A Better Way
Through Legal Conflict

What a divorce, a bankruptcy, a criminal charge, or a death in the family actually involves, and the decisions that make it better or worse.

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This guide is general information about Ohio law, not legal advice, and reading it does not make you a client of this office. Every case turns on its own facts, and the law changes. Current as of November 2026.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INVITATION

When your *world shakes*

> In Ohio, a dissolution, the agreed way out of a marriage, is heard between thirty and ninety days after the petition is filed. A contested divorce often runs a year or more. A Chapter 7 bankruptcy usually ends about four months after filing. Ohio law requires a felony to be brought to trial within 270 days of arrest, and each day spent in jail on the charge counts as three. Delays the defense requests or agrees to extend that deadline.

Those numbers are the first honest thing anyone can tell you, and they are rarely what a person wants to hear. People do not call a lawyer on a good day. They call when a marriage has come apart, when the garnishment has started, when a charge has put everything else on hold.

Most legal advertising answers that moment by promising a fighter. Aggression is easy to sell, because it sounds like control at a time when you have none. When we are afraid, we reach for control. But what a frightened person needs is not someone who matches the fear. It is someone with experience, who will not flinch, and who can see your situation from the outside while you are living it from the inside.

The work that actually changes the outcome of a case is quieter than the advertising suggests: getting the facts straight, meeting deadlines, knowing what the court can and cannot do, and telling you the truth early enough for it to be useful.

This guide explains what these cases involve, what the law requires, and which decisions tend to make them better or worse. It will not tell you that your situation is simple. It will tell you what you are dealing with, so that you can make decisions you will still respect in a year.

FROM PRACTICE

A man facing a felony investigation came to me ready to pay whatever it took for me to jump into action and make the investigation stop. No amount of money does that, and I told him so. We talked instead about what was his to control and what was not, and I shared the Serenity Prayer with him: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The charges still came. What changed was how he carried them. He stopped spending himself on what he could not control and put that energy into what he could. He is still in the middle of a hard case, and he is enduring it with a steadiness he did not have the day he walked in.

> *Anyone can survive a case with white knuckles. We want to help you thrive on the other side of it.*

CHAPTER TWO

THE THREE COMMITMENTS

Dignity, truth, and *disciplined strength*

> In a court file, you stop being your name. You are the Petitioner, the Respondent, the Defendant, the Debtor. Your name appears in the caption and then, for the most part, nowhere else.

That is not cruelty; it is how a system processes thousands of cases. But it shapes how people are treated inside it, and it is the reason this office states three commitments plainly rather than leaving them to be inferred.

Dignity. Every person who comes here is more than the hardest thing about their situation. That holds when the answer is no, when the facts are bad, and when the client has made the wrong decision. It also means we do not mock the other side, even when they are difficult. Contempt is expensive. It costs credibility with the court and buys nothing in return.

Truth. You will be told what the file actually supports, including when that is unwelcome. A lawyer who agrees with everything a frightened client says is not serving that client. If your expectation is unreasonable, you will hear so from us before you hear it from a judge.

Disciplined strength. Calm is not passivity. Aggression is not strategy. When firm action protects your children, your liberty, your property, or your future, we take it without hesitation. When it would only run up a bill and harden the other side, we say so.

> *Real strength is quieter than people expect. It looks like preparation.*

CHAPTER THREE

THE COST OF WINNING

Why you want to win, *and what it costs*

> In Ohio, each side ordinarily pays its own attorney fees. A domestic relations court can order one spouse to pay some of the other's fees, and a few statutes allow fee awards in other kinds of cases, but those are exceptions. The fight to get there costs money of its own.

This surprises people more than any other rule. "I will make him pay for this" is usually not something the law offers. Contested matters are billed by the hour, which means every motion, every hearing, and every email and phone call is a purchase. The question worth asking before each one is simple: what am I buying, and is it worth the price?

