

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Wayne County

A plain-English map to divorce, dissolution, custody, support, protection orders, and adoption in Wayne County: which court handles your issue, what to file, what it costs, and when to ask for help.

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- 01** Find the right Wayne County court before you fill out a single form.

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  - 02** Tell dissolution, divorce, juvenile custody, and adoption apart.

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  - 03** See the exact forms, fees, and deadlines that trip people up in Wooster — including the two parenting programs and the case-management clock.

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

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## START HERE

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

Family-law problems get easier the moment you can name the court, the paperwork, and your next decision. Wayne County has no separate divorce court and a detailed set of local deadlines — so step one is knowing which court is yours.

01

## Married, or ending a marriage?

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, and protection orders are the Court of Common Pleas, General & Domestic Relations Divisions (Judges Spitler and VanSickle), filed with the Clerk of Courts.

02

## Parents who were never married?

Custody, parenting time, parentage, and support for unmarried parents are the Probate & Juvenile Court (Judge Wiles).

03

## Adopting a stepchild or relative?

Adoption is also the Probate & Juvenile Court (Judge Wiles) — on its Probate side, where an attorney is required to file.

## READ THIS FIRST

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Wayne 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.

## WAYNE COUNTY COURTS

# No separate divorce court — here's the map.

Wayne County family law is split between two courts in Wooster. There's no standalone domestic-relations court; the trick is matching your case to the right one.

YOUR MATTER	COURT	WHERE / CONTACT
Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, protection orders	Common Pleas, General & DR Judges Spitler & VanSickle	Clerk of Courts (330) 287-5590
Custody, parenting time, and parentage for unmarried parents; non-parent custody	Probate & Juvenile Court Judge Wiles	Juvenile (330) 287-5561
Abuse, neglect, or dependency (children services) cases	Probate & Juvenile Court Judge Wiles	Juvenile (330) 287-5561
Stepparent and kinship adoption	Probate & Juvenile Court Judge Wiles	Probate (330) 287-5575

#### HOW THE COURTS WORK

Divorce is heard by Common Pleas — first by its magistrates.

Wayne County has no separate domestic-relations court. Divorce and dissolution are heard by the General & Domestic Relations Divisions (Judges Spitler and VanSickle), first by DR Magistrates Svec and Blake. A separate combined Probate & Juvenile Court (Judge Wiles) handles the rest. Filing is electronic — the court doesn't accept fax filings.

#### WAYNE COUNTY REQUIREMENT

Two parenting programs, not one.

In a divorce or dissolution with minor children, both parents complete a parenting seminar before the final hearing — and the court also sends children ages 8–12 to a separate Kids First program (which applies to legal separations too). The seminar is \$35 per parent; confirm Kids First logistics with the DR Division.

WAYNE COUNTY COURTS

# Child support, child safety, and filing notes.

A few things to know before you file, plus the numbers that matter most for children.

**MONEY FOR THE KIDS**

**Child support — Wayne County CSEA**

The Wayne County Child Support Enforcement Agency sets up, collects, and can review support; all support runs through the CSEA with a 2% processing fee. Every case with children includes a child-support worksheet (required even if no one is asking for support) and a IV-D application.

**HOW WAYNE COUNTY TAKES FILINGS**

**E-filing, and two different addresses.**

Filing is electronic (no fax). The Common Pleas courtrooms are at 107 W. Liberty Street, but the Clerk of Courts' Common Pleas office is at 215 N. Grant Street (the Municipal Courthouse) — easy to mix up. The Clerk is open 7:30–4:30.

**IF A CHILD MAY BE UNSAFE**

**Reporting abuse or neglect**

Ohio's 24-hour hotline is 1-855-642-4453 (1-855-O-H-CHILD), which routes to the Wayne County Children Services Board. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Divorce	\$446
Dissolution	\$396
Re-open (post-decree)	\$85
Fee too high?	file Forms 47 + 38

## PART ONE

# Domestic Relations: the married-couple court.

If you are married and ending it, the General & Domestic Relations Divisions handle your case — filed with the Clerk of Courts and heard first by a magistrate. They also issue protection orders. This part walks through each path in the order most people meet them.

