

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Muskingum County

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

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- 01 See how Muskingum County handles family law across its courts.

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

 - 03 Find the right local form, the deposit, and the 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 Muskingum County.

01

Which court handles this?

The Domestic Relations Court handles divorce, dissolution, and custody for all parents, married or not. The Juvenile Court handles child-protection cases. Adoptions go to the Probate 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 Muskingum 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.

ONE COURT FOR DIVORCE AND CUSTODY

Unlike many counties, Muskingum sends both divorce and unmarried-parent custody to the same Domestic Relations Court. The Juvenile Court here handles child-protection and delinquency cases.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Four parts: Domestic Relations (divorce and dissolution), parents who were never married, 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 Muskingum County they sit in three buildings in Zanesville. Start with what you need a judge to decide, because here one court covers more than you might expect.

DIVORCE AND ALL CUSTODY

Domestic Relations Court

Divorce, dissolution, and custody, parenting time, and support for all parents, married or not.

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Maria N. Kalis. (740) 455-7190.

CHILD PROTECTION

Juvenile Court

Abuse, neglect, and dependency cases, and juvenile delinquency. Not where parents file for custody here.

WHERE

1860 East Pike. (740) 453-0351.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Eric D. Martin. (740) 455-7113.

The Domestic Relations Court does the heavy lifting

In Muskingum County the Domestic Relations Court, before Judge Kalis, hears divorce and dissolution and also custody, parenting time, and support for unmarried parents. The Juvenile Court handles child-protection and delinquency cases. The Probate Court handles adoption. All three are in Zanesville.

PART ONE

Divorce and dissolution go to Domestic Relations.

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	DISSOLUTION	PARENT CLASS	RESIDENCY
\$225	\$175+	Required, \$10	6 months in Ohio

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit, and it costs less to file. 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.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together as co-petitioners. 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. You can convert a divorce to a dissolution later if you reach a full agreement.

THE DEPOSITS

A divorce costs \$225 to file. A dissolution costs \$175 without children, or \$200 with children. Add \$50 per person for sheriff service. You can ask the court to waive the deposit if you cannot afford it. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

The Domestic Relations Court posts its own numbered forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first, then build the rest of the packet around it.

FILE JOINTLY, THEN ATTEND THE HEARING

Both spouses file the joint petition with the signed Separation Agreement and the required affidavits. The hearing is held 30 to 90 days later, and both spouses must appear. With children, finish the Co-Parenting Seminar first.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Dissolution With Children (tab 14) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/14.%20DISSOLUTION%20WITH%20CHILDREN%20(PARENTING%20PLAN).pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement (tab 55) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/55.%20SEPARATION%20AGREEMENT.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Parenting Plan (tab 56) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/56.%20PARENTING%20PLAN.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	With children; the parenting plan
Financial Affidavit DR1 (tab 47) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/47.%20DR1%20AFFIDAVIT.ONE%20SIGNATURE.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Each spouse's finances
Title IV-D Application (tab 54) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/54.%20Title%20IV-D%20Application.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	With children; required before support

REQUIRED**The Co-Parenting Seminar**

With children under 18, both parents complete a 2-hour Co-Parenting Seminar before the final hearing. It is offered online, and the seminar fee is \$10. Register by calling the court at (740) 455-7190.

IF YOU STOP AGREEING

A dissolution only works if both spouses agree all the way through the hearing. If you cannot agree, the case can be converted to a divorce so the court can decide the open issues.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Domestic Relations Court. The court posts a full set of numbered fillable forms, with a separate complaint depending on whether you have children.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint, with children (tab 1) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/1.%20COMPLAINT%20FOR%20DIVORCE%20WITH%20CHILDREN.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Starts the lawsuit, with children
Complaint, no children (tab 8) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/8.%20COMPLAINT%20FOR%20DIVORCE%20WITHOUT%20CHILDREN.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Starts the lawsuit, no children
Financial Affidavit DR1 (tab 47) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/47.%20DR1%20AFFIDAVIT.ONE%20SIGNATURE.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Your financial picture
Verified Motion Ex Parte (tab 42) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/42.%20VERIFIED%20MOTION%20EX%20PARTE.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Only for an extreme emergency
All DR forms (tabs 1-66) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/#Tab6	Muskingum DR forms index	The court's full forms library

Higher-conflict cases

For higher-conflict cases, the court can order a six-week Cooperative Parenting Class, taught by two court instructors. It costs \$100 a person, and both parents must attend together for it to count.

PLAN FOR EXTRA COSTS

Sheriff service adds \$50 per person served. Paternity testing, if needed, is \$100 per person. A court-ordered home investigation is \$50. Budget for these if they apply to your case.

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.

How you ask

You file a motion with the affidavits the court provides, so the judge can set temporary custody, parenting time, and support. A temporary order request has to ride along with a complaint or a motion for final orders.

Emergencies are narrow

An ex parte order needs an affidavit showing an extreme emergency, filed using the court's Verified Motion form between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. The court then holds a fresh hearing, and the order holds until then.

