/Court%20of%20Domestic%20Relations/Local%20Rules/7-3%20Affidavit%20of%20Income,%20Expenses%20and%20Financial%20Disclosure.pdf</a>	Link at left, or Room 3-46	Your financial picture for support decisions.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Also due no later than 7 days before any hearing where money is decided.</p>		
<a href="#">Mandatory Disclosure Order (Form 1.26)</a> <a href="https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php">https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php</a>	Forms & Procedures page or Room 3-46	Served with the complaint; orders both spouses to exchange financial documents.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Each side has 45 days from service to hand over deeds, statements, tax returns, insurance, and debts.</p>		
<a href="#">Questionnaire (Form 1.1) + your photo ID</a> <a href="https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php">https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/courts/court_of_domestic_relations/forms_and_procedures.php</a>	Forms & Procedures page or Room 3-46	Case information sheet plus a copy of your license or state ID.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Questionnaire must be typed. The mutual restraining order (Form 19.0) also goes in — it takes effect automatically.</p>		

## DIVORCE · BEFORE YOU FILE

# Confirm the court, flag parentage, and add the children's forms.

## Are you filing in the right court?

- Already have an open case? File in that court, under that case number.
- Starting fresh: 6 months in Ohio, 90 days in Hamilton County.
- Spouses in different places? Usually, the first to file sets the court.
- With children, the court also checks “home state” rules — generally where the child lived for the last 6 months. Emergencies are an exception.

## With children, add these

The children's affidavit, the health insurance affidavit, the IV-D application, and the support worksheet go in with the complaint. The IV-D application is required in every case with minor children.

## Expecting? Disputed parentage?

If the wife is pregnant, or either spouse says a child born during the marriage is not the husband's, the first filing must say so. Genetic test results or proof of adoption change the packet — ask before you file.

## DIVORCE · COST, FILING, AND THE CLOCKS

# Budget the fee, count the copies, and calendar three dates.

## FILING FEE · WITH CHILDREN

**\$375.00**

Divorce, legal separation, and annulment use the same fee schedule.

## FILING FEE · NO CHILDREN

**\$325.00**

Service by sheriff or publication can add costs — ask the Clerk.

## CAN'T AFFORD IT?

**Fee waiver**

File a poverty affidavit (Form 1.22A). The court reviews costs later.

Copies: original plus 3 sets for certified mail, regular mail, or sheriff service; original plus 4 for service by publication or posting. Fees verified as of May 31, 2026 — confirm with the Clerk.

## How filing works

1. Docket Office, Room 3-46, checks your packet and issues the classification form.
2. Clerk, Room 3-47, takes the fee and assigns the case number.
3. The Clerk arranges service on your spouse — certified mail, sheriff, or publication if they can't be found.
4. Watch for the return of service. Most of the case's clocks start there.

## Three deadlines that hurt

- 28 days — your spouse's deadline to answer after service (Civ.R. 12(A)).
- 45 days — both sides' deadline to exchange financial disclosures (Local Rule 1.26).
- 75 days — the plaintiff's deadline to file a Request for Merit Setting, a property statement with a conference date, or a custody investigation request. Miss it and the case can be dismissed on day 76 (Local Rule 1.10).

## Parenting class — 42 days

With minor children, the plaintiff must finish the parenting class within 42 days of filing; the defendant within 42 days after service. Certificates are valid for 2 years.

## GOOD TO KNOW

Post-decree motions later cost \$125. Agreed entries of 5 or more pages add \$3 per page after approval.

## DIVORCE · WHAT TO EXPECT

# The court runs your case on a track. Here's the shape of it.

Hamilton County assigns every case to a managed track. These are outside limits, not promises — agreed cases finish faster.

## While the case is pending

- The mutual restraining order is in force. Don't drain accounts, cancel insurance, or lock your spouse out.
- Trial counsel must attend scheduling conferences — no-shows risk sanctions or dismissal.
- Exhibits: each side files an exhibit list (Form 20.0) and brings pre-marked copies. Plaintiff uses numbers, defendant uses letters.
- Need an interpreter? File Form 1.7 at least 10 days before the hearing — the court arranges one.

## Good to know in Hamilton County

A divorce case that sits for 6 months without movement is treated as inactive and gets set for hearing — to be tried or dismissed. Keep your case moving or it may move without you.

1

### Service completed

Your spouse is formally served. The track clock starts.