COURT	DIVORCE FEE	MAGISTRATES	FINAL HEARING
General & DR	\$446	Svec & Blake	~291 days

**ONE THING THAT HELPS IN WAYNE COUNTY**

The court publishes its divorce timeline.

A contested divorce follows a concrete case-management clock: a status conference about 90 days after service, a second around 210 days, a final pretrial near 270 days, and the final hearing about 291 days (roughly 9½ months) after filing. Uncontested cases move faster. And every ex parte order — emergency custody, exclusive use of the home — comes with a review hearing within 14 days, so the other side is heard quickly.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Dissolution: the fully agreed way to end a marriage.

A dissolution is the no-fault path for couples who agree on everything. You both sign a full agreement, file a joint petition, and appear together at a short hearing. No one is served, and there are no fault grounds to prove.

COURT	FILING FEE	HEARING WINDOW	SERVICE
General & DR	\$396	30–90 days	None — joint filing

**This path may fit if...**

- You both agree the marriage should end.
- Property, debt, support, and parenting are already settled in writing.
- You will both sign the paperwork and attend the final hearing.

**Watch the agreement, not just the forms.**

A clean-looking packet can still cause years of trouble if retirement, taxes, the house, debt, insurance, or parenting terms are vague. A “\$0 support” deal isn't enough by itself — Wayne requires the paperwork to spell out the statutory deviation reasons and the children's best interest.

New-case form	Form 49 (New Case Designation)
Core filing	Petition for Dissolution (Form 17)
Agreement	Separation Agreement (Form 19)
If minor children	Parenting plan + both programs
Final step	Hearing where you both confirm the deal

**THE STATUTORY TIMELINE**

**Hearing 30 to 90 days after filing.**

Ohio law sets the dissolution hearing not less than 30 nor more than 90 days after filing. Both spouses attend and affirm the agreement, and the proposed decree (Form 18) is expected at or before the hearing.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Divorce: are you starting it, or responding to it?

Divorce does not always mean a trial. It means one spouse files, the other is served, and the court sets a structure. Your very first move depends on which side of that you are on.

**A** You are starting the divorce  
 You must have lived in Ohio at least six months. You prepare the Complaint for Divorce (statewide Form 7 with children / Form 6 without) with the income and property affidavits, the child-support worksheet, and the Wayne New Case Designation (Form 49), and file with the Clerk.

**B** You were served with divorce papers  
 Read the first page for your answer deadline. You generally have 28 days from service to file an Answer (and a Counterclaim if you want your own requests). Missing it can let the case proceed without your input.

COURT	RESIDENCY	ANSWER DEADLINE	FINAL HEARING
General & DR	6 months in Ohio	28 days	~291 days

**TWO WORDS PEOPLE MIX UP**  
 “Uncontested” divorce is not a dissolution.  
 An uncontested divorce is still a divorce one spouse files — it just proceeds default-style because the other spouse can't be found or won't take part. If your spouse can't be located, Wayne allows service by posting at three Wooster sites: the courthouse, the Municipal Courthouse, and the County Administration Building. A dissolution, by contrast, is a fully agreed joint filing.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# What do I fill out, and where do I get it?

