

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Warren County

The plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, child support, protection orders, and adoption in Warren County's courts — with the real local forms, fees, and deadlines.

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- 01** Find the right Lebanon courthouse before you fill out a single form — Warren County uses two.

 - 02** Get every required local form, with direct links to the court's own Document Center.

 - 03** See the actual filing fees, parenting schedules, and the deadlines that hurt people who miss them.

 - 04** Learn the Warren County quirks — pre-filing review, required child-support language, one-sided printing — that get filings rejected.

 - 05** Pick a next step that fits your situation, your budget, and your timeline.

START HERE

Two courthouses, one campus. Start by picking the right one.

Warren County splits family law between two courts in Lebanon. Married or formerly married? Your case is in Domestic Relations Court at 500 Justice Drive. Never married to the other parent? Custody and support go to Juvenile Court at 900 Memorial Drive. Adoption is in Probate Court, in the same building as Juvenile.

01

Find your court and your path

Part 1 covers Domestic Relations: divorce, dissolution, temporary orders, custody between married parents, support, contempt, and protection orders. Part 2 covers Juvenile Court for parents who never married. Part 3 covers adoption in Probate Court.

02

Use the linked forms

Every form name in this guide is a live link to the court's own PDF. The full web address is printed under each link, so a printed copy works too.

03

Check the local quirks

Warren County reviews every filing before the Clerk accepts it. Small mistakes — missing language, two-sided printing, no email address — can send your packet back. The “Heads up” notes flag these.

IF YOU WERE SERVED PAPERS

Your deadline is already running.

You generally have 28 days from the day you were served to file an Answer. If the papers include a request for temporary orders, you may have only 14 days to respond. Read Part 1 first.

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Warren 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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Everything in this guide, one tap away.

On a phone or computer, tap any line to jump straight to it. Every page footer has a Contents link to bring you back.

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YOUR COURTS AT A GLANCE

Both courts sit on the county campus in Lebanon.

Same campus, different buildings, different judges, different rules. Save the right phone number before you start.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations Court

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, spousal support, custody and child support for married parents, and civil protection orders.

WHERE

500 Justice Drive, Lebanon, OH 45036
 (513) 695-1344 · Mon–Fri 8:00–4:00 (lunch close 12:30–1:00)
 Judge Jeffrey T. Kirby

FORMS

[DR Document Center](https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/Forms) (https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/Forms)

NEVER-MARRIED PARENTS · ADOPTION

Probate / Juvenile Court

Juvenile: custody, parenting time, parentage, and support for parents who never married. Probate: adoption, name changes, guardianships, marriage licenses.

WHERE

900 Memorial Drive, Lebanon, OH 45036
 Juvenile (513) 695-1160 · Probate (513) 695-1180 · Mon–Fri 8:00–4:00
 Judge Joseph W. Kirby

FORMS

[Juvenile forms](#) · [Probate packets](#)

GOOD TO KNOW	THE DETAILS
DR Help Center	Tue 1–3 PM, Thu 9–11 AM, 500 Justice Drive. Staff help you fill out printed Document Center forms.
Probate/Juvenile Legal Help Center	Thu 8 AM–noon, 900 Memorial Drive. Walk in; an attorney answers legal questions for anyone, free.
Child Support (CSEA)	(513) 695-1580 · 500 Justice Drive · csea.warrencountyohio.gov
How to file in DR Court	Email DRFILINGS@warrencountyohio.gov, fax (513) 695-1884, or file on paper. Never follow an email or fax with a hard copy. Print one-sided.
The most useful local fact	Every DR filing goes to the DR Office for pre-approval first. It counts as filed only when the Clerk time-stamps it. Build cushion into every deadline.

PART ONE · DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Ending a marriage starts with one question: do you both agree?

Dissolution and divorce both end your marriage. The difference is agreement. Full agreement, in writing, on everything — property, debt, support, and parenting — opens the calmer dissolution path. Anything less means divorce.

RESIDENCY	COUNTY RESIDENCY	DISSOLUTION HEARING	UNCONTESTED DIVORCE
Ohio 6 months	Warren Co. 90 days	31–90 days	65+ days

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you both agree on everything?

Agreement means more than wanting the case over. It means both of you will sign the same separation agreement and, if you have children, the same parenting plan — and both of you will show up to the final hearing. If any piece is missing, plan for divorce. A divorce can still settle at any point.

Dissolution — built on agreement

You file together as petitioners. Nobody is sued and nobody is served. The court reviews your signed agreement and holds a short final hearing 31 to 90 days after filing. Both spouses must attend.

Divorce — built for disagreement

One spouse files a complaint and the other is served. The court gives you structure: deadlines, temporary orders, required financial disclosure, and a judge who decides anything you can't settle.