CONFIRM THE TIMING

The court does not publish a set day count for the follow-up hearing, so confirm the current timing with the court. If a child is in immediate danger, contact law enforcement and Children Services. If anyone is in danger now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, the seminar, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Muskingum County requires a co-parenting seminar and handles support through the Domestic Relations 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 Co-Parenting Seminar

The 2-hour seminar is required in a divorce, dissolution, or parenting case with children under 18. Finish it before the final hearing. If you skip it, the court can dismiss your case or hold up your parenting time.

SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE DR COURT

Muskingum handles child support through the Domestic Relations Court under the Title IV-D program. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state.

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 \$225 deposit as a divorce. Legal separation sets terms without ending the marriage. Annulment is rare.

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. Getting the wording right matters, and a mistake can cost real money later, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Muskingum County order.

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

POST-JUDGMENT MOTION**\$150**

To modify custody, support, or another order

SHERIFF SERVICE**+\$50**

Per person who must be served

HOME INVESTIGATION**\$50**

When the court orders a home study

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody, parenting time, or support, you file the matching motion the court provides, for a \$150 deposit. To enforce an order, you file a Contempt motion in the same case.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

If a parent plans to move, file the Notice of Intent to Relocate so the court can review parenting time. File it ahead of the move and keep a copy for your records.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the seminars.

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

Mediation

The court can refer parents to mediation to help them reach an agreement on parenting and other issues. It is never used for a domestic violence case or to decide a protection order.

Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem, or order a home investigation for \$50, to look into the children's needs in a contested case.

Two parenting classes

The 2-hour Co-Parenting Seminar is required in most cases with children. The six-week Cooperative Parenting Class is ordered only in higher-conflict cases.

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 Muskingum 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 civil protection order can order someone to stay away. It can also set temporary custody and support. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	WHERE	EX PARTE HEARING	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Domestic Relations	At filing	Up to 5 years

How it works here
 The Domestic Relations Court hears protection orders under R.C. 3113.31, with no fee. Use the statewide forms. Plan to go before the judge for an ex parte hearing at the time you file, with a full hearing set later.

Help and a key difference
 The same court hears stalking orders against someone who is not a family or household member. A victim advocate at Transitions can help you file and attend court for free, at (740) 454-3213.

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. A final order can last up to five years.

PART TWO

Never married? Your case is still in Domestic Relations.

Here is a surprise. In Muskingum County, unmarried parents file for custody and support in the Domestic Relations Court. They do not file in the Juvenile Court.

Proving the father 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. If that is in question, the court can order a DNA test, which costs \$100 a person.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint to Determine Parentage (tab 25) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/25.%20COMPLAINT%20FOR%20PARENTAGE.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Establishes who the father is
Complaint for Custody (tab 19) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/19.%20COMPLAINT%20FOR%20CUSTODY.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Custody, after paternity is proven
Complaint for Child Support (tab 23) https://www.muskingumcountyoh.gov/Courts/Domestic-Relations/Downloads/23.%20COMPLAINT%20FOR%20CHILD%20SUPPORT.pdf	Muskingum DR forms	Sets support, with the IV-D application

WHAT THE JUVENILE COURT DOES

The Juvenile Court is at 1860 East Pike, (740) 453-0351. It hears child-safety cases and juvenile crime. A custody or support case between parents goes to the Domestic Relations Court instead. The custody deposit is \$175.

OTHER CUSTODY SITUATIONS

Non-parents and child-safety cases.

Sometimes a relative steps in. Sometimes the county steps in to keep a child safe. Here is where those cases go.

Custody to a relative

A relative or other trusted adult can ask the Domestic Relations Court for custody, using the court's non-parent forms. A relative caring for a child short-term can use a Caretaker Affidavit for school and medical needs.

Child-safety cases

When a child may not be safe, the county brings the case in the Juvenile Court, which can name a guardian ad litem for the child. To report a worry, call the hotline at 1-855-642-4453, or 911 if there is danger.

PERMANENT PLACEMENT IS DIFFERENT

Custody to a relative does not end a parent's rights. To become a child's legal parent for good, you file an adoption in the Probate Court, which is covered next.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Court, before Judge Martin, a separate court from the one that handles divorce. Here is the basic shape.

WHERE TO FILE, AND THE FEES

Adoptions are filed at the Probate Court, 401 Main Street, (740) 455-7113. The court sets its own adoption fees, so confirm the current deposit when you file. A stepparent case is often streamlined.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor on the Supreme Court probate forms. Add the child's birth certificate, and a marriage certificate for a stepparent.

2

Address consent

The child's parents usually must consent. A court can excuse consent in some cases, such as a year of no contact or support without good reason. A child 12 or older also consents.

3

Complete the home study

Ohio law usually asks for a home study or pre-finalization assessment. A stepparent adoption can be simpler. The court sets what your case needs.

4

Attend the hearing

If the court finds the adoption is in the child's best interest, Judge Martin signs a final decree of adoption. A new birth record follows.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Muskingum 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 16, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Muskingum 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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