Wayne County numbers its DR forms 1–53: it adopts the Ohio Supreme Court Uniform forms as Forms 1–31, and adds county Forms 32–53 for everything else. Every new case also needs the county's New Case Designation.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2046%20-%20New%20Case%20Designation%20Form.pdf">New Case Designation (Wayne Form 49)</a> <a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2046%20-%20New%20Case%20Designation%20Form.pdf">https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2046%20-%20New%20Case%20Designation%20Form.pdf</a>	Wayne County Common Pleas	Required on every new domestic-relations filing
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf">Complaint for Divorce With Children (Form 7)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (Uniform DR form)	The pleading that starts a divorce involving minor children
<p>△ Heads up: There's a without-children version (Form 6) and matching answer, counterclaim, and decree forms in the statewide set.</p>		
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit1.pdf">Affidavit 1 — Income and Expenses</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit1.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit1.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (Uniform DR form)	Your finances; filed with the complaint (Affidavit 2 covers property)
<a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2044%20-%20Motion%20to%20Proceed%20Without%20Advancing%20a%20Filing%20Fee%20Deposit-FINAL.pdf">Motion to Proceed Without Advancing a Filing Fee (Wayne Form 47)</a> <a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2044%20-%20Motion%20to%20Proceed%20Without%20Advancing%20a%20Filing%20Fee%20Deposit-FINAL.pdf">https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2044%20-%20Motion%20to%20Proceed%20Without%20Advancing%20a%20Filing%20Fee%20Deposit-FINAL.pdf</a>	Wayne County Common Pleas	Filed with the Indigency Affidavit (Form 38) if you can't pay
<a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/resources/domestic-relations-templates">All Wayne County DR forms (the numbered templates)</a> <a href="https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/resources/domestic-relations-templates">https://www.waynecourtofcommonpleas.org/resources/domestic-relations-templates</a>	Wayne County Common Pleas	Forms 32–53 plus the adopted statewide forms
<p>△ Heads up: The Required Documents page lists the exact packet for each case type; with children, the child-support worksheet is required even if no one asks for support.</p>		

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# What does a Wayne County divorce look like?

Most divorces settle. The steps below are the path the court sets in motion once you file, whether or not you ever reach a trial.

WHEN DIVORCE IS THE RIGHT TOOL

You need a deadline, a temporary order, information, or a judge's decision.

Divorce is often the necessary path when a spouse won't sign, money is unclear, parenting time is disputed, or someone needs the court to act before everything is settled.

Answer deadline	28 days after service
Temp-order review	within 14 days
Parenting programs	two (parents + kids)
Final hearing	about 291 days

**1** Assemble the packet, file, and pay  
 Confirm the six-month Ohio residency, file the New Case Designation, complaint, affidavits, and worksheet, and pay the \$446 deposit — or file Forms 47 + 38 to proceed without advancing it.

**2** Serve your spouse  
 File the Request for Service or a Waiver of Service. If your spouse can't be found, use Form 48 for service by posting at the three Wooster sites.

**3** Temporary orders, with a 14-day review  
 File Affidavit 5 for temporary support or custody. An ex parte order issues from the papers only for risk of irreparable harm — always with a review hearing within 14 days.

**4** Two parenting programs, if children  
 Both parents complete the parenting seminar before the final hearing, and children ages 8–12 attend the Kids First program.

**5** Case management, then settle or try  
 Status conferences around 90 and 210 days, a pretrial near 270, and the final hearing about 291 days after filing. Many cases settle; if not, the court decides and journalizes the decree.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Legal separation and annulment: the other two doors.

Not every case is a divorce. Two less-common paths solve different problems, and both are filed in the General & Domestic Relations Divisions and heard the same way as a divorce.

## Legal separation (R.C. 3105.17)

A court divides property, sets support, and orders parenting — but you stay legally married. People choose it for religious, insurance, or personal reasons. In Wayne County the Kids First children's program applies to legal separations with children 8–12. It can later lead to a divorce or dissolution.

## Annulment (R.C. 3105.31)

A court declares a marriage was never valid on a specific ground — such as bigamy, being underage, fraud, duress, mental incompetence, or non-consummation. A short marriage is not, by itself, a ground; annulments are usually attorney-drafted because the proof is technical.

### DON'T CONFUSE TWO SIMILAR TERMS

“Legal separation” is a status; a “Separation Agreement” is a document.

Legal separation is a court case that leaves you married. A Separation Agreement is the signed settlement used in a dissolution and in agreed cases. Wayne doesn't publish a legal-separation or annulment packet, and the filing fee isn't on the Clerk's schedule — confirm the expected complaint format and fee with the DR Division, (330) 287-5547.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Temporary orders and emergencies while you wait.

A case can take months. Temporary orders set the rules for support, the home, and the children in the meantime. Wayne County's review-hearing guarantee is a real protection on both sides.