Where you must file

You or your spouse must have lived in Ohio for at least 6 months and in Warren County for at least 90 days. If a case is already open somewhere, file in that case — not a new one. When children are involved, the court also checks “home state” rules: generally, custody belongs where the child has lived for the last 6 months. Emergencies and other exceptions exist.

DISSOLUTION

Dissolution: the agreed way to end your marriage.

A dissolution is a way to end your marriage when you and your spouse already agree on everything. You walk away with a court decree that ends the marriage and makes your agreement an enforceable order.

FILING FEE (CHILDREN)	FILING FEE (NO CHILDREN)	FINAL HEARING	COURT
\$400	\$300	31–90 days	Domestic Relations

This path may fit if...

- You both agree the marriage should end.
- Property, debt, and support terms are settled and you'll both sign.
- If you have children, you agree on parenting and child support.
- You can both attend the final hearing in Lebanon.

Not for you if...

One of you won't sign, can't be found, won't share financial information, or won't attend the hearing. Any one of those means divorce is the workable path. If your spouse stops agreeing before the decree, the dissolution stalls.

Core filing

Petition for Dissolution, signed by both spouses

The agreement

Separation Agreement covering property, debt, and support

With children

A parenting plan, child support worksheet, and parenting class

Decree

Warren County requires the proposed decree WITH your initial filing

Final step

Short hearing; both spouses confirm the agreement under oath

Good to know in Warren County

The court sets dissolution hearings 31 to 90 days after filing. Collaborative-law dissolutions may be heard earlier. There is no service step, so the clock starts the day you file.

DISSOLUTION · FORMS

What you file, with links to the real forms.

Warren County uses the Supreme Court of Ohio uniform forms, hosted on the court's own Document Center, plus local DR forms. File the set that matches your situation.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution & Waiver https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form17.pdf	DR Document Center	Starts the case. Both spouses sign.
Separation Agreement https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form19.pdf	DR Document Center	Your full deal on property, debt, and support. Attached to the petition.
Judgment Entry — Decree of Dissolution https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form18.pdf	DR Document Center	The order the judge signs.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Warren County requires this proposed decree WITH your initial filing — not at the hearing.</p>		
Income/Expense/Property Affidavit (DR 1) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form1.pdf	DR Document Center	Each spouse files one — two total.
Personal History (DR 2) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form2.pdf	DR Document Center	Basic case information sheet.
Waiver of Representation https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form3.pdf	DR Document Center	Confirms a spouse is proceeding without a lawyer.

Filing with children? Add these.

Parenting Proceeding Affidavit (DR 4), a Shared Parenting Plan or Parenting Plan, the Decree of Shared Parenting if you choose shared parenting (required with the initial filing), a child support worksheet, the IV-D Application (DR 12), Health Insurance form (DR 10), Notice to Income Provider (DR 11), the Basic Parenting Schedule, and the court's Notifications pages. Every one is linked in the with-children packet table in the divorce section — the same files are used here.

Common mistakes that get packets rejected

- Leaving out the required child-support language. Since November 1, 2023, the court rejects initial and final documents without it.
- Printing two-sided. Every document must be one-sided, typed, on 8½ × 11 paper with a 2-inch top margin.
- No email addresses. Local Rule 1.1 requires both parties' emails on initial and final pleadings.
- Filing the petition without the proposed decree attached.
- Signing where a notary is required before you're in front of the notary.

1 File the packet

Submit by email, fax, or paper. The DR Office reviews it before the Clerk accepts it.

2 Register for the parenting class

With children under 16, register for the H.O.P.E. seminar within 30 days of filing.

3 Final hearing

31–90 days after filing. Both spouses appear and confirm the agreement, about 15 minutes.

4 Decree

The judge signs the decree. Your agreement is now a court order.

DIVORCE

Divorce: are you starting the case, or did you get papers?

One question routes everything. If you need to start the process, you file a Complaint. If you received papers, your next document is an Answer — and the clock is running.

A

I need to start the case

The Complaint starts the divorce with the court. You are the plaintiff. The Clerk serves your spouse, which means formally delivering the papers to them.

B

I received papers

The Answer officially makes you part of the case. A Counterclaim adds your own requests to the court — without one, only your spouse's requests are on the table. "Service" is the day you were formally delivered the papers, not the day you first heard about the case.

THE TWO CLOCKS

28 days to answer. 14 days on temporary orders.

You have 28 days from service to file your Answer (Ohio Civil Rule 12). Did your spouse also ask for temporary orders by affidavit? Then you typically have just 14 days from service to answer it with your own affidavit, or to ask for more time. Miss that, and the court can rule on your spouse's paperwork alone (Civil Rule 75(N)).

