

Misdemeanor: Misdemeanors are crimes for which the maximum punishment is one year or less in a county jail. Most states call for jail terms in the local/county jail, while others require that the time be served in a state prison. Most states categorize DUI/DWI offenses as misdemeanors, except where more than 3 prior convictions exist, or where a death or serious bodily injury results.

Felony: The term felony is a crime for which the punishment may be a state prison term of one year or longer. Some capital felonies such as sexual battery on a minor and 1st degree murder can carry the death penalty in states that still have capital punishment.

Retainer: A contract between an attorney and the client. Retainers are generally in written form, but some retainers can be verbal. The payment of money to the attorney as a "retainer fee" signifies an agreement for the attorney to act on the person's behalf and to represent the person in the legal matter that is the subject of their "contract". In many criminal cases, a retainer is a down payment towards the total fee. Sometimes, fees are hourly based, or flat-fee based. Most criminal cases are flat-fee based.

Nolo Contendere: A form of a plea in a criminal case or traffic case in which (instead of saying "I am guilty", the person is basically saying, "I will not 'contest' or defend the charge against me". No contest has the same effect as a plea of guilty, as far as the criminal sentence is concerned, but may not be considered as an admission of guilt for any other purpose.

Citations, Indictments and Informations: A citation is a legal document usually issued by a police officer directly to the person being "charged" with some minor offense (usually a traffic violation) identifying the nature of the accused offenses. A citation usually states a date and time to appear in court. Felonies and some misdemeanors are charged in a more formal document either called an indictment, an information or a complaint. Failure to appear in court to answer a citation, indictment or information usually results in an arrest warrant. In most states, failing to appear in traffic court results in a notice to the state driver license authority to revoke or suspend the person's license until the "citation" has been cleared in court.

Probation: At sentencing, judges have the option of jailing an offender or may sentence to some period of jail or some combined period of jail and probation. Basically the concept of probation is that the offender, who has been given a chance to avoid jail time, will not get into any more trouble during the period of the probation term. If so, a probation violation affidavit may be filed by a probation officer. While on probation, the offender must report to and stay in touch with a probation officer to assure that the general and special conditions of probation are complied with.