

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Mahoning County

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

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- 01** See how Mahoning County splits family law across three courts.

 - 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 Mahoning County.

01

Which court handles this?

Married couples file divorce or dissolution in the Domestic Relations Court. Unmarried parents file custody in the separate Juvenile Court. Adoptions go to the Probate Court, a third court.

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 Mahoning 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.

TWO COURTS, TWO FILING METHODS

The Domestic Relations Court requires e-filing through the Clerk. The Juvenile Court is paper-filing only — no e-filing or fax. Check the right method for your court before you file.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.	2
Which court is actually handling your case?	4
The Domestic Relations Court ends marriages.	5
The dissolution packet, step by step.	6
Filing a divorce when you do not agree.	8
Getting orders while the case runs.	9
Custody, the workshop, and child support.	10
Spousal support, property, and other paths.	11
Changing or enforcing a Mahoning County order.	12
Mediation, GALs, and the workshop.	13
When safety comes first.	14
The Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.	15
Filing for custody as an unmarried parent	15
Changing orders and CPS cases.	16
Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.	17
How Gavvl Law can help in Mahoning County.	18
Important disclosures.	19

QUESTION ONE

Which court is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one court. Mahoning County splits family law by whether the parents were married. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations Court

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

WHERE

120 Market St., 4th floor.
Judge Beth A. Smith.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

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

WHERE

300 E. Scott St. Judge
Theresa Dellick.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus name changes and guardianships.

WHERE

120 Market St. (330)
740-2310.

Three separate courts

In Mahoning County the Domestic Relations Court, the Juvenile Court, and the Probate Court are three different courts. Divorce goes to Domestic Relations at 120 Market Street; unmarried-parent custody goes to Juvenile Court at 300 E. Scott Street. File with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Court ends marriages.

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

DIVORCE OR DISSOLUTION	COUNTERCLAIM	WHERE YOU FILE	RESIDENCY
\$250	\$150	Clerk, 2nd floor	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. The deposit is the same either way.

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, or the case is dismissed.

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.

ONE FLAT DEPOSIT, AND A SCHEDULING QUIRK

A divorce, dissolution, legal separation, or annulment all cost \$250 to file, with or without children. For a dissolution, you must get a hearing date from the assignment commissioner before you file. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. Get your hearing date first, then sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary and build the rest of the packet around it.

GET THE HEARING DATE BEFORE FILING

A Mahoning dissolution is unusual in one way: you obtain the final hearing date from the assignment commissioner before you file. The hearing is held 30 to 90 days later, and both spouses must appear or the case is dismissed.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Waiver of Service https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses waive formal service
Financial affidavits https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Income and property details
Parenting plan + worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the plan and support math
Decree of Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment the court signs (Form 18)

CHANGED YOUR MIND?**Converting to divorce**

If a dissolution stops being fully agreed, you can convert it to a divorce by filing no later than 7 days after the scheduled dissolution hearing date. The court can move it onto the divorce track.

FREE MEDIATION

If a parenting issue comes up, the court offers free mediation with a trained magistrate, and it settles most cases referred to it. Ask Family Services at (330) 740-2208.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is e-filed with the Clerk of Courts. Mahoning 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
Financial affidavits (1–5) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Income, expenses, and property
Mutual Restraining Order https://www.mahoningcountyoh.gov/705/Court-Forms	Mahoning DR forms	Keeps both sides from hiding assets
Parenting affidavits https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; parenting and insurance
Request 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

Timing and a witness

An uncontested divorce is not heard before 42 days after service. A contested case can take about six months. At the final hearing you need one witness who knows the facts of the marriage; they can appear by Zoom for a video trial.

SCHEDULE THE MOTION FIRST

Mahoning is assignment-commissioner driven. Schedule any motion with the commissioner before you file it, and serve post-decree motions through the Clerk with both parties' full names and current addresses.

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 a parenting schedule.

The 14-day rule

You ask for temporary orders by motion and affidavit under Civil Rule 75(N). The other party files a counter-affidavit within 14 days. The court can decide the temporary orders from the affidavits.

A restraining order up front

A divorce complaint can include a mutual restraining order. It keeps both spouses from hiding or selling assets, running up debt in the other's name, or dropping insurance while the case runs.