Filing fees

Divorce with children: \$400. Without children: \$300. Service by publication: \$500. Answer and cross-complaint with service: \$200. Sheriff service: \$50 per person. Can't afford the fee? File the Motion and Affidavit of Indigency — the deposit drops to \$15. Fees verified June 11, 2026; confirm with the Clerk before filing.

DIVORCE · FORMS

The Warren County divorce packet, linked.

Warren County hosts the uniform Supreme Court forms and its own local DR forms in one Document Center.

With children, also file

Every divorce also needs the DR 1 affidavit and DR 2 Personal History, linked in the dissolution section. Sharing minor children? Add the with-children packet — every form is linked on the next page.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce with Children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form7.pdf	DR Document Center	Starts a divorce when you share minor children.
Complaint for Divorce without Children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form6.pdf	DR Document Center	Starts a divorce with no minor children.
Motion/Affidavit for Temporary Orders https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Affidavit5.pdf	DR Document Center	Sets rules for money, housing, and the children while the case is pending.
Mutual Restraining Order (DR 7) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form7.pdf	DR Document Center	Standard order against bad financial moves while the case is open.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Filed with every complaint. Binds you at filing, your spouse at service. Not a reflection on either of you.</p>		
Mandatory Disclosure Order (DR 6) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Mandatory_Disclosure_Order.pdf	DR Document Center	Requires both sides to exchange financial documents within 45 days after service.
Final Decree — with children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form15.pdf	DR Document Center	Proposed final order, with children.
Final Decree — without children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form14.pdf	DR Document Center	Proposed final order, no children.

DIVORCE & DISSOLUTION · WITH CHILDREN

The with-children packet, linked.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit (DR 4) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form4.pdf	DR Document Center	Sworn history of where the children have lived.
Shared Parenting Plan https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/JDRF/Form20.pdf	DR Document Center	Your proposed plan when both parents share decision-making.
Parenting Plan https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/JDRF/Form21.pdf	DR Document Center	Your proposed plan with one legal custodian (sole custody).
Decree of Shared Parenting https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/DecreeSharedParenting.pdf	DR Document Center	The order the judge signs — required WITH your initial filing if you request shared parenting.
Child Support Worksheet https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html	Ohio's official calculator	Generates the worksheet from both parents' numbers.
IV-D Application (DR 12) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form12.pdf	DR Document Center	Child support services. SSNs go to the DR Office — never to the Clerk.
Health Insurance Information (DR 10) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form10.pdf	DR Document Center	Who covers the children and what it costs.
Notice to Income Provider (DR 11) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form11.pdf	DR Document Center	Sets up wage withholding for support.
Basic Parenting Schedule https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/BasicParentingSchedule.pdf	DR Document Center	The court's default age-based schedule.
Notifications https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Notifications.pdf	DR Document Center	Required notice pages with the child-support language.

DIVORCE · RESPONDING

Served with divorce papers? File these.

An Answer protects your place in the case. A Counterclaim puts your own requests in front of the court, so the case keeps moving even if your spouse later dismisses.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Answer — with children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form11.pdf	DR Document Center	Your formal response, children involved.
Answer — without children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form10.pdf	DR Document Center	Your formal response, no children.
Counterclaim — with children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form9.pdf	DR Document Center	Your own divorce requests.
Counterclaim — without children https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/UDRF/Form8.pdf	DR Document Center	Your own divorce requests, no children.
Income/Expense/Property Affidavit (DR 1) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Form1.pdf	DR Document Center	Required with your response.

△ Heads up: Don't miss the 28-day deadline waiting to "talk it out." Informal promises that the case is on hold don't stop the clock.

1

Complaint filed and served

The Clerk issues service. Your spouse's 28-day answer clock starts at service.

2

Temporary orders

Either side can request them by affidavit. The 14-day counter-affidavit window applies.

3

Disclosure and discovery

Financial documents are exchanged within 45 days after service under the Mandatory Disclosure Order.

4

Conferences and settlement

Scheduling conference, pretrials, and settlement conferences. Most cases settle.

5

Trial, if needed

The judge or magistrate decides what you couldn't. Exhibit lists are exchanged 14 days before trial.

How long does it take?

A non-contested divorce or legal separation is heard 65 or more days after filing. Contested divorces run longer: Ohio's guidelines allow up to 12 months without children and 18 months with children. Warren County moves cases on a scheduling order once an answer is filed.

GOOD TO KNOW IN WARREN COUNTY**Hearings are set before you file the motion.**

For motions, the moving party gets a hearing date from the Assignment Commissioner before filing. Responsive motions are due 7 days before the hearing. Plan backwards from the date.

TEMPORARY ORDERS

Who pays what — and where the kids sleep — while the case is pending.