2

### Scheduling conference — by week 12

The court maps the issues. Mediation can start here. No-asset cases can finish at this stage.

3

### Custody phase — weeks 12–40

With children: pre-trial, evaluations if ordered, then a custody trial if you don't settle.

4

### Property phase — weeks 40–58

Pre-trial and trial on property, debt, and support issues that remain.

5

### Decision and decree — by week 78

The court decides, the order is prepared, and the decree is journalized. Without children, the track runs about 52 weeks.

## TEMPORARY ORDERS

# Who pays the bills while the case is pending?

Temporary orders set the rules for money, the house, and the children until the case ends. In Hamilton County they run under Civil Rule 75(N) through a paper process — usually no hearing at all.

COUNTER-MOTION WINDOW	FROM	SOURCE	EARLIEST ORDER
14 days	Date of service	Local Rule 3.1	14+ days after service

## How the paper process works

1. File the 75(N) motion and affidavit (Form 3.2A with children, 3.2 without) with your complaint, answer, or counterclaim.
2. Your spouse has 14 days from service to file a counter-motion and affidavit.
3. After the window closes, file the Notice of Service form (3.4) — and the data form if support is involved. Only that filing activates the order.
4. The magistrate rules on the affidavits alone and mails the order. No oral hearing unless one is requested.

## IF YOUR SPOUSE ASKED FOR ORDERS

You have 14 days. The court can rule without you.

If you don't respond in time, the magistrate can issue temporary orders based on your spouse's affidavit alone. File your counter-affidavit or formally ask for more time — fast.

## LIVING UNDER THE SAME ROOF?

Hamilton County will not order temporary custody or support while you both still live in the household. The court can instead order who pays specific household expenses, on motion and hearing.

CUSTODY & PARENTING

# Ohio custody words don't mean what people think.

Ohio has no “primary custody” and no “joint custody.” Learning the real vocabulary early keeps your paperwork — and your expectations — accurate.

Sole custody	One parent is the residential parent and legal custodian. The other parent gets parenting time.
Shared parenting	Both parents are residential parents under a written plan. Time can still be unequal.
Legal custodian	Who holds major decision-making authority.
Residential parent	Mostly administrative — the address used for school enrollment and similar purposes.
Parenting time	The schedule. It is not set by the custody label — equal time is possible in either arrangement.
Supervised parenting time	Time with a child in a protected setting when safety is a concern — requested by motion (Form 520C).

**Asking for shared parenting? File the plan.**  
 The parent asking for shared parenting **MUST** file a proposed shared parenting plan — asking alone isn't enough. Hamilton County's plan requirements are detailed: support worksheet, health care order, records-access language, relocation notice terms, and more. Plans go to the assigned magistrate for approval before the final hearing.

**THE DEFAULT SCHEDULE**  
**Standard Parenting Order (Form 2.7)**  
 Hamilton County publishes a standard parenting time schedule the court can adopt or adjust. If your plan references it, the completed and signed form must be attached.

**MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN?**  
 A parent who intends to relocate must file the Notice of Intent to Relocate (Form 2.8) with the Docket Office. The other parent can contest the move by motion.

## CUSTODY &amp; PARENTING · THE CLASS

# The parenting class: three ways to check the box.

Every divorce, dissolution, legal separation, or annulment with minor children requires both parents to complete a court-approved class.

CLASS	FORMAT & COST	DETAILS
Parenting Through Transitions	In person · \$35 · 2.5 hours	First Wednesday of each month, 1:30 PM, 800 Broadway, 3rd floor. Register and pay 5 days ahead. Arrive on time — 15 minutes late means the next class. Children aren't permitted.
Children in Between	Online · \$39.95 · 4 hours	English and Spanish. Register through the provider linked from the court's parenting education page.
Two Families Now	Online · \$49 · 4–6 hours	English and Spanish. Register through the provider linked from the court's parenting education page.

## Deadlines

- Plaintiffs: within 42 days of filing.
- Defendants: within 42 days after service.
- Dissolutions: both parents finish before filing.
- Certificates last 2 years — expired means retake.

## If you skip it

The court can refuse to allocate or modify parental rights, refuse shared parenting, refuse parenting time — or dismiss the filing. Willful failure can be contempt. A fee waiver is available with an indigency affidavit, and the court can waive the class for good cause through the Dispute Resolution Department.

