

A JOURNALIST'S GUIDE TO COVERING A CRIMINAL CASE FROM ARREST TO SENTENCING

Arrest and Booking

Once a person is arrested, law enforcement will book that person into the Maricopa County jail. The person will go through the jail's intake process at the Intake, Transfer, and Release (ITR) Facility. The defendant has 24-hours, from arrest, to be seen by a judicial officer in Initial Appearance Court for the purpose of setting bail and release conditions.

To read more about IA process, visit: <https://superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/criminal/case-procedures/>

Please note, under Arizona Law, there are certain circumstances where a defendant shall be denied bail: www.azleg.gov/ars/13/03961.org

IA Paperwork

During the IA hearing, the judicial officer reviews paperwork submitted by law enforcement containing a narrative of the alleged crime. The IA paperwork contains a probable cause statement, the release order and Form IV. **The IA paperwork is available at the public access terminals at the Clerk of the Court Records Center at 601 W. Jackson St.**

If it's a recent arrest, before a case file or CR number is generated, please contact Superior Court's communications office for the IA paperwork. Please submit requests to: CourtPIO@jbazmc.maricopa.gov.

Supervening Indictment

In Maricopa County, many felony cases go to a grand jury rather than a preliminary hearing. To read more about each type of hearing visit: <https://superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/criminal/case-procedures/>

Once a grand jury issues a supervening indictment listing the formal charges, the document will soon be available at the public access terminals at the Clerk of the Court Records Center at 601 W. Jackson St. During the arraignment, the defendant will formally enter a plea to the charges on the supervening indictment. This is a very short hearing. To learn more about the arraignment process and guilty and not guilty pleas, visit: <https://superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/criminal/case-procedures/>

Case Files

Once the Maricopa County Attorney's Office files charges and decides to move forward with the case, a CR number is generated. (For ex: CR2020-098786). All documents and case information will be found under this CR number. The documents are available at the public access terminals at the Clerk of the Court Records Center. Also, case information, including times and dates of a hearing, may be found on the case lookup on Superior Court's website: www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/docket/CriminalCourtCases/caseSearch.asp

A search for rulings and minute entries in a case may be found on the Clerk of the Court's website: <https://courtminutes.maricopa.gov>

Types of Hearings

When a person is charged, there will be a series of hearings like status conferences, pretrial conferences, oral arguments and evidentiary hearings. Status and pretrial conferences are usually routine hearings to ensure the case is moving along and the parties are working toward resolving the case. Oral arguments and evidentiary hearings may be of interest and may contain substantive information. Oral arguments are when attorneys argue their motions and evidentiary hearings involve discussions about evidence. There are also hearings called settlement conferences, which are free talks between the judges and the parties. Often plea deals will be extended by the County Attorney's Office to the defendant as a result of a settlement conference. At any time during the pretrial phase, the County Attorney's Office may offer a deal, known as a change of plea, to the defendant. During a change of plea hearing, the defendant enters their guilty plea. **The change of plea document is available at the public access terminals at the Clerk of the Court Records Center at 601 W. Jackson St.** This document will list the updated charges. If the defendant wishes to plead straight to the Court, the charges will remain the same.

Trial

Roughly 2% percent of cases go to trial in Maricopa County. Every defendant has the right to a jury trial in Maricopa County. After witnessing evidence and testimony, from the prosecution and defense, the jury must decide guilty or not guilty. For a verdict, all jurors must agree. If the jury is not unanimous, the trial is deemed a mistrial and the County Attorney's Office may choose to refile the case. Also, a defendant has the right to waive a jury trial and elect for a bench trial where the judge serves as judge and jury.

In a case where a not guilty verdict is reached, the charges are dismissed and the defendant cannot be retried on the same charge.

Sentencing

After a change of plea or trial verdict, the judge will pronounce sentencing based on the law. Sentencings are usually scheduled at least 30 days beyond the change of plea or verdict. Sentences pronounced by a judge may range from probation to life in prison. In a death penalty case, a jury usually decides on life in prison or death. Judges must sentence according to the law. (Title 13, Chapter 7 of Arizona Revised Statutes: www.azleg.gov/arsDetail/?title=13) Crimes carry sentencing ranges and judges have the discretion to aggravate or mitigate sentences within those ranges.

Camera in the Courtroom

Arizona Supreme Court Rule 122 allows the use of recording devices in a courtroom, which includes cameras. To request a camera in the courtroom, the news media must fill out the camera request form on the Superior Court website. The completed form is forwarded by a public information officer to the judicial officer for approval. The parties to a case will be notified and given an opportunity to object.

The news media are allowed one television camera and one still camera to serve as a pool camera for all media outlets. In most cases, cameras are to be placed in the back row of the courtroom on the same side as the jury box with a wireless microphone on the podium. In the South Court Tower, the camera may be placed on the side nearest to the audio panel. If a courtroom has a media room, most judicial officers prefer the camera be inside the room.