Temporary orders set the rules for money, the house, and the children until the final decree. They are meant to keep things stable, and they are not binding on the final outcome.

How Warren County handles them

- The parent who has physical custody of the children when the case is filed is typically made the temporary legal custodian AND residential parent — usually automatically.
- Temporary child support is calculated on the state worksheet and starts when the order is filed.
- Temporary parenting time defaults to Basic Parenting Schedule II for children over age 2, unless the filing explains why less is appropriate.
- Both sides keep paying debts the way the household did before, and existing insurance stays in place.

Exclusive use of the house

If your spouse has been gone from the marital home for 30 or more continuous days, you can ask for exclusive use by ex parte order — meaning the court can grant it without a hearing first. The other spouse then has 14 days to move to dissolve it.

The 14-day window

Did the other side request temporary orders? You typically have 14 days from service to file a counter-affidavit. You can also formally ask for more time. Miss the window, and the court can rule on their affidavit alone (Civil Rule 75(N)).

Request form	Motion/Affidavit for Temporary Orders (Affidavit 5)
Entry — with children	Entry of Temporary Orders with Children
Entry — no children	Entry of Temporary Orders without Children
Respond within	14 days of service
Modify	Oral hearing within 28 days, on request

CUSTODY & PARENTING TIME

Ohio doesn't have “full custody.” Learn the words the court uses.

The vocabulary matters because the forms and the judge use it. Ohio has two arrangements: sole custody and shared parenting. Neither one decides how much time each parent gets.

THE ARRANGEMENTS**Sole custody vs. shared parenting**

The legal custodian makes the big decisions. In shared parenting, both parents share that role under a written plan. The “residential parent” label is mostly about paperwork — it sets the address used for school and insurance.

THE SCHEDULE**Parenting time**

Parenting time is the schedule. It is separate from custody type — parents can have equal or unequal time in either arrangement. Older documents say “visitation”; today's term is parenting time.

THE MONEY**Child support**

Support is calculated the same way in sole custody and shared parenting, from both parents' incomes, health insurance, and work-related child care.

Asking for shared parenting? File the plan.

The parent asking for shared parenting must submit a proposed Shared Parenting Plan. Asking alone isn't enough — without a plan, the court can't consider it. Warren County also wants the proposed Decree of Shared Parenting with your initial filing.

The H.O.P.E. seminar (required)

Every divorce, dissolution, or legal separation with children under 16 requires the 3-hour H.O.P.E. for Families in Divorce class. Register online within 30 days of filing or service, with your case number and email. Live more than 50 miles away? Get pre-approval to take another court's class. A non-residential parent who skips it risks suspended parenting time.

Warren County's Basic Parenting Schedule

The court publishes an age-based default schedule, from infants through teens. Basic Schedule I is alternating weekends plus a Wednesday evening. Basic Schedule II adds overnights: alternating weekends Friday through Monday morning, plus a Wednesday overnight. Holidays rotate odd and even years, and summer parenting time runs up to 4 weeks depending on age.

[Basic Parenting Schedule \(PDF\)](https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/BasicParentingSchedule.pdf) (https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/BasicParentingSchedule.pdf)

Moving? Tell the court first.

File the Notice of Intent to Relocate (DR 8) at least 30 days before an in-county move and 60 days before a move out of the county. You cannot move children out of Ohio to live without a court order or a signed agreement.

CHILD SUPPORT

The number comes from a worksheet, not a negotiation.

Ohio uses an income-shares model. The worksheet combines both parents' incomes, who pays health insurance, and work-related child care. The court can deviate from the number, but it starts there.

90+ OVERNIGHTS	CSEA REVIEW	SUPPORT ENDS	PROCESSING CHARGE
10% adjustment	Every 36 months	18 + graduation, or 19	2% of support

What to know

- 90 or more overnights a year usually gets a 10% adjustment. Bigger deviations take an approved agreement or statutory factors.
- Quitting work doesn't erase support — courts can impute income to a parent.
- Unpaid support can mean intercepted tax refunds and contempt — which can carry jail time.
- Support usually ends when the child turns 18 and finishes high school, or at 19, whichever comes first. It can run longer by agreement or for a child with special needs.
- Both agree on a lower number? The judge still orders what the child's best interest supports.

RUN YOUR NUMBERS FIRST

Estimate support before you file anything. Gavvl's free calculator walks you through the Ohio worksheet in plain language.

gavvl.com/child-support-calculator

Heads up: the required language

Warren County requires set child-support wording. Since November 1, 2023, the court rejects papers that leave it out. Copy it from the court's site: [required language](#) · [Notifications](#)

Warren County CSEA	(513) 695-1580
Where	500 Justice Drive, Lebanon
Modification	At 36 months, ask CSEA for a review. Earlier, a big change in circumstances supports a review or a motion.
Always file	IV-D Application (DR 12)

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing an order, and what to do when one is ignored.