CHILD SUPPORT

# Child support: one formula, both incomes.

Ohio calculates support with an income-shares model: both parents' incomes, health insurance costs, and work-related childcare go into one worksheet. The label on custody doesn't change the math — the same formula runs in sole custody and shared parenting.

**Run your own numbers**

Two calculators get you close before you ever file:

[Gavvl child support calculator](https://gavvl.com/child-support-calculator)  
(https://gavvl.com/child-support-calculator)

[Ohio's official ODJFS calculator](https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html)  
(https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html)

**Deviations**

Court-ordered parenting time of 90 or more overnights a year triggers a 10% adjustment. Bigger deviations are possible by approved agreement or where the statutory factors support them. The court isn't required to approve a lower number just because both parents agree — it orders what fits the child's best interest.

**Enforcement realities**

Quitting or staying underemployed on purpose doesn't lower support — income can be imputed. Tax refunds can be intercepted. Contempt can carry jail time.

Every order includes	A monthly amount per child, paid through the CSEA, plus a 2% processing fee, with a wage-withholding order.
Serving the CSEA	Any motion to change, enforce, or end support must also be served on the Hamilton County CSEA, 222 E. Central Parkway, 6th Floor, Cincinnati.
Changing the amount	36 months after the order, you can request a free administrative review through the CSEA. Earlier, a substantial change of circumstances supports a review request or a court motion.
When support ends	When the child turns 18 AND finishes high school, or turns 19 — whichever comes first. It can run longer by agreement or for a child with special needs.
Bring to a modification hearing	Pay stubs, tax returns with attachments, proof of other support orders, and 3 years of overtime, commission, and bonus records.

## PROPERTY &amp; SPOUSAL SUPPORT

# Equitable does not mean equal.

Ohio divides marital property fairly — which is usually, but not always, evenly.

What counts as marital turns on WHEN something was acquired, not whose name is on it.

## Marital vs. separate

Property and debt acquired during the marriage is generally marital — regardless of the name on the account. Inheritance and gifts stay separate if you can trace them; mixing them into joint accounts can change that. Home equity is often part marital, part separate. Ohio doesn't recognize common-law marriage — the marriage date and the separation date are what count.

## Fault rarely pays

It's almost always wise to include no-fault grounds. Courts don't punish bad behavior for its own sake — but behavior that drained marital money or endangered the children can matter to the outcome.

## Retirement needs its own order

Private retirement accounts divide by QDRO. Ohio public pensions — PERS, SERS, STRS, Police & Fire — use a Property Division Order, and in Hamilton County YOU must file the notice form that triggers the Clerk's certified-mail notice to the retirement system. Military retirement has its own federal rules.

## When to bring in a professional

A house, a business, complex retirement, or disputed values are the triggers. The court keeps a panel of real estate appraisers — \$450 for a single-family home, paid to the Clerk before appointment.

## Spousal support

Spousal support is decided on the parties' incomes, resources, and circumstances — there is no formula like child support. Temporary spousal support can be ordered while the case is pending through the 75(N) process. Like child support, it's paid through withholding, and the decree must state the exact amount and start date.

## OTHER PATHS

# Legal separation, annulment, and the missing-spouse divorce.

Three less-traveled paths, each with a specific job. None of them is a shortcut — but one of them might be exactly what your situation needs.

**STILL MARRIED, LIVES APART**

## Legal separation

A legal separation does everything a divorce does — property, support, parenting — except end the marriage. People usually choose it for religious or insurance reasons. Hamilton County files it on Form 1.10, with the same fees as divorce: \$375 with children, \$325 without.

**AS IF IT NEVER HAPPENED**

## Annulment

An annulment treats the marriage as void from the start. It fits only specific situations and is rare. Hamilton County publishes packets for it — Form 1.12 with children, Form 1.13 without — with the decree forms due before the final hearing.

**“UNCONTESTED” HAS A SPECIFIC MEANING**

## An uncontested divorce is not a dissolution.

In Ohio, “uncontested” means a default divorce — your spouse won't participate or can't be found. Service happens by posting or publication, and a witness must appear with you at the final hearing. The divorce can go through without your spouse — but if they show up before it's final, it's no longer uncontested.

## Missing-spouse mechanics

- Service by publication or posting uses Forms 15.0/15.1 or 16.5/16.6, with an affidavit about your efforts to find them.
- Bring the original plus 4 copies for publication or posting service.
- Publication has its own cost — ask the Clerk when you file.
- Military spouse? Special federal protections apply, and the court can appoint an attorney for them. International and military divorces deserve experienced handling.