Some fights are worth it, such as custody arrangements that do not work, an asset that will matter in ten years, or a charge that will follow you into every job application. These may justify the cost. Others do not. Court files are full of people who spent thousands of dollars on property they would not have replaced for a fraction of the amount, because the object had stopped being the object and started being the argument.

The instinct to win is not shameful. It is usually an instinct to be treated fairly, or to be believed, or to keep a life that is being destroyed. But a court is not built to give you those things. It divides property, allocates parenting time, and applies statutes. Wanting more from it than it can offer is the most common way people spend money on disappointment.

FROM PRACTICE

We once spent a few thousand dollars in fees and half a day in court on a property division in which the most fiercely contested item was the Christmas décor. Nobody in that courtroom would have paid that much for it in a store.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPOSURE

What you're afraid *people will find out*

> Most court filings are public records. A Chapter 7 petition lists your debts, your income, your property, and recent transfers, signed under oath. A contested divorce involves financial affidavits and discovery. A criminal case puts your charges on a public docket in open court.

For many people this is the real fear, and it is rarely the fear they say out loud. It is not the statute or the hearing date. It is that someone will see the credit-card balance, the text messages, the arrest, the way the household actually ran.

Two things are worth knowing. First, less of it is interesting to the court than you think. Judges and trustees see these facts daily; what feels like a personal verdict on you is, to them, a category. What feels catastrophic to you is most likely a variation on a recurring theme that the court sees over and over. Second, concealment is the one strategy that reliably makes it worse. Hiding an asset in a bankruptcy can cost you the discharge you filed for. A fact you keep from your own lawyer becomes a surprise, and surprises land in front of a judge at the worst possible moment. In court, your credibility is paramount. Recurring fact patterns are forgettable. Once a party loses credibility, judges tend not to forget.

The practical rule is unglamorous: tell your lawyer the bad facts first. Everything we can plan for, we can usually handle. The only facts that reliably damage a case are the ones we learn about from the other side.

FROM PRACTICE

Near the end of a consultation, a client worked up the nerve to tell me a fact they were sure would hurt their case. It was embarrassing for them, and they prefaced it carefully: “You're my lawyer, and I need to tell you everything.” I half chuckled when I heard it, not because it was funny, but because it was so familiar. It was almost predictable, and it did not trouble me in the slightest. At this point in my career, I have heard almost everything.

I always appreciate a client who is truthful with me. The facts that hurt are the ones a client tries to hide, because once something is hidden, it creates the impression that something deeper and darker may be hidden too. That is the worst impression a court can have.

CHAPTER FIVE

FAMILY LAW

The people who *cannot choose*

> Ohio courts decide about children by the best interest of the child. The statute lists the factors: each parent's relationship with the child, the child's adjustment to home, school, and community, the mental and physical health of everyone involved, and whether each parent is likely to honor and encourage the child's relationship with the other. What is fair to the parents is not on the list.

That last omission explains most of the frustration in family court. A parent arrives with a case about fairness. They want accountability, and the tendency is to make the issues about who left, who lied, and who did the work for years. The court asks a narrower question about what arrangement serves the child. Both questions are real. Only one of them is before the judge.

What follows from that is concrete. Children should not carry messages, and should not be asked what happens at the other house. How you speak about the other parent within earshot matters, not because that parent has earned better, but because a child who hears one parent described as worthless has to work out what that makes the child. Courts notice which parent supports the other's relationship with the child, because the statute tells them to.

None of this means accepting whatever you are handed. A parent who is unsafe, who will not follow orders, or who disappears for months is a matter for the court, and that is what establishing healthy boundaries and taking firm action are for. Steady does not mean soft. It means spending your energy where it affects the outcome.

FROM PRACTICE

I have had cases where a parent brought the children to the courthouse to testify as fact witnesses against the other parent. Don't. I have had cases where a parent recorded the children to use in court. Don't. I have had cases where a parent told a child what to say to the guardian ad litem, even writing out a note of talking points. Don't.

These can feel like ways to get the truth out. They backfire every single time. Your children do not want to be in the middle, so do not put them there. The judge will give the children less, not more, of a parent who does these things.

