

Terms and Acronyms

Criminal Justice/Legal Terms

Abeyance: To hold back, temporary inactivation.

Acquittal: Finding of not guilty of a person tried for a crime.

Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD): Diversion of a first-time offender to probation without a trial.

Affidavit: Written statement of the fact made under oath and done voluntarily.

Arraignment: The first court appearance, usually before a District Justice, for the purpose of reading the charges, advising the individual of his or her rights and determining bail. Generally takes place within hours of the arrest.

Arrest: Taking a person into custody, or detaining a person during an investigation.

Bail: money or other security given to the court to temporarily secure a person's release from custody and assure his or her appearance in court.

Bail Bond: Written agreement, posting security to assure court appearance.

Bench Warrant: A warrant issued from the Court of Common Pleas.

Booking: The usual practice of taking an "arrested" person to the police station for recording the arrest, taking a photograph of the person and getting fingerprints from the person.

Complaint: The formal charge presented to a judge or district justice that charges the person with a crime.

Continuance: Postponement of a pending trial or action to a later date.

Conviction: A finding of Guilty.

Felony: Generally, crimes that are punishable by more than a year in prison.

Grand Jury: A body that hears several cases and decides whether to indict those accused.

Indictment: Formal written accusation by a grand jury charging a person with a crime

Magistrate: A District Justice or District Court Judge.

Mandatory Sentence: A statutory requirement for a crime that a prescribed sentence be carried out upon conviction of a crime.

Misdemeanor: Generally, crimes that are punishable by less than one year in jail, or payment of a fine.

Nolo Contendere: Latin for ("I will not contest it") – a plea of no defense to the charge, but not the same as "not guilty".

Nolle Prosequere: From the Latin – A Court approved decision by a District Attorney to not pursue a case.

TERMS & ACRONYMS

Ordinance: Law enacted by a municipality (town or township) or a county.

Parole: Released from prison prior to completing the sentence with Supervision in the community by a parole officer.

Penal Laws: Statutes and ordinances that define crimes or offenses

Petit Jury: Trial court jury (of 12 persons)

Prima Facie: Enough evidence to go to trial

Probation: Supervision in the community (by a probation officer) for a set period of time

Quash: To make something void – e.g. criminal charges

Release on own Recognizance (ROR): A District Justice may elect to deal with summary offenses without bail, based on a promise to return to court.

Sentencing Guidelines: Statewide recommended sentences for misdemeanor and felony charges

Statute: A law enacted by the state or federal government

Summary Offense: Acts such as underage drinking, shoplifting or disorderly conduct involving payment of a fine and court costs.

Summons: Used in lesser crimes instead of a warrant – A notice to appear in court for a specified crime.

Warrant: A written order directing a police officer (or other authorized person) to take the individual into custody and bring him or her before the court that issued the warrant.

TERMS & ACRONYMS

Mental Health Civil Commitment Terms

Designated Facility. A hospital or other facility designated by the Administrator of a county MH/MR program as the location for involuntary examination and treatment.

Hearing: Takes place before a Mental Health “Judge” for the purpose of approving involuntary commitment. The individual, the person who “petitioned”, the individual’s attorney (either public or private), the designated district attorney and other people directly involved attend. Each county has different processes for Mental Health Hearing.

Involuntary Examination and Treatment:

§ 302 – Emergency Involuntary Commitment for Examination and Treatment (up to 120 hours)

§ 303 – Extended Involuntary Commitment for Examination and Treatment (up to 20 days)

§ 304 – Extended Involuntary Commitment for Treatment (up to 90 days)

§ 305 – Extended Involuntary Commitment for Treatment (up to 180 days beyond the period covered by the § 304 commitment).

MH examination and treatment under section 302 of Pennsylvania's Mental Health Procedures act nearly always takes place in a facility that has inpatient psychiatric services available. Sometimes the individual may be admitted to a different facility after the examination.

Involuntary MH Treatment under sections 303, 304 and 304 of the Mental Health Procedures Act may be provided on an outpatient basis. The court can order a specific number of hours or days of treatment in a specific setting.

MH Court: a special court set up to deal with charges and issue orders surrounding arrest, re-arrest, probation or parole violations for individuals who have serious mental illness.