AFTER THE DECREE

# Changing an order — or enforcing one.

Life changes after a decree; orders can too. But changing custody, changing support, and punishing a violation are three different motions with three different standards. Aim before you file.

POST-DECREE MOTION FEE	COPIES · SUPPORT MOTIONS	COPIES · OTHER MOTIONS	SERVE THE CSEA?
\$125	Original + 4	Original + 3	Yes, if support

### What are you changing?

- Custody: Motion for Change of Custody (Form 3.10) plus the children's affidavit. The court won't modify unless facts have changed — or were unknown — and the change serves the child.
- Parenting time: Motion 3.11. A lighter standard than custody.
- Child support or health care: Motion 3.8 served on the CSEA, with new financials, worksheet, and IV-D application. The free CSEA review path is on the child support page.
- Spousal support: Motion 3.8 — only if your decree kept the door open to changes.

### Before you file contempt, ask...

- Does your decree require mediation first? Many do.
- Have you tried to fix it in writing? Courts notice.
- Is it worth the cost? Be honest about the math.

### How contempt works

Contempt asks the court to enforce its own order. File Motion 3.8 with the Affidavit for Citation (13.1); the court issues the summons. If the court finds contempt, it usually issues a purge order — specific conditions the other person can meet to avoid the penalty. Attorney's fees can be awarded.

### Agreed changes have limits

Hamilton County will NOT accept an agreed entry that cuts or erases child support, arrearage, or changes the residential parent — unless the protected party has a lawyer and the entry meets strict requirements. Otherwise: motion, service on the CSEA, and a hearing.

### Medical bills have their own rule

For unpaid medical costs, deliver the bills to the other parent first — never through the child — and file the Medical Expense Sheet (Form 1.25) with the motion. Bills come to the hearing as exhibits, not attachments.

## OBJECTIONS &amp; OUT-OF-STATE ORDERS

# Short clocks: disagreeing with a decision.

Most Hamilton County family cases are heard by magistrates. If you disagree with a magistrate's decision, an objection is your move — and the window is brutally short.

OBJECTION DEADLINE	SET ASIDE AN ORDER	REQUEST FINDINGS	TRANSCRIPT DUE
14 days	10 days	7 days	30 days

## What an objection is — and isn't

An objection is review for error, not a second trial. The judge looks only at what was presented to the magistrate — no new evidence, no new witnesses. Objections to factual findings must be backed by a transcript: file the Request for Transcription (Form 8.30) the same day, and get the transcript in within 30 days.

## Transcript rates

\$4.50 per page at the regular rate, rising to \$7.95 for next-morning delivery. A page is about one minute of audio. Extra paper copies are \$0.10 per page; the emailed copy is free once the original is paid.

## Out-of-state orders

An order from another state can be registered in Hamilton County for enforcement or modification here. Custody orders register for \$75; enforcing or modifying a registered support order costs the \$125 motion fee. Each path uses its own notice form (13.23 for custody, 13.22 for support) filed with a certified copy of the order, the typed Questionnaire, and the IV-D application. Submit to the Docket Office first, then file with the Clerk.

## Appeals are even stricter

Appealing a judge's final order to the First District Court of Appeals runs on its own short deadlines and record rules. If you're considering an appeal, get advice the same week the decision arrives — not the month after.

## PROTECTION ORDERS

# Domestic violence protection orders are free. Always.

If someone in your household or dating life has hurt you or made you fear serious harm, you can ask the Domestic Relations Court for a civil protection order. There is never a filing fee. You don't need a lawyer to file.

## How to file

1. Complete the petition: Form 10.01D for domestic violence, or 10.01P for dating violence. Instructions are in Form 10.01C.
2. Complete Form 10.01Z, the confidential information sheet. Only the court and the Sheriff use it to serve the respondent.
3. Asking for temporary custody of a child in the petition? Add Form 10.01F, the parenting proceeding affidavit.
4. Take everything to the Docket Office, Room 3-46, 800 Broadway. You'll receive your hearing date when you file.

## Who can be protected

Family or household members — and, under the dating violence order, people in a dating relationship. The petition forms walk through who qualifies and what conduct counts, including violence, threats of serious harm, and stalking.