IF YOU NEED PROTECTION RIGHT AWAY

A temporary order is not the fast path for an emergency. For immediate protection from violence or threats, file a protection order. It has no filing fee and is usually heard the same day. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, the workshop, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Mahoning County also has a parents' workshop and handles support through the county agency.

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, filed as its own document. It must cover living arrangements, support, health care, school, and holidays.

The parents' workshop

By local rule, parents with minor children in a divorce or legal separation attend a short workshop before the final hearing. It runs about 2.5 hours and costs \$20 cash. The court has at times paused it, so confirm the current status.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Mahoning County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (330) 740-2600. 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 Court for the same \$250 deposit. Legal separation sets terms without ending the marriage. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

A note on dividing retirement

If a divorce divides a pension or retirement account, it usually takes a separate order to split it with the plan. Mahoning runs these and other parenting evaluations through its Family Services Department. Getting the wording right matters, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Mahoning County order.

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

POST-DECREE MOTION**\$100**

Per motion; also per counter or cross motion

REGISTER A FOREIGN ORDER**\$100**

To bring in a support or custody order from another state

CONTEMPT**\$100**

To enforce an order; \$750 attorney fees may be presumed

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-decree motion for \$100. Schedule it with the assignment commissioner first. Support changes can also start through the agency at (330) 740-2600.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

The residential parent must file a Notice of Intent to Relocate at least 60 days before the move and copy the assignment commissioner. The Clerk then notifies the other parent.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the workshop.

Mahoning County offers ways to settle disputes. It also offers ways to give the court good information about the children.

Free mediation

The court's magistrates are trained mediators and offer mediation free of charge. It settles most cases referred to it. It is never used for a domestic violence case or to decide a protection order.

Family Services

The Family Services Department coordinates guardians ad litem, parenting assessments, and evaluations to help the court make good decisions for the children. Reach it at (330) 740-2208.

The parents' workshop

A short workshop helps parents understand how separation affects children. It costs \$20 cash. The court has paused it at times, so confirm the current status.

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 Mahoning 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	HEARD	FULL HEARING	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Day you file	Within 14 days	Up to 5 years

How it works here

A protection order is filed with the Clerk under R.C. 3113.31. There is no cost deposit. It is generally heard the day you file. If the court grants an ex parte order, a full hearing follows.

Free help filing

The Volunteer Advocate Legal Unit, a project of Community Legal Aid, helps victims fill out and file the petition and go to hearings, at no cost. Reach it at (330) 742-5856.

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

The 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 separate Juvenile Court, before Judge Dellick.

Parentage comes first

In Ohio, the mother of a child born outside marriage is the only legal custodian until a court says otherwise. So a father usually has to prove he is the father first. You can do that by a signed form, through the child support agency, or by a court case.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Parentage and Custody https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Uniform Form 23	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
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
Application for Child Support https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Juvenile Court or CSEA	Sets up the support case with the agency

PAPER FILING ONLY

The Juvenile Court is at 300 E. Scott Street, (330) 740-2278. Unlike the Domestic Relations Court, it takes paper filings only — no e-filing or fax. A non-divorce custody or child support case costs \$100 to file.

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, on paper. Support changes can also start through the agency at (330) 740-2600. Bring or mail the paper filing to the Juvenile Court.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Court. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to speak for the child. To report concerns about a child's safety, contact county children services. For immediate danger, call 911.

A NOTE ON THE TWO FILING METHODS

Mahoning runs its two family courts differently. The Domestic Relations Court requires e-filing through the Clerk, while the Juvenile Court accepts paper filings only. Double-check which court and method your case uses before you file.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the separate Probate Court at 120 Market Street. Here is the basic shape.

CONFIRM THE PROBATE DETAILS

Adoption is handled by the Mahoning County Probate Court, a different court from the other two. Confirm its current forms, deposit, and any local steps with the Probate Court at (330) 740-2310 before you file.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor. Add the child's birth certificate. For a stepparent, add the marriage certificate too. Ohio uses the same forms in every county.

2

Address consent

The other parent's consent is usually needed. So is the child's, if they are 12 or older. A court can waive a parent's consent for a year of no contact or support.

3

Complete the home study

Ohio law usually asks for a home study. A stepparent case can be simpler. Ask the Probate Court what your case needs.

4

Attend the hearing

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

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Mahoning 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 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Mahoning 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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