Life changes after a decree, and orders sometimes get broken. Both problems come back to the same court — with a \$75 post-decree motion.

POST-DECREE MOTION	HEARING SET IN	CONTEMPT ATTORNEY FEE	OBJECTION DEADLINE
\$75	4–6 weeks	Up to \$1,000	14 days

Modifying an order
 Know what you're changing, because the paths differ. Custody and parenting-time changes ask the court to find changed circumstances and the child's best interest. Support changes can also run through CSEA's review. Spousal support can change only if your decree kept the door open. Start with the court's own how-to: [Self-Represented Instructions](#).

Contempt: ask these first

1. Does your decree require mediation before filing? Many do — check yours.
2. Have you tried to fix it in writing? Texts and emails become your evidence.
3. Is it worth it? Weigh the cost and time against what you'd actually recover.

Attach the right extras
 Modifying parenting time or custody? File the Pro Se Motion with the DR 1 affidavit and the DR 4 parenting affidavit. Modifying support? Motion plus DR 1. You must attend your hearing.

What a contempt win looks like
 Courts usually issue a purge order: specific steps the other person can take to “purge” the contempt and avoid the penalty. The court can also award attorney's fees.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Pro Se Motion https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/ProSeMotion.pdf	DR Document Center	The motion form for most post-decree requests.
Motion for Contempt https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/MotionContempt.pdf	DR Document Center	When the other person won't follow the order.

OBJECTIONS, APPEALS & THE REST

Disagree with a decision? The window is short.

An objection or appeal is review for error — not a second chance to retell your story. It can only use the evidence already presented. New facts need a different motion.

Objecting to a magistrate's decision

You have 14 days from the decision to file objections. If your objection needs a transcript, file the Praeceptum for Transcript (DR 5); the transcript or an affidavit is due 15 days before the submission date. Transcripts cost \$4.50 per page, or \$7.50 expedited. Objections are usually decided on the papers.

[Objection to Magistrate's Decision](https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Objection_Magistrate.pdf) (https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Domestic_Relations_Court/doc/Forms/Objection_Magistrate.pdf)

Out-of-state orders

An out-of-state decree can be registered in Warren County for enforcement or modification. UIFSA (support) and UCCJEA (custody) registrations are filed as separate petitions under the same case number. Filing a foreign decree of divorce costs \$50.

Appealing the judge

Final orders of the DR Court appeal to Ohio's 12th District Court of Appeals. The notice of appeal costs \$225 to file, and appellate deadlines are strict — generally 30 days. This is the step where talking to a lawyer fast matters most.

Legal separation & annulment

Legal separation does everything a divorce does — property, support, parenting — except end the marriage. People choose it for religious or insurance reasons. Annulment treats the marriage as if it never happened and applies only in narrow situations. Warren County publishes no separate packets for either; the divorce forms and Supreme Court of Ohio standard forms are the starting point. Always confirm with the court — counties handle details differently.

“Uncontested divorce” means something specific

In Ohio, an uncontested divorce is a default divorce — one spouse won't participate or can't be found. It is not a dissolution and not an agreed divorce. Service happens by posting or publication (\$500 filing fee), a witness must appear at the final hearing, and the hearing is set 65 or more days after filing. If your spouse shows up before it's final, it is no longer uncontested.

PROTECTION ORDERS

A civil protection order is free, and you can ask for it today.

Has someone in your family or household hurt you, made threats, or stalked you? Warren County's Domestic Relations Court can issue a Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order, or DVCPO. There is never a filing fee.

FILING FEE	BRING	CASES HEARD UNTIL	PLAN FOR
\$0 — always	Photo ID	3:00 PM daily	Up to 3 hours

How it works the same day

1. Go to 500 Justice Drive with photo ID before 3:00 PM.
2. Fill out the paperwork and testify before a magistrate the same day — the ex parte hearing happens without the other person.
3. If granted, the order takes effect immediately and a full hearing is set, where both sides can appear.
4. If the order is violated, call the police. Violating a protection order is a crime.

Who a DVCPO can protect you from

A family member. Someone related to you by marriage. A current or former spouse. Someone you lived with as a partner in the past 5 years. Someone you dated in the past 12 months. The other parent of your child. If none of those fit, ask about a civil stalking protection order instead.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER

Your safety comes before any filing.

If you're in immediate danger, call 911. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 800-799-7233, 24/7. Court staff can't give legal advice, but the Probate/Juvenile Legal Help Center attorney (Thursdays, 8 AM–noon) can answer questions at no cost.