## WHAT HAPPENS, AND HOW FAST

### The court moves in days, not months.

A judge can grant an ex parte order — immediate, temporary, without the other person present — often the same day you file. The Sheriff serves the respondent, and a full hearing follows. Hamilton County's track runs the whole case in about 4 weeks: ex parte order week 1, service week 2, full hearing week 4.

## If the order is violated

Violating a protection order is a crime. Call the police — 911 in an emergency. Keep a copy of your order with you.

## Support while you do this

Women Helping Women runs a crisis line, advocacy, and hospital accompaniment for gender-based violence in Cincinnati. For children: 241-KIDS, (513) 241-5437, answers 24/7. Free legal help: Legal Aid, (513) 241-9400. Statewide info: [ohiolegalhelp.org](http://ohiolegalhelp.org).

## STEADY WINS

# What helps your case on a regular Tuesday.

Most family cases aren't lost in the courtroom. They're hurt by texts, posts, and decisions made in the hard weeks between hearings. A few habits protect you.

## Do

- Move arguments to writing, and save everything: texts, emails, posts, bank records.
- Keep a short dated log of exchanges, missed visits, and incidents.
- Keep paying what the orders say to pay, even when it stings.
- Take care of yourself. Resources exist for safety, money, and stability — use them.

## Don't

- Don't post about the case or your spouse on social media. Assume the judge will read it.
- Don't put children in the middle — not in the conflict, the logistics fights, or as messengers.
- Don't drain accounts, cancel insurance, lock your spouse out, or destroy property. These violate the restraining order and backfire.
- Don't sign under pressure. A bad agreement is harder to undo than to avoid.

## FEELING OVERWHELMED?

The hardest step in Part 1 is usually the financial disclosure.

Forty-five days to assemble deeds, statements, taxes, insurance, and debts — while everything else is happening — is where people stall. If you're stuck, two minutes tells you what kind of help fits: take the quiz at [gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) or call (844) 694-2885.

## PART TWO

# Juvenile Court: parents who never married — and more.

Never married to your child's other parent? Custody, parenting time, and support run through Juvenile Court. So do non-parent custody, grandparent time, and child emergencies.

CLERK'S OFFICE	DAILY FILING CUTOFF	EMERGENCY ORDERS	PROTECTION ORDERS
800 Broadway, 1st Fl	3:30 PM	By 2:00 PM	By 1:00 PM

**CUSTODY OR COMPANIONSHIP**

**\$200 / \$150**

\$200 to open a new case; \$150 in an existing case. Contempt: \$150.

**CHILD SUPPORT**

**\$100.00**

New case, modification, contempt, or termination.

**PATERNITY**

**\$115.00**

Parent-child relationship case.  
Out-of-state decree registration: \$75.

**Free, mandatory: the Triple P class**

Every party in a Juvenile Court custody case must complete the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P). It's free, online, and split into short modules — pick the 0–12 or Teen version by your child's age. Bring the certificate to your first hearing and be ready to talk about it. Skipping it will hurt your case.

**Free legal help inside the building**

The Juvenile Help Center is at 800 Broadway, 1st floor: (513) 946-9440. It gives free education and limited legal advice on custody, parenting time, and support. The Help Center attorney can't go to court for you. But they can make sure you understand the forms and the process.

## PATERNITY

# Paternity first. Custody is a separate ask.

Here is the most misunderstood thing in Juvenile Court. Paternity makes you the legal father and triggers child support. But it does NOT give you custody or parenting time. That's a second, separate request to the court.

1

## Establish paternity

Three ways: sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity, take a court-ordered DNA test — an at-home kit won't work — or get a court order. Until then, an unmarried mother has sole custody by default. Paternity can be established until the child turns 23.

2

## Then ask for custody or parenting time

File separately in Juvenile Court for custody and/or parenting time. Want shared parenting? You must file a proposed shared parenting plan — asking alone isn't enough.

## Filing in Juvenile Court

The court publishes complete paternity packets — one for fathers, one for mothers — at [juvenile-court.org](http://juvenile-court.org). The filing fee is \$115. The case is served within 72 hours and set for hearing about 9 weeks out. If the other parent denies paternity, the court orders genetic testing.

## Objecting to a CSEA support order

Disagree with a support order the child support agency issued? You have 20 days from the order date to object in Juvenile Court.

## The free route: CSEA

1. Apply for child support services with HCJFS: photo ID, the child's birth certificate, and forms JFS 1618 and JFS 07076.
2. A caseworker locates the other parent. Acknowledgment signing and DNA testing happen at 222 E. Central Parkway — by appointment, (513) 946-7387.
3. A hearing officer sets support using Ohio's guideline formula — no deviations at this stage. Payments start the day the order issues.
4. Remember: the CSEA handles paternity and support only. Custody and parenting time stay with the courts.