## Temporary orders, then a 14-day review

File Affidavit 5 with your complaint for temporary support or a parenting schedule; a party who disagrees requests an oral hearing within 14 days of service. For genuine emergencies, an ex parte order can issue from the papers — but only on a showing of irreparable harm, and always with a review hearing within 14 days.

## Temporary is not final.

A temporary order holds things steady while the case is pending. The final decree controls long-term custody and support.

## A NO-AFFIDAVIT OPTION

### Mutual restraining orders.

Either spouse can ask for a mutual restraining order — issued without an affidavit because it binds both parties — barring harassment, dissipating assets, changing beneficiaries, new joint debt, and interfering with the children.

## If there's violence, a CPO may fit better.

A protection order can provide immediate ex parte protection, and Wayne assigns it to the same judge as your divorce (next pages).

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Objections and appeals: review, not a redo.

Because magistrates hear DR matters first in Wayne County, knowing how to ask a judge to review a decision — and the short deadlines for doing it — matters.

## FIRST LEVEL

## Objecting to a magistrate's decision

DR matters are heard first by Magistrates Svec and Blake. You generally have 14 days to file written objections under Civ.R. 53; if you object to the facts, you must order a transcript. The judge then reviews the magistrate's decision — it is not a fresh trial.

### Then: appeal to the Court of Appeals

To appeal a final judgment, you generally have 30 days to file a notice of appeal (App.R. 4); Wayne County is in the Ninth District. An appeal reviews the record for legal error; you do not get to re-argue the facts or add new evidence.

### Deadlines run from the entry.

The clock starts when the decision or judgment is filed. If you think something went wrong, move quickly — these windows do not pause while you decide.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Protection orders when you are not safe.

A Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order (R.C. 3113.31) is a civil order that can require a family or household member to stay away, leave a shared home, and stop contact, and can set temporary custody and support terms. There is never a filing fee.

### How it works

File a petition on the Ohio Supreme Court protection-order forms at the Court of Common Pleas. The court can issue a temporary ex parte order the same day if you are in danger; a full hearing follows — within 7 court days if the ex parte order gives you the home or temporary custody, otherwise within 10 — and a final order can last up to five years.

### A protection order stands on its own.

It is separate from any divorce or custody case, though it can include temporary parenting and support terms. Mediation is never used to set protection-order terms. To change or end an existing order, file Wayne Form 46 (Motion to Modify, Extend or Dismiss).

### A WAYNE COUNTY RULE

#### Same judge as your divorce.

If you have (or later file) a divorce, dissolution, legal separation, or support case, your protection order is assigned to the same Common Pleas judge — so one judge sees the whole picture.

Filing fee	none, ever
Ex parte order	often the same day
Full hearing	7 or 10 court days
Final order	up to 5 years

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
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[Ohio protection-order forms \(petition, ex parte and full order\)](#)

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/protection-order/2>

Ohio Supreme Court (protection-order forms)

Asks the court to order a family or household member to stay away

△ Heads up: No filing fee for the petitioner. Confirm the petitioner intake desk and same-day scheduling with the court.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Motion to Modify, Extend or Dismiss a CPO (Wayne Form 46)</a> <a href="https://www.waynecourtsofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2043%20-%20Motion%20to%20Modify%2C%20Extend%20or%20Dismiss%20Civil%20Protedtion%20Order-%20FINAL.pdf">https://www.waynecourtsofcommonpleas.org/sites/default/files/Form%2043%20-%20Motion%20to%20Modify%2C%20Extend%20or%20Dismiss%20Civil%20Protedtion%20Order-%20FINAL.pdf</a>	Wayne County Common Pleas	Changes or ends an existing protection order

**NOT SURE WHICH PATH IS YOURS?**

Take the 2-minute quiz — it routes you to the right starting point.

Dissolution, divorce, a custody case, or just a consult? Gavvl's Find My Service quiz gives a personalized recommendation in about two minutes. [Take the quiz](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) (https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) · Call (844) 694-2885.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Dividing property, and protecting your case.

Ohio divides marital property and debt equitably — fairly, which is not always equally. A few day-to-day habits protect you while any of the paths above plays out.