Changing or dismissing a DVCPO

To dismiss an ex parte DVCPO, the petitioner must appear in person and state the reason on the record. To change or dismiss a full order, file a motion, get service, and appear. A divorce decree by itself does not modify a DVCPO — the protection order stays until this court changes it.

You can file where

You live in Warren County, the other person lives in Warren County, or the incident happened here.

PROTECTING YOURSELF & YOUR CASE

The habits that quietly win family-law cases.

None of this is legal strategy. It's conduct — and conduct is what judges, magistrates, and guardians ad litem actually see.

Stay off the keyboard

Don't post about the case or your spouse on social media. Assume everything you write will be read aloud in court, because it can be.

Keep the kids out of it

Not in the conflict, not in the logistics fights, not as messengers. Courts notice which parent shields the children and which one doesn't.

Write it down, save it all

Move important conversations to text or email and save them — along with bank records and anything that shows the timeline. Organized evidence beats loud argument.

Don't self-help

Don't pull your spouse off insurance, lock them out, drain accounts, or destroy property. The Mutual Restraining Order forbids it, and it backfires.

Warren County's settlement toolbox

Court-connected mediation is free. It covers parenting issues. Warren County also offers something rarer: Cooperative Dispute Resolution, or CDR. A court assessor — a senior family-law magistrate — hears both sides for about 3 hours. Then the assessor tells you how a trial would likely come out. It's private, the briefs are shredded after, and many cases settle on the spot. After the decree, a parenting coordinator can referee schedule disputes.

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

The financial affidavits are where most people stall.

If the DR 1 affidavit, the disclosure deadlines, or the parenting plan feel like too much, you don't have to choose between doing everything alone and hiring a lawyer for everything. [Take the 2-minute quiz](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) (https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) and see exactly which kind of help — if any — your situation actually needs.

PART TWO · JUVENILE COURT

Never married to the other parent? Your case is here.

Were you never married to your child's other parent? Then custody, parenting time, parentage, and support belong to Juvenile Court at 900 Memorial Drive. One catch: if the parents are or were married, or a DR case is pending, Juvenile Court generally can't take a private custody case.

COMPLAINT FEE	MOTIONS	RESPOND TO A MOTION	INACTIVE 180 DAYS
\$160 + \$50/child	\$75	20 days	Dismissed

THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD THING IN THIS PART

Paternity first. Custody second. They are separate.

Establishing paternity makes you the legal father and triggers child support — but it does NOT give you custody or parenting time. Those take a second, separate request to the Juvenile Court. Unmarried mothers have sole custody by default until a court orders otherwise.

Step 1 — establish paternity

There are three ways. Sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity, often done at the hospital. Take a court-ordered DNA test — an at-home kit won't work. Or get a court order. The CSEA at (513) 695-1580 or the Juvenile Court can help. Filing a parentage case here? Attach proof of the agency's paternity finding — the court requires it.

Step 2 — ask for custody or parenting time

File a complaint in Juvenile Court for custody, parenting time, or shared parenting. Asking for shared parenting requires a proposed plan — the request alone isn't enough.

How to file at Juvenile Court

File in person at 900 Memorial Drive, by fax to (513) 695-2948, by email to Juvenilecomplaints@warrencountyohio.gov, or in the drop box out front (after-hours drops count the next business day). Forms are reviewed before time-stamping, and the Clerk will reach out if anything is missing. Pay by cash, cashier's check, money order, credit card, or attorney trust check — no personal checks.

JUVENILE COURT · FORMS

Warren County's pro se packets, linked.

The Juvenile Court writes its own packets for parents filing without a lawyer. Numbered WCJC forms attach to them. Every link below goes to the court's own PDF.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint/Motion for Custody https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/ComplaintMotionForCustody.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Ask for legal custody of your child.
Complaint/Motion for Parenting Time https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/ComplaintMotionForParentingTime.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Ask for a parenting-time schedule.
Complaint/Motion for Shared Parenting https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/ComplaintMotionForSharedParenting.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Ask for shared parenting.
<p>⚠ Heads up: Attach your proposed shared parenting plan — the court can't consider shared parenting without one.</p>		
Motion for Child Support https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/MotionForChildSupport.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Establish or address support.
Motion for Contempt https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/MotionForContempt.pdf	Juvenile forms page	When a juvenile-court order is being ignored.
Generic Motion https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/GenericMotionForm.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Modifications and other requests.
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit (WCJC 3) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/3.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Required child-history affidavit in custody cases.
Financial Disclosure / Indigency (WCJC 12) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/12.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Ask to file without prepaying fees.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Motion for Remote Appearance https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/MotionRemoteAppearance.pdf	Juvenile forms page	Ask to appear by video.

△ Heads up: File it at least 7 days before the hearing.