## CUSTODY IN JUVENILE COURT

# First order, or changing one — the packets differ.

Juvenile Court publishes a complete, free packet for nearly every custody filing. Match the packet to your situation and you've done half the paperwork battle.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Custody — Parent (complete packet)</a> <a href="https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/custody_packet_parent-3.pdf">https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/custody_packet_parent-3.pdf</a>	juvenile-court.org or the Clerk	A parent's first request for legal custody.
<a href="#">Custody — Shared Parenting (complete packet)</a> <a href="https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/custody_shared_parenting-5.pdf">https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/custody_shared_parenting-5.pdf</a>	juvenile-court.org or the Clerk	Both parents as residential parents under a plan.
<p>△ Heads up: Must include a proposed shared parenting plan — the court can't consider shared parenting without one.</p>		
<a href="#">Parenting Time / Visitation (complete packet)</a> <a href="https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/parenting_time_packet-3.pdf">https://juvenile-court.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/parenting_time_packet-3.pdf</a>	juvenile-court.org or the Clerk	A schedule with your child when the other parent has custody.
<a href="#">Motions to modify custody, plan, or parenting time</a> <a href="https://juvenile-court.org/filing-fees-and-forms/">https://juvenile-court.org/filing-fees-and-forms/</a>	juvenile-court.org · Filing Fees & Forms	Separate packets to change an existing order. Changing custody requires showing why the change serves the child.

## CUSTODY IN JUVENILE COURT · FILING &amp; TIMELINES

# What filing requires, and how fast the case moves.

## What filing requires

Original cases start with a sworn complaint; changes start with a motion. Bring proof of parentage, the children's affidavit, the court's information and release forms, any existing orders, and a service request. Pay the fee or file the fee waiver affidavit with proof — you get 30 days to document it.

## The court's default schedule

The court has a standard parenting time order. It moves to an equal 50/50 week at age 2. It sets alternating holidays, daily phone contact, and make-up days within 30 days. Neither parent may move the child outside the nearby counties. That takes a court order or a signed agreement.

Service	Within 72 hours of filing
Preliminary hearing	Within 60 days of filing
Trial	Within 90 days of the last preliminary hearing
Whole case	Resolved within 9 months
Mediation	Free court mediation available in custody and companionship cases — (513) 946-9272
GAL deposit	\$1,000 deposit, \$125/hour, if the court appoints a guardian ad litem

## EMERGENCIES &amp; NON-PARENTS

# Emergency custody has a high bar — honestly.

Emergency orders exist for immediate danger to a child. The court reads them strictly, and most frustrating situations don't qualify. Knowing the line saves you a denied motion.

## What can qualify

Immediate physical or emotional harm. Think abuse, bodily injury, medical neglect, or domestic violence in the home. You testify under oath in open court. Your affidavit must describe the emergency and the harm. It must also show how you told the other side, and what you tried first.

## Juvenile protection orders

When the person to be protected or restrained is a minor, a Juvenile Protection Order may fit. File the JPO packet by 1:00 PM for a same-day hearing. There's no fee to seek protection from violence.

## What is NOT an emergency

- School enrollment questions.
- Getting a first custody order faster.
- Missed visits, or a child not returned on time after parenting time.
- Non-emergency medical decisions.

## Non-parents: custody vs. companionship

Grandparents and other non-parents have two different doors. Custody — the non-parent custody packet — asks the court to place the child with you. Companionship — its own packet — asks for scheduled time with a child in someone else's custody. Both file at the Juvenile Clerk: \$200 for a new case, \$150 in an existing one.

## CLOCK AND PROCESS

File by 2:00 PM for same-business-day review. An emergency motion needs an underlying custody case filed with it. If granted without the legal custodian present, a hearing follows within 3 business days. Suspected abuse or neglect: call 241-KIDS, (513) 241-5437. Danger now: 911.

## Quieter alternatives

A parent can give a grandparent a Power of Attorney for the child. If a parent can't be found, a caretaker can file a Caretaker Authorization Affidavit. Both packets are on the court's forms page. No custody case needed.

## JUVENILE SUPPORT &amp; CHANGES

# Support, changes, enforcement — and when the county is involved.

The rest of Juvenile Court, in brief: money, changes to orders, out-of-state cases, and the cases nobody chooses.