## Marital vs. separate

Marital property and debt is generally what was acquired during the marriage; separate property includes pre-marriage assets, gifts, and inheritances kept separate. Timing and tracing matter. Retirement accounts are often divided by a special order (a QDRO, \$25 in Wayne County).

## Do

- Keep communication in writing, and save it.
- Gather financial records — the affidavits ask for a lot.
- Put the children's needs first, and your own second.

## Don't

- Don't post about your case or your spouse online.
- Don't use the children as messengers.
- Don't move money or cancel insurance once a case is filed.

## PART TWO

# Juvenile: when parents were never married.

Custody, parenting time, parentage, and support for unmarried parents are decided by Judge Wiles's Probate & Juvenile Court — not the divorce court — and paternity can also start at the CSEA.

COURT	JUDGE	PATERNITY	PHONE
Probate & Juvenile	Latecia Wiles	CSEA or court	(330) 287-5561

#### WHY A SEPARATE COURT

Unmarried-parent custody is a Juvenile matter.

By Ohio law (R.C. 2151.23), custody, parenting time, and support for children of unmarried parents are decided in the Juvenile Court of the county where the child lives. A father establishes parentage first, then the court allocates custody and sets support. Custody for married or divorcing parents is decided in the divorce case instead. Note: the Juvenile Court has its own parenting-time schedule, different from the divorce court's.

## JUVENILE

# Unmarried parents: parentage first, then custody.

This is the most common Juvenile family-law case. It happens in two steps, and Wayne County requires a specific affidavit package with every filing.

## Step one: establish parentage

Parentage is the legal parent-child link (R.C. 3111). It can be set by a juvenile-court parentage action (usually DNA testing) or administratively through the CSEA, whose order can be registered with and enforced by the juvenile court. Parentage opens support; it does not by itself decide custody.

## Step two: ask for custody

The court then allocates parental rights as sole custody (one residential parent and legal custodian) or shared parenting (both parents under a plan), sets parenting time, and orders support. Ohio has no “primary” or “joint” custody.

### WHAT EVERY JUVENILE FILING NEEDS

#### The Rule 5.03 affidavit package.

Every new or reopened parentage, custody, parenting-time, or support case includes a Parenting Proceeding Affidavit, an Employment/Healthcare/Tax Information Affidavit, a Party Information Form, the child's birth record, and the IV-D application. The court's deposit is set by an administrative order — confirm the current amount with the Juvenile clerk, (330) 287-5561.

## JUVENILE

# Forms for an unmarried-parent case.

Wayne County's Probate & Juvenile Court publishes its own parentage, custody, and visitation complaints — use these rather than the generic statewide forms.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20to%20Establish%20Parentage.pdf?download=1">Complaint to Establish Parentage</a> <a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20to%20Establish%20Parentage.pdf?download=1">https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20to%20Establish%20Parentage.pdf?download=1</a>	Wayne County Probate & Juvenile Court	Establishes legal parentage
<a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20for%20Allocation.pdf?download=1">Complaint for Allocation of Parental Rights and Responsibilities</a> <a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20for%20Allocation.pdf?download=1">https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for/Complaint%20for%20Allocation.pdf?download=1</a>	Wayne County Probate & Juvenile Court	Asks the court to set custody and parenting time
<a href="https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html">Child Support Computation Worksheet</a> <a href="https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html">https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html</a>	Ohio child-support calculator	Builds the guideline support number
<a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/juvenile/parentage-support-custody-visitatio">All Wayne juvenile parentage/custody forms</a> <a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/juvenile/parentage-support-custody-visitatio">https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/juvenile/parentage-support-custody-visitatio</a>	Wayne County Probate & Juvenile Court	Complaints, affidavits, shared parenting plan, and support motions

⚠ Heads up: File the full Rule 5.03 affidavit package with every case; confirm the deposit with the Juvenile clerk, (330) 287-5561.

## JUVENILE

# Parenting time and grandparent companionship.

“Parenting time” is the schedule a parent has with a child. “Companionship” is the separate, narrower time a grandparent or relative may be granted. The Juvenile Court has its own detailed schedule.