Fees at a glance

A complaint costs \$160. Most types add \$50 for each extra child. That covers custody, parentage, shared parenting, visitation, and support filings. Motions cost \$75 — contempt, changes, emergency, support, and the rest. Sheriff service is \$25 per person. Short on funds? An Affidavit of Indigency (\$25) asks the court to waive prepaying. Fees verified June 11, 2026; confirm with the Clerk before filing.

Deadlines that bite

Answer a motion within 20 days, or 7 days before the hearing, whichever comes first. Ask for a continuance at least 3 days before the hearing. A case with no activity for 180 days is dismissed. Custody and visitation cases are set for a first hearing within about 60 days.

THE JUVENILE PARENTING SCHEDULE

Juvenile Court has its own model schedule — including a true 50/50 option.

Don't reuse the DR schedule here. Juvenile Court adopted its own Model Parenting Schedule on January 1, 2026. It runs from birth to age 18. It has its own infant stages, its own holiday rotation, and equal-time options the DR schedule doesn't offer.

INFANTS**Birth to age 2**

Time starts short and grows. Newborns get brief visits in the residential parent's home. Next come evenings plus a weekend day. By 10 months, the child has weekend overnights every other week.

AGES 2–12**Four models**

Model I: alternating weekends plus Wednesday evening. Model II: alternating weekends through Monday morning plus a Wednesday overnight. Model III offers equal time — week-on/week-off, or a 2-2-5 style split.

TEENS**Ages 13–18**

13–15: keep the schedule going if possible, with a Wednesday evening and one overnight minimum. 16–18: the teen and the non-residential parent set the schedule together.

The phase-in option

Bringing a parent back after time away? The schedule has a built-in ramp. Start with one 3-hour visit a week at a neutral spot, for 4 weeks. Then 6-hour visits for 4 weeks. Then overnights every other week for 6 weeks. Then the full schedule. A missed visit restarts the stage you're in.

Rules that apply at every age

- The receiving parent handles transportation. A parent who moves 25+ miles away takes on all of it or files a motion.
- Grace period: 15 minutes within 30 miles, 30 minutes beyond — exceed it and the visit is forfeited.
- Relocation notice: 30 days for in-county moves, 60 days out-of-county.
- Child support is not reduced during summer parenting time.

EMERGENCIES & NON-PARENTS

When a child isn't safe — and when a relative steps in.

Emergency custody exists for immediate danger, and the bar is high. Grandparents and other relatives also have real — but specific — paths in Warren County.

Emergency (ex parte) custody

An emergency means imminent or immediate risk of injury to the child's health, safety, or welfare. It takes two filings: the ex parte motion AND an underlying custody or modification motion. The ex parte hearing often happens without the other parent, then a full hearing follows. The underlying motion keeps moving either way. And anyone can file — not just a parent.

[Ex Parte Motion for Custody](https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/ExparteMotionForCustody.pdf) (https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/ExparteMotionForCustody.pdf)

Grandparent Power of Attorney

Sometimes parents agree a grandparent should handle school and medical choices for a while. The parents and the grandparent sign the GPOA in front of a notary. File it within 5 days. A parent who didn't sign gets certified-mail notice within 5 days. Can't find the parents at all? A Caretaker Authorization Affidavit can stand in. If a parent later revokes it, the grandparent has 14 days to file for custody.

[Grandparent Power of Attorney](https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/GrandparentPowerOfAttorney.pdf) (https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Juvenile/Forms/GrandparentPowerOfAttorney.pdf)

The 3:00 PM rule

File emergency motions by 3:00 PM. The hearing is likely the next business day. You must notify the current custodian — or explain why contact would put the child at risk. The packet also needs three extras. One: a sworn custody affidavit, signed before a notary. Two: a background-check request. Three: a contact sheet.

Which court hears relative visitation?

Ohio's 12th District sorted this out in 2026. Juvenile Court takes a grandparent or relative visitation motion only when a Juvenile case is already open, and the motion rides along with it. Were the parents ever married, or has a parent died? Then the motion belongs in DR Court.

If a children services case starts

Abuse, neglect, and dependency cases move fast. A shelter-care hearing happens within 72 hours. The court appoints counsel and a guardian ad litem for the child. Warren County's CASA program — more than 50 trained volunteers — speaks up for what is best for the child. These cases are serious. Get legal advice early. The Help Center attorney is free.

Out-of-state custody orders

Need Ohio to enforce or change an out-of-state custody order? Warren County's Juvenile Court publishes no local packet for this. The process follows the UCCJEA — the interstate custody law — using the Supreme Court of Ohio standard forms. Always confirm with the court; counties handle details differently.

PART THREE · PROBATE COURT

Stepparent and kinship adoption: joyful, and exacting.