## Child support

File the new-case support packet (\$100) in Juvenile Court, or apply free through the CSEA. Juvenile Court handles support for unmarried parents — and for married-but-separated parents without a divorce case. Modify, terminate, or enforce with the matching packet, \$100 each.

## Contempt & enforcement

If an order is ignored, file the contempt packet. It asks the court to enforce the order. The fee is \$150 for custody or parenting time, \$100 for support. Contempt can mean 30 to 90 days in jail, fines of \$250 to \$1,000, and attorney's fees.

## Out-of-state orders

Register another state's custody decree with the foreign decree packet — \$75 — so Ohio can enforce it. A contest packet exists for the other side. Where the county publishes nothing more, Ohio's UCCJEA rules and Supreme Court forms fill the gap — confirm details with the Clerk.

## Disagreeing with a decision

Juvenile Court publishes packets to object to a magistrate's decision, set aside a magistrate's order, or appeal. The windows are short — read your decision for the deadline and act the same week. Transcript fee waivers exist if cost is a barrier.

### IF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IS INVOLVED

#### Abuse, neglect, and dependency cases move fast.

When HCJFS files about a child's safety, hearings can begin within 72 hours of removal. Parents have the right to counsel — ask the court about appointed counsel immediately, attend everything, and engage with the case plan. ProKids CASA volunteers and the Bridges program support children and young adults in care. This guide can't cover these cases fully; getting advice early matters most here.

## PART THREE

# Adoption: joyful outcome, exacting paperwork.

Hamilton County Probate Court handles adoptions at the William Howard Taft Law Center, 230 East Ninth Street, 9th and 10th floors. Stepparent and kinship adoptions are the most common family filings — and the consent question always comes first.

## THE FIRST QUESTION

## Will the other parent consent?

In a stepparent adoption, the non-custodial parent must either consent in writing — signed before a notary — or the court must find their consent is not required, typically for failure to communicate with or support the child. Consent makes the path direct. A contest makes it a real case. Know which one you have before you file.

### Adoption changes everything — permanently

Adoption ends the other parent's legal relationship with the child entirely and creates a new one. It is not custody, which can be changed later. And unmarried couples can't adopt together in Ohio. Treat the decision with the weight it carries.

### This path may fit if...

- You're married to the child's custodial parent and the child lives with you.
- The other parent will consent — or has long failed to communicate or support.
- You're ready for a home study and a court hearing the child attends.

## STEPPARENT ADOPTION

**\$160.00**

Deposit per Probate cost schedule (eff. 7/19/2021); more children may add charges.

## PRIVATE ADOPTION

**\$185.00**

Agency adoption is also \$185. Adult adoption: \$150.

## HOME STUDY

**Agency-set fee**

Paid to the court-approved agency you hire, not to the court.

Probate fees verified June 11, 2026 from the court's posted cost schedule — confirm with the Probate cashier before filing.

## STEPARENT ADOPTION · PROCESS

# The packet, the home study, and the hearing.

Probate Court bundles the forms into packets with instructions. Get them at the 9th floor desk or online.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AS">Adoption Step Parent Petition packet (AS)</a> <a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AS">https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AS</a>	probatect.org or the 9th floor desk	The complete stepparent filing: petition, consent, notice, decree, and supporting forms.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Pay with cash, certified check, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express. Probate accepts NO personal checks or money orders.</p>		
<a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/form/AS-I">Step-parent filing instructions (AS-I)</a> <a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/form/AS-I">https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/form/AS-I</a>	probatect.org	The court's own step-by-step instruction sheet — read it before anything else.
<a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AM">Adoption of Minor Petition packet (AM)</a> <a href="https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AM">https://www.probatect.org/forms/download/packet/AM</a>	probatect.org or the 9th floor desk	For kinship and other minor adoptions; pre-placement application (AL) where required.

## Notice: don't guess

If a parent won't consent, the court serves them notice of the hearing by certified mail — and your notice must state why their consent isn't required. If their address is unknown, notice runs by publication, with your affidavit describing the search. Notice mistakes can undo an adoption — this is the step where careful review pays.

## Help at the court

Probate magistrates take walk-ins. The court gives free interpreters with 72 hours' notice: (513) 946-3570. Need a lawyer? The Cincinnati Bar referral line, (513) 381-8359, offers a 30-minute consult for \$50. Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Project, (513) 241-9400, helps free or at reduced rates.