## The Juvenile Court's own schedule

Juvenile Local Rule 13 sets the default when parents can't agree: alternating weekends (Friday 6 p.m. to Sunday 8 p.m.), two midweek evenings (Tuesday and Thursday), a holiday rotation, spring break with the non-residential parent every year, and six weeks of summer. It uses age-banded schedules for children under three, and a long-distance plan for parents 100+ miles apart — and it differs from the divorce court's schedule.

## Which schedule applies?

Use the schedule of the court that issued the order — the Juvenile schedule here, the divorce court's schedule in a DR case.

## Grandparent and relative companionship

Non-parents do not have automatic rights. A grandparent or relative may seek companionship in qualifying situations — for example, when the parents are unmarried or a parent has died (R.C. 3109.11, 3109.12). The court weighs the child's best interest and a fit parent's wishes.

## IF YOU MOVE

### File a relocation notice.

Under the juvenile order, a parent must notify the other of any move, and file a notice of intent to relocate with the court at least two weeks before an out-of-state move.

## JUVENILE

# When a grandparent or relative is raising the child.

A relative or other suitable adult can ask the Juvenile Court for legal custody of a child when neither parent can appropriately care for them (R.C. 2151.23). It gives day-to-day custody while parents keep certain rights. It is not adoption.

**A HIGHER BAR THAN PARENT-VS-PARENT****The 'unsuitability' standard.**

When a non-parent seeks custody against a parent, best interest alone is not enough. The non-parent must generally show the parents are unsuitable — abandonment, an agreement to give up custody, or that parental custody would harm the child — before the court awards legal custody. Wayne publishes a Motion for Custody to Third Party (and a Motion to Intervene) for this.

**Lighter-touch grandparent tools**

When there's no existing custody order, two statutory tools can help: a Grandparent Power of Attorney (with a parent's agreement) and a Caretaker Authorization Affidavit (when the parents can't be located — good for one year). Both let a grandparent handle school and medical decisions without a custody case, but neither is a custody order.

**FREE HELP FOR RELATIVES****The Juvenile Help Desk.**

Unrepresented relatives weighing custody versus a power of attorney can get free attorney advice at the Juvenile Help Desk — generally the 1st and 3rd Fridays; call (330) 287-5561.

## JUVENILE

# Child support, and changing an order.

Ohio builds child support from both parents' incomes, and an order can be changed when life changes. Modifications stay in the Juvenile case that made the original order.

## How support is built

Ohio uses an income-shares model: both parents' incomes, work-related child care, health-insurance cost, and the number of children go into a statewide worksheet. About 90 or more overnights a year can adjust the number. Support runs through the Wayne County CSEA.

## Changing an order

Custody changes need a real change in circumstances plus the child's best interest (R.C. 3109.04); parenting-time changes use the best-interest standard; support changes on a qualifying change. Wayne publishes its own motions to reallocate, to modify or enforce parenting time, and to modify or enforce support.

## RUN YOUR OWN NUMBERS FIRST

### Estimate before you negotiate.

Gavvl Law has a free Ohio child-support estimator you can use before any filing or hearing: [gavvl.com/child-support-calculator](https://gavvl.com/child-support-calculator)  
(<https://gavvl.com/child-support-calculator>).

## Disagree with a CSEA order?

If the CSEA issues an administrative support order, you can ask for a court review using the Request for Judicial Hearing on a CSEA Administrative Order.

## JUVENILE

# When Children Services is involved.

When a child may be abused, neglected, or dependent, the Wayne County Children Services Board investigates and, if needed, files a case in Judge Wiles's Juvenile Court. The process protects the child while working toward a safe, permanent home, on tight statutory deadlines.

## The stages, in plain order

1. A report comes in; the agency screens and investigates.
2. If a child is removed, a hearing follows within 72 hours or the next court day.
3. Adjudication within 60 days: the court decides if the child is abused, neglected, or dependent.
4. Disposition within 90 days: placement (which can be a relative) and a case plan.
5. Reviews and a permanency plan follow until there is a lasting outcome.

You may have a lawyer; the child has an advocate.

A qualifying parent who requests counsel gets an appointed attorney (the Public Defender first), and the court appoints a CASA volunteer or guardian ad litem to advocate for the child.