Adoption makes you the child's legal parent forever. It also ends the other parent's rights forever. That is why Probate Court checks consent, notice, and the home so carefully. And it's why custody and adoption are not the same thing: custody can change later. Adoption cannot.

STEPPARENT/PRIVATE ADOPTION	EACH CHILD PAST TWO	COURT	PAYMENT
\$355	+\$50	Probate, 900 Memorial Dr.	No personal checks

The consent question comes first

Does the other birth parent agree? Then the path is usually direct. Ohio law has narrow cases where consent is not needed. Those turn on exact facts, and getting them wrong can undo an adoption. Have the consent picture reviewed before you file. Everyone owed notice must actually get it. And depending on age, the child may need to agree too.

The home study isn't scary

Every adoption requires a home study. It means background checks, references, and a home visit. The assessor's job is to confirm what you already know — that the child is safe and loved. Plan for it. Don't fear it.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Adoption of a Minor packet https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Probate/Forms/Packets/AdoptionOfAMinor.pdf	Probate packets page	The court's full stepparent/kinship filing packet.
Application for Approval of Placement https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Probate/Forms/Packets/ApplicationForApprovalOfPlacement.pdf	Probate packets page	For private placements before adoption.
Adoption of an Adult packet https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Probate/Forms/Packets/AdoptionOfAnAdult.pdf	Probate packets page	Adopting someone 18 or older (\$95 fee).

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Re-Adoption (Foreign Adoption) https://www.warrencountyohio.gov/Probate_Juvenile/doc/Probate/Forms/Packets/ReAdoption.pdf	Probate packets page	Ohio recognition of an international adoption (\$105).

△ Heads up: Probate Court takes no personal checks, and no money orders older than 90 days.

One thing unmarried couples should know
Unmarried couples can't adopt together in Ohio. A stepparent adoption requires that you be married to the child's parent. Not married? Then custody or guardianship may be the tool that fits instead.

BEFORE YOU FILE

Adoption is the one filing not to wing.
Consent and notice mistakes can delay an adoption — or undo one. A short review of your consent facts before filing is the cheapest insurance there is. [Take the 2-minute quiz](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) (<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>) or call (844) 694-2885 for a low-cost consultation.

PART FOUR · HOW GAVVL LAW CAN HELP

You have the map. Decide if you want company on the road.

Everything in this guide works without hiring anyone. But you don't have to do it alone. Gavvl is a modern Ohio family-law firm. We serve all 88 counties, including Warren County's courts. The firm was built by attorneys who have been through divorce and custody themselves.

OPTION ONE**Full representation**

An attorney runs the whole case with you. That means strategy, every filing, every hearing, negotiation, and trial if it comes to that. You have attorney access the whole way. Best for contested, complex, or high-conflict cases. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

OPTION TWO**Limited-scope, flat-fee help**

Hire the firm for just the hard part. That might be drafting and filing your packet, one hearing, a strategy session, or document review — each at a flat fee. Best for agreed matters, simple changes, and tight budgets. Honestly: it is NOT the right fit for complex or high-conflict cases that need ongoing advocacy. But if the case turns contested, you can usually move up to full representation.

Ways to pay

Full representation: pay in full by card, or finance through Affirm with a soft credit check. Flat-fee services add Klarna, PayPal pay-later plans, and Gavvl Direct — our no-credit-check plan, where 60% down starts work right away and the financed balance carries 19% yearly interest, compounded monthly. You see exact payments when you enroll. Questions: financing@gavvl.com.

Why people pick Gavvl

A 4.8+ average across 90+ verified Google reviews. Named a Best Lawyers “Firm to Watch” for 2026. More than 50 years of combined family-law experience across the team. Awards and reviews reflect what other clients went through. They don't predict your case.

Three ways to start

Take the 2-minute quiz: gavvl.com/find-my-service (<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>). Or call (844) 694-2885. Or visit gavvl.com/start for a low-cost consultation.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

Read this page before you rely on anything in this guide.

Information, not legal advice

This guide is information, not legal advice. It explains how things generally work in Warren 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.

Fees, forms & procedures change

Court fees, forms, and procedures change. The information in this guide was verified as of June 11, 2026 from official court sources, including the Warren County Clerk of Courts fee schedule effective July 1, 2025, the DR Local Rules effective January 5, 2026, the Juvenile Local Rules effective January 1, 2026, and the Probate fee schedule effective January 1, 2026 (amended January 27, 2026). Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Warren County Clerk of Courts before you file.

Results & 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.

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NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Take the 2-minute quiz, or just call.

We'll help you name the court, the likely path, and the level of help that fits — full representation, a flat-fee task, or none at all.

(844) 694-2885

support@gavvl.com

gavvl.com/find-my-service

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