## STEPPARENT ADOPTION · FIVE STEPS

# From the 9th floor desk to the new birth certificate.

1

## Complete the packet

File the petition with a certified copy of the child's birth certificate. Add the notarized affidavit and the consent forms. If a parent won't consent, add the notice forms. A child born after 1996 to unmarried parents also needs a Putative Father Registry check.

2

## Magistrate review, then file

Take the forms to the 9th floor information desk. A magistrate reviews them and sets the hearing; the cashier then assigns the case number and takes the fee.

3

## Home study — before the hearing

Always required. You hire an agency from the court's approved list and pay its fee. It covers background, home, medical, and financial checks, and it stays confidential.

4

## The hearing

The child must be in your home 6 months before finalization — in stepparent cases, that clock starts at the marriage. The child attends the hearing. If granted, the decree is entered that day.

5

## The new birth certificate

After the final hearing, the clerk certifies the adoption to vital statistics. For an Ohio-born child, request the new birth certificate in writing about 30 days later. Expect it in about 4 months.

### NOT SURE WHICH PART IS YOURS?

Two minutes sorts it out.

Divorce, custody, support, or adoption — the Find My Service quiz at [gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) matches your situation to the right path and the right level of help. Or call (844) 694-2885.

## PART FOUR

# If you want company on the road.

This guide gave you the map. Some people walk it alone; some want a lawyer for one hard stretch; some want a lawyer for the whole route. Gavvl Law is built to offer all three — honestly.

## TWO WAYS TO WORK WITH US

### Full representation

An attorney runs the whole case: strategy, every filing, every court date, and trial if it comes to that. You get ongoing access to your attorney the whole way. The best fit for contested, complex, or high-conflict cases. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

## FLAT FEE, DEFINED TASK

### Limited-scope representation

Hire the firm for set tasks at a flat fee. Think drafting and filing papers, one hearing, document review, or advice sessions. Best for uncontested matters, simple changes, and tight budgets. One honest limit: it's NOT a fit for complex or high-conflict cases that need ongoing advocacy. A limited-scope matter can usually convert to full representation if things heat up.

## Ways to pay

Flat-fee services have the widest options. Pay in full by card. Finance with Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal. Or use Gavvl Direct, the in-house plan with no credit check. Gavvl Direct starts services at 60% down with the rest financed, or finances the full fee with services starting once 60% is paid; financed amounts carry 19% annual interest, compounded monthly.

Full-representation retainers can be paid in full or financed through Affirm. Exact payment amounts are calculated at enrollment — [financing@gavvl.com](mailto:financing@gavvl.com) can walk you through it.

## Why people pick Gavvl

Gavvl is a modern Ohio family law firm serving all 88 counties. Its co-founders are attorneys who have been through divorce and custody themselves. Clients have left more than 90 verified Google reviews averaging 4.8+, and Best Lawyers named Gavvl a “Firm to Watch” for 2026. Awards and reviews reflect other clients' experiences — never a guarantee about your case.

## NEXT STEP

# Start with two minutes, not a retainer.

The Find My Service quiz asks about your situation. It then suggests a service level and ways to pay. It's free and works on your phone. Prefer a person? Call or email, and ask about a low-cost consultation.

**PRIMARY**

Take the 2-minute quiz

[gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service)

(<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>)

Not sure which path fits? The quiz will tell you — and what it would cost to get help with it.

**DIRECT**

Talk to a human

(844) 694-2885

[support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com)

[gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start) (<https://gavvl.com/start>)

Consultations are low-cost, and there's no obligation after.

## HAMILTON COUNTY FAMILIES

## Seen. Heard. Helped.

Whether you file it yourself with this guide or hand the whole case to an attorney, the next step is the same: get clear on your path.

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(844) 694-2885

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[support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com)

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[gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service)

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1677 Old Henderson Road, Columbus, Ohio 43220

## IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

# The fine print, in plain sight.

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Hamilton County, but it can't account for the facts of your situation. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client or create an attorney-client relationship. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

## Accuracy and changes

Court fees, forms, and procedures change. The information in this guide was verified as of May 31, 2026 from official court sources; Probate Court costs, the legal separation fee, and protection order filing procedures were re-verified June 11, 2026. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts — and the Probate cashier for adoptions — before you file.

## Results and recognition

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

## Who is responsible for this guide

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