Camera operators must not film the jury and gallery. They must also stop filming when the court is in recess, or a different matter has been called. Lastly, the media must comply with all limitations or restrictions ordered by the judicial officer.



TIPS FOR COVERING A CASE AND FINDING A SENTENCING



Find a Case to Cover

Aside from google and monitoring the local news, another great resource for finding cases is: <http://www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/docket/calendar/>

Please set your time parameter and click on any judge with CR next to their name to view their criminal calendars. Once you find a crime of interest, the next step is to visit **the public access terminals at the Clerk of the Court Records Center at 601 W. Jackson St. to obtain the IA paperwork or other pertinent documents.**



Walking into the Courtroom

Always walk into the courtroom quietly. You don't know what is going on in the courtroom at that moment. Find a seat on either side but avoid sitting in the front row. Those seats are reserved for victims, family members and friends. Try to arrive at least 10 minutes before your case starts. If your hearing is scheduled for 8:30 a.m., please be advised that the hearing is part of the morning calendar and could begin at anytime between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.



Audio Recorders

Audio recorders are presumed allowed but you must tell the courtroom assistant of your intention to record for personal use only. The courtroom assistant is seated off to the side between the judge's bench and the attorney tables. You are not allowed to walk beyond the bar. Simply wave to the courtroom assistant to attract their attention. If the courtroom assistant is not familiar with the audio recorder rule, please ask him or her to contact the court's public information office. If you can't get the courtroom assistant's attention and are unsure, pen and pad is always allowed.



Sources

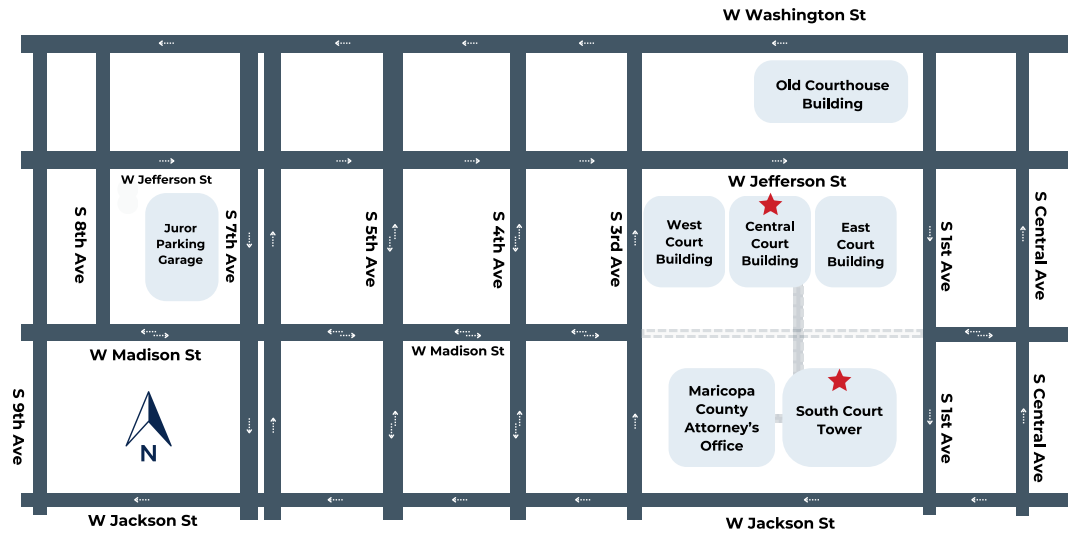
The judges do all their talking, on the bench, during court. Please do not attempt to ask a judge for a comment. Judges have a strict cannon of ethics that prevent them from commenting on cases. Also, court staff is instructed to refer all type of media questions to the public information office. Similarly, prosecutors and public defenders typically have the same policy. Their questions generally are routed through their PIO office. The public defender's office does not have a PIO office. Private defense attorneys typically do not have those type of restrictions and may be able to speak more freely to reporters.

Also, approach victims, defendants, family members and friends with sensitivity. Please be aware that criminal cases may be traumatic for the parties and their friends and families. Please try to conduct all interviews outside the courthouse and never take photos inside the court building. You are also allowed to use social media. But again, no photos.



Downtown Phoenix Court Complex

Maricopa County Superior Court's criminal cases are heard in the South Court Tower (175 W. Madison St.) and the Central Court Building (201 W. Jefferson St.) in Phoenix. If using the Valley Metro Rail, exit off Jefferson St./1st Ave. Upon entering each building, court security will screen all court customers. As you enter into the lobby, you will see electronic case information screens to direct you to your courtroom.



KEY COURT CONTACTS:

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SOCIAL MEDIA:



SuperiorCourtOfArizona



@courtpio



@courtpio



@courtpio



SuperiorcourtAZ



Judicial Branch of Arizona
in Maricopa County



Maricopa County - Superior Court

WEBSITES:



The Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County:

superiorcourt.maricopa.gov



The Clerk of the Superior Court, Maricopa County, AZ:

clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov



Justice Courts of Maricopa County:

justicecourts.maricopa.gov