## REPORT FIRST IF A CHILD IS AT RISK

Who to call.

Ohio 24-hour hotline: 1-855-642-4453, which routes to Wayne County Children Services.  
Emergency: 911.

## THESE CASES ARE HARD – YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE THEM ALONE

Support exists for the difficult parts.

If there is violence, instability, or a child-welfare case in the mix, the court appoints counsel for those who qualify, protection orders cost nothing to file, and the free Help Desk and the resources on the disclosures page are there for a reason.

## PART THREE

# Probate: stepparent and kinship adoption.

Adoption permanently makes an adult the legal parent of a child. In Wayne County it is the Probate side of Judge Wiles's combined Probate & Juvenile Court — and an attorney is required to file.

COURT	JUDGE	STEPPARENT FEE	ATTORNEY
Probate (Prob. & Juv.)	Latecia Wiles	\$1,000	required

**TWO TRUTHS ABOUT ADOPTION**

It is permanent, and Wayne requires a lawyer.

Custody arranges care and can be changed; adoption permanently ends one legal parent relationship and creates another. In Wayne County, an attorney is required to file a stepparent adoption, the petitioner must be a county resident, and the stepparent must be married to the birth parent for at least one year. A child over twelve must also consent, and a court assessor completes a home study.

## PROBATE

# What a Wayne County adoption involves.

The Probate Court uses the Ohio standardized adoption forms plus its own local forms and a published checklist. The most common family adoptions are stepparent and kinship, and the central question is usually consent.

**THE USUAL STICKING POINT**

Consent is the heart of most cases.

Many stepparent adoptions turn on whether the other parent's consent is required. The failure-to-support-or-communicate exception is fact-specific — this is where your attorney's judgment matters most.

**WHAT IT COSTS**

\$1,000 to file.

A stepparent adoption is \$1,000 (plus 3% if paying by card; checks to “Wayne County Probate Court”). A private adoption is \$1,000 per child plus a \$23 pre-placement fee, with separate counsel for the birth parents. Confirm kinship treatment with the Probate clerk.

**1****Hire an attorney and gather records**

An attorney is required. Gather the certified long-form birth certificate, the marriage license abstract, and proof of paternity or a Putative Father Registry search where needed.

**2****File the petition**

Counsel files the Petition for Adoption (Form 18.0) with the Wayne local adoption forms and consents in the Probate Court.

**3****Consent or its exceptions**

The other legal parent generally must consent (R.C. 3107.06), and a child over 12 must consent. Consent can be excused (R.C. 3107.07) for, e.g., a year of unjustified failure to support or communicate; if an address is unknown, file the affidavit and a motion for publication.

**4****Assessor's home study**

A court-assigned assessor investigates the family and prepares a home study, which begins once all documents are received.

**5****Hearing and final decree**

All parties, including the child, attend the hearing. The court issues the final decree, the original birth certificate is sealed, and a new one issues.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Petition for Adoption of a Minor (Form 18.0)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/LegalResources/Rules/superintendence/probate_forms/adoption/18_0.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/LegalResources/Rules/superintendence/probate_forms/adoption/18_0.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (probate form)	The petition that starts the adoption
<a href="#">Wayne County stepparent adoption checklist</a> <a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for_ce/Stepparent%20Adoption%20Checklist%20-%2012222025.pdf?download=1">https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/system/files_for_ce/Stepparent%20Adoption%20Checklist%20-%2012222025.pdf?download=1</a>	Wayne County Probate & Juvenile Court	The county's step-by-step list of required documents
<a href="#">All Wayne adoption information and forms</a> <a href="https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/probate/adoptions">https://www.wayneprobateandjuvenile.org/probate/adoptions</a>	Wayne County Probate & Juvenile Court	Stepparent, private, and kinship adoption pages

△ Heads up: An attorney is required to file; confirm the kinship checklist and any current fees with the Probate clerk, (330) 287-5575.

#### THINKING ABOUT AN ADOPTION OR A CUSTODY CHANGE?

Talk it through before you file.