CHAPTER SIX

BANKRUPTCY

Worth and *net worth*

> Filing a bankruptcy triggers the automatic stay, which stops most collection calls, lawsuits, and wage garnishments immediately. Ohio's exemptions protect, for cases filed between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2028, up to $182,625 of equity in a home, $5,025 in a vehicle, and $16,850 in household goods, among others. Most people who file Chapter 7 keep everything they own.

People arrive at a bankruptcy consultation braced for a lecture, and often having waited years to make the appointment. In the meantime the debt has done its usual work: garnishment, overdrafts, a car payment made with a credit card, and the quiet conclusion that this says something about the kind of person they are.

It says nothing of the sort. Debt relief is far older than any modern code. The law of ancient Israel released debts every seventh year, and in the Year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year, land returned to the families who had lost it, and people who had sold themselves into service to pay what they owed went free. That conviction runs through the Judeo-Christian tradition: people were not created to be enslaved to debt.

Our law still holds that people who cannot pay should have a lawful way through, and that way is used by people whose businesses failed, whose hours were cut, whose health collapsed, or who guaranteed a loan for someone they loved. The filing is a legal remedy, and the relief most people describe afterward is not about money. It is about no longer bracing for the phone.

What the process does require is complete honesty. Every asset, every transfer in the look-back period, every account. The trustee's job is to check, and the discharge is what you have to lose. Telling the truth about the numbers is not only the ethical path; it is the only version of this that works.

FROM PRACTICE

People often try to make financial decisions before they come to a bankruptcy lawyer. Many times, someone has told me they just transferred a car to a family member, afraid they would lose it in the bankruptcy. But within the limits above, the law is designed to let you keep your house, a reasonably valued car, your household goods, and a modest amount of money in the bank. A big financial move made before you see a professional can complicate a bankruptcy, make you wait longer to file, or keep you from filing at all. It is always best to talk to me before you make any decision that could affect a filing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CRIMINAL DEFENSE

What the state *has to prove*

> In a criminal case, the state must prove every element of the offense beyond a reasonable doubt. You are not required to prove anything. A not-guilty plea is not a statement that nothing happened. It is a demand that the state prove its case, and it preserves your options while the evidence is examined.

That distinction matters, because people often plead guilty early out of embarrassment, believing that admitting fault is the honest thing to do. Honesty with your lawyer is essential. A plea entered before anyone has read the discovery is something else: it is a decision made without the facts.

The case against you has parts. Was the traffic stop lawful? Was the breathalyzer test accurately administered? Does the conduct the state can actually prove match the offense charged? Those are not technicalities; they are the difference between a charge and a conviction, and they are what a defense lawyer is for.

At the same time, a defense is not a story you talk yourself into. Where responsibility is genuinely yours, you can take it at the right moment, with counsel, at the right stage. This often produces a better result than a denial the evidence will not carry. Both things are true at once: demand what the law requires of the state, and stay honest about what you did. That combination is what lets a person walk out of a courthouse still recognizable to themselves.

FROM PRACTICE

Many clients come to me wanting to be honest and to take ownership of what they did. Often their conduct really does meet the definition of an offense under the statute. In those cases, winning does not mean “getting off.” It means being honest about the situation and bringing forward what is good about the client: a person who made an understandable mistake, perhaps with little or no record, a character letter from an employer, or a decision to enter treatment on their own.

Many times, the win is not disproving the charge but reducing the sentence, and that is often just as important. A lawyer who knows the local court and the sentencing factors is critical.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ESTATE PLANNING

Protecting the people *who outlive you*

> If you die without a will, Ohio law decides. If all of your children are also your spouse's, your spouse inherits everything. If any are not, your spouse takes a fixed sum ($20,000 or $60,000, depending on the family) plus a share of the rest, and your children divide the remainder. If your children are minors, a probate court, not you, decides who raises them.

Most people know they should have a will. What stops them is not indifference; it is that making one requires sitting down with the fact that they will die, and that the people they love will be in a room without them.

