

# PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN GOING TO COURT

Whether we agree or not, appearance matters in court. This handout provides a few key items to think about before you go.

- Efforts should be made to be clean and tidy.
- Don't forget any aids you may need: glasses, contacts, hearing aids, cane, walker, etc.
- Try to avoid heavy smelling perfume if possible.

- Bring documents you may need (evidence, witness questions, etc.)
- Paper and pen or pencil are helpful to take notes and to write notes to counsel or your advocate.
- A credit card or checkbook may be needed if there is a court fee.
- Bring a form of identification just in case (if you have a protected address, please let court know)
- Put your phone in your bag on do not disturb; don't carry it in your hand. A phone charger may be helpful.
- Water can help alleviate nervous dry mouth if you need to speak in court.

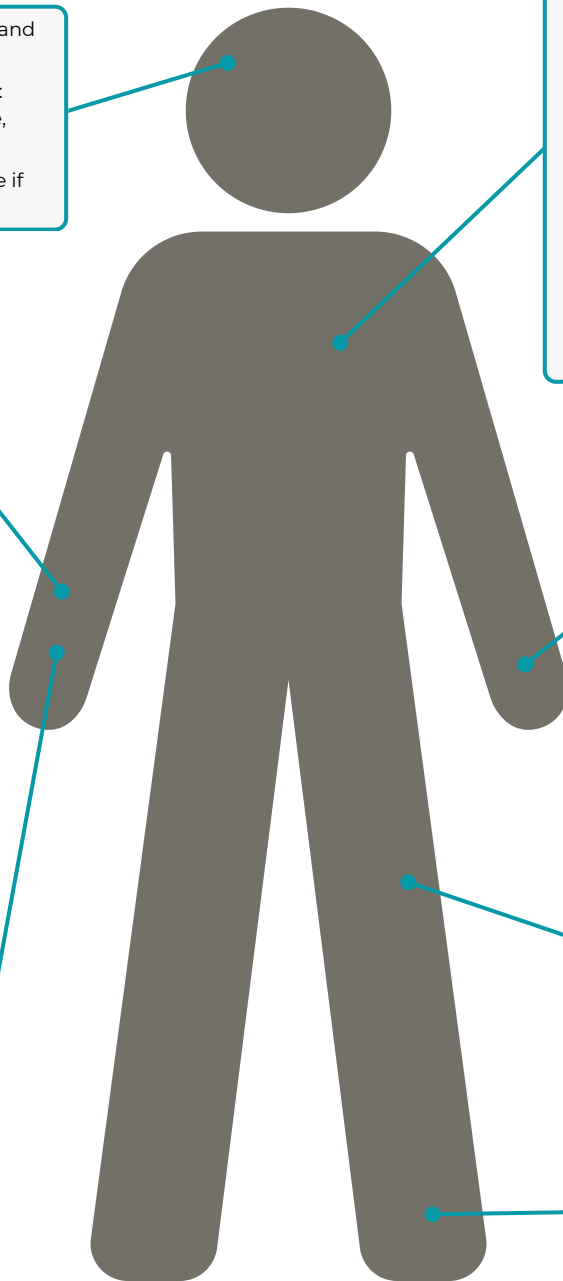
- Bags, briefcases, purses, etc. may be scanned or checked by security.
- Anything you don't want to go through security should be left at home.

- Courtrooms tend to be conservative with most court personnel either in uniform, suits, or business attire.
- Dress like you are going to an interview for an office job: suit, slacks, blouse, dress shirt, etc. No jeans, no words on clothing, etc.
- Zippers, chains, heavy metal jewelry, and some surgical metal may set off security alarms.

- A ring, bracelet, or small fidget toy can be helpful to de-stress.
- Tattoos can be judged unfairly. Discuss any concerns with your advocate.
- Be mindful of smart-device settings and turn on do not disturb as needed.

- Check your pockets and remove loose change or other metals that might ring security alarms.
- Keep any weapons at home, including pocket knives, mace, utility tools, etc.

- Always wear shoes. You may be standing or sitting, so wearing a comfortable pair is a good idea.
- Avoid flip flops and sandals, as they can also be judged unfairly.



# QUICK TIPS FOR BEING IN COURT

## Before arriving

- Try to get some sleep the night before court.
- Pack what you need: court documents, pen, paper, water, etc.
- Check the docket before heading to court to verify the date, time, and location.
- Arrange for child and/or elder care in advance of going to court, whether it is someone staying with them at home or someone going with you to court to stay with them.
- Prepare what you are going to wear.
- Safety plan with an advocate.

## Where to go

- Security may be able to direct you.
- Know the name of the judge/magistrate.
- Locate the elevators or stairs for easy access to the floor.
- There might be other people around while you access the courthouse.

## Security

- There will be police or security officers.
- Security measures may include: metal detector, x-ray machine, security wand. You may be wanded if an alarm is triggered.

## Waiting

- Multiple hearings can be scheduled for the same time. A hearing may be right on time or within a timeframe. Be prepared to wait for other hearings before and after yours.
- Be mindful of who else is in the waiting room. Judges, magistrates, attorneys, and personnel can all be in the room without you realizing it.
- If you are using your phone while waiting, use earbuds or keep your phone silent.
- If you need to talk on your phone, step away from hearing rooms.

## Emotional Prep

- Prepare with advocate or support before court, including signs that you need a break.
- Box breathe waiting for your case to be called.
- Debrief with advocate or support after court.
- Have something on your finger or wrist to quietly fidget.

## When to go

- It is better to arrive early than late.
- Court hearings can be very short or take hours.
- Give yourself time to walk through the courthouse; there are many floors.

## Transportation

- Before the day of court, secure transportation to the courthouse.
- If you are busing, check stops to make sure it stops by the courthouse.
- Some courthouses have parking decks. Bring a form of payment.
- You might have to use a meter to park, which will require either a credit card or change.
- If using a meter, ensure you note the time so you can add more money if needed.
- Leave enough time before your hearing to find parking as during peak times it may be hard to find.

## In the Courtroom

- Silence your cell phone.
- If you are a party to a case, you will be seated at one of the tables.
- Take notes on important things to highlight during your testimony.
- Ask for a break, if it is needed.
- Utilize the "your honor" or "judge" when speaking to or referring to the judge, and don't interrupt them.
- Take a breath before answering a question.

## Your Advocate

- If you have an advocate, they can most likely come into the hearing/meeting with you.
- Your advocate has to stay silent during court proceedings.

## Resources to learn more

- [www.ohiolegalhelp.org](http://www.ohiolegalhelp.org)
- [www.ohiobar.org/legalhelp](http://www.ohiobar.org/legalhelp)
- [www.opd.ohio.gov/law-library/representing-yourself/3-other-pro-se-resources](http://www.opd.ohio.gov/law-library/representing-yourself/3-other-pro-se-resources)
- [www.oaesv.org/LegalManual1](http://www.oaesv.org/LegalManual1)
- [www.oaesv.org/LegalManual2](http://www.oaesv.org/LegalManual2)