Adoption and custody cases turn on consent, notice, and timing — the kinds of details where early advice saves months. Gavvl's quiz points you to the right service in about two minutes. [Take the quiz](#)

(<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>) • Call (844) 694-2885.

## PART FOUR

# How Gavvl Law can help.

This guide gave you the map. If you'd like a hand from here, here is what working with Gavvl looks like — and the two ways we usually help.

## Limited-scope (flat fee)

You handle parts of your own case and hire us for specific tasks at a flat, agreed price — reviewing a Separation Agreement, preparing a filing packet, coaching you for a hearing, or drafting a parenting plan. Predictable cost, right-sized help.

## Full representation

We handle the whole matter — strategy, filings, temporary orders, negotiation, and hearings — on a retainer plus hourly basis. Best when a case is contested, complex, or moving fast and you want someone carrying it.

### WAYNE COUNTY ALSO HAS A FREE HELP DESK

#### Free limited attorney advice.

Qualifying, financially eligible unrepresented residents can meet volunteer attorneys at the court's Help Desk — Juvenile matters generally the 1st and 3rd Fridays (330-287-5561), Probate matters the 2nd Friday (330-287-5575). It's brief advice, not representation, and pairs well with limited-scope help on the harder parts of a case.

## Divorce & dissolution

Strategy, settlement terms, filing packets, temporary orders, and final hearings.

## Custody & parenting

Unmarried-parent and married cases, shared parenting plans, schedules, and modifications.

## Child support

Calculations, income documentation, deviations, modifications, and enforcement.

## Adoption

Stepparent and kinship adoption planning, consent review, and the attorney representation Wayne requires.

## PART FOUR

# Ways to pay, and how to start.

The options depend on the service model, because Ohio trust-accounting rules treat retainers differently from flat fees. Exact amounts are calculated when you enroll.

**RETAINER + HOURLY****Full representation**

Pay in full by secure card (Confido Legal). Affirm financing is available — monthly payments with a soft credit check that doesn't affect your score.

**FLAT FEE****Limited-scope**

Pay in full by card (Confido Legal). Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later. Or Gavvl Direct — our in-house plan with no credit check.

**NO CREDIT CHECK****Gavvl Direct**

Start with 60% down and finance the rest, or finance the full fee once 60% is paid. Schedules of 18 weekly, 8 bi-weekly, or 4 monthly payments. The financed amount carries 19% annual interest, compounded monthly.

**NOT SURE WHICH PATH FITS?**

The 2-minute quiz gives a personalized recommendation.

Find My Service asks a few questions and suggests a service and financing option. [Take the quiz](#)

(<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>) · [Start here](#) (<https://gavvl.com/start>) · (844) 694-2885 · [support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com).

Consultations are low-cost.

**WHY FAMILIES CHOOSE GAVVL**

A 4.8+ average across 90+ verified Google reviews, recognized by Best Lawyers as a “Firm to Watch” (2026), with 50+ years of combined family-law experience across all 88 Ohio counties. (See the disclosures page — awards and ratings are not a prediction about your case.)

## IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

# The fine print, in plain English.

Please read this before relying on anything in this guide.

## Information, not legal advice.

This guide explains how things generally work in Wayne County, but it can't account for your situation. Reading or contacting Gavvl Law does not create an attorney-client relationship — only a signed engagement agreement does. For advice about your case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

## About awards and reviews.

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.

## Fees and procedures change.

Court fees and procedures change, and some Wayne County items (the Juvenile deposit, the legal-separation fee, Kids First logistics) aren't reproduced here. Verified as of June 11, 2026 from official court sources; always confirm current fees with the relevant court before filing.

## Jurisdiction and responsibility.

Gavvl Law attorneys are licensed to practice law in Ohio. This guide describes Ohio law and Wayne County procedure only. Advertising material, Gavvl Law LLC. Attorney responsible for this content: Stephanie Green, Esq., Managing Partner. Privacy policy: [gavvl.com/privacy-policy](https://gavvl.com/privacy-policy)

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READY WHEN YOU ARE.

## Take the 2-minute quiz or talk with our team.

We'll help you find the right court and the level of help that fits.

(844) 694-2885

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

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

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