The work itself is ordinary. A will, a power of attorney, a healthcare directive, sometimes a trust or a transfer-on-death designation. It only takes a few hours or less, in most cases. What it buys is that the people sorting out your affairs are handed instructions instead of a guess, at the exact moment they are least able to reconstruct what you would have wanted.

Clients who finish this work describe the same thing afterward, and it is not pride. It is relief from being prepared, the quiet kind that comes from having handled something that was quietly overdue.

FROM PRACTICE

A client came in after their grandmother died with $200 in the bank. The client was the executor named in her will, but the bank said the will was not enough. It wanted an order from the probate court, and getting one would cost about $1,000. It now cost $1,000 to get $200 out of the bank.

That kind of problem can be avoided, and we cover it in the hour-long consultation, along with planning for a great deal more than what happens to the last $200 in an account.

CHAPTER NINE

PATIENCE

The myth of *the easy path*

> The court's docket sets the pace, not your lawyer. A dissolution cannot be heard sooner than thirty days after filing. Continuances move hearings by weeks. Motions the court treats as emergencies are the ones that meet the court's definition of an emergency, not the client's.

Nearly every legal problem takes longer than the person living through it can comfortably bear. That gap is where the expensive decisions get made: the impulsive email, the missed payment, the agreement signed in a parking lot to make the discomfort stop, the disappearance from the case for two months.

There is no filing that makes a case skip the line. What there is instead is unremarkable: answer your lawyer's calls, produce the documents on time, follow the temporary orders exactly, keep your own copies, and make the next decision well. Cases are not usually won by one brilliant move. They are lost, fairly often, by a series of small avoidable ones.

You will not do this perfectly. Nobody does. What matters is how quickly you get back to the plan after the bad week. The case is still going, and the next decision is still in front of you.

FROM PRACTICE

Clients often justify violating a court order because the other side violated it first. The most common version: child support was missed, is late, or is in arrears, so the parent stops letting the other parent see the child. Missing support is not fair or right. But it does not justify withholding a child.

Withholding the child may well be seen as the greater wrong, because it puts the child in the middle, and its consequences run deeper and last longer.

CHAPTER TEN

THE BETTER WAY

What is left when *the file closes*

> Every case ends with a document. A decree of divorce or dissolution. A bankruptcy discharge order. A journal entry of sentence or dismissal. A closed estate. The clerk files it, and the matter is over.

The document is the outcome the system produces. It is not the whole of what you leave with. You also leave with whatever the process did to your relationship with your children's other parent, with your sense of your own judgment, and with the habits you formed while you were under pressure.

That is the part a lawyer can affect only partly, and it is the reason this office works the way it does. We would rather tell you something unwelcome in March than watch you learn it in September. We would rather settle a matter that should be settled, and take a case to trial that should be tried. We would rather you spend your money on the two decisions that need court intervention than on the eleven that merely feel urgent but do not.

Legal problems are never merely legal. They are human problems with legal consequences. Handled well, they end, and what they leave behind is a person who can look back at how they behaved during the worst stretch of it without wincing.

FROM PRACTICE

I once had a client retain me for his divorce. He brought me the retainer, and we worked through all of their marital assets and debts. Then we got to talking about how he reacted to his wife's comments, and how their arguments would escalate. We talked about how he could become less reactive, even being kind to her when he felt he had been treated poorly.

He came back a month later to tell me they had reconciled, and I gave him his money back.

ATTORNEY BOYD LAW OFFICE, LTD.

If you want to talk it *through with someone*

The initial consultation is confidential and without obligation. Fees vary by matter. We'll tell you about any consultation fee before we schedule, and explain all fees before any work begins.

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Serving Richland, Ashland, Crawford, and Morrow Counties

This guide is general information about Ohio law. It is not legal advice, and reading it does not create an attorney-client relationship with Attorney Boyd Law Office, Ltd. Every situation is different, statutes and dollar figures change, and only a lawyer who knows the facts of your case can advise you about it. Dollar amounts and timelines stated here are current as of November 2026.

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