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Courts Service Victims
Charter

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WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE COURTS SERVICE

The Courts Service aims to look after the needs of crime victims by providing the following facilities and services:

- victim waiting rooms are available in almost all refurbished courthouses and also in a number of other courthouses;
- a dedicated victim suite of four rooms and reception area is available within the Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin;
- where possible, rooms will be specially set aside for victims in all future refurbishment projects;
- video link facilities are available in a number of courtrooms – subject to order of the Court, these may be used by vulnerable witnesses when they are giving evidence. If these facilities are not available in the courtroom you are attending, the Court may order the hearing to be moved to a courtroom where such facilities are available, so that you can give evidence by video link;
- reserved seating is available for the family of the deceased in murder and manslaughter cases at Central and Circuit Criminal Court hearings, by prior arrangement;
- victims can visit the courthouse before the trial, by prior arrangement and if needed;
- customer liaison officers within each of our offices – these officers are the first point of contact for inquiries by victims. Customer liaison officers can arrange access to victim rooms, where available, reserve family seating in murder and manslaughter cases, and organise advance visits to courthouses. They can also give you contact details of voluntary organisations that offer support to crime victims; and
- separate family law sittings take place at all major court venues – urgent cases, such as an application for a protection order, can still be heard at other times as well.

Other services

We also give support and information through the following services:

- our website www.courts.ie, will give you a wide range of information on going to court – the website is available in English and Irish, with some publications also available in French and Spanish. The website includes a section for people who are going to court for the first time, including as a victim or a witness;
- a publication entitled *Going to Court* – this is available as a booklet, on DVD or on our website. It gives a range of information on how the court process works, including what happens in court, who's who in court and what happens after a trial;
- an interpretation service in the court room – this is available, by order of the court, to witnesses who do not speak English so that they can give their evidence, or to make a victim impact statement where the law or the court permits a statement to be made.

We aim to provide a courteous, fair and sensitive service to victims of crime. We will continue to talk to special user groups representing victims, at both regional and national levels.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF WE DO NOT MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS

We want to give you a fast and effective service that meets your needs. If you are unhappy with any part of our service, you can contact a Customer Service Officer, who deals with complaints.

You may contact any of the following:

Head of Customer Services

Tel: (01) 888 6000

Courts Service

Fax: (01) 888 6090

Phoenix House

Website: www.courts.ie

15–24 Phoenix Street North

Smithfield

Dublin 7.

- Local District Court Clerk; or
- Local County Registrar.

You can find contact details for the last two on www.courts.ie, or in the green pages of the telephone directory under the 'Courts Service' section.

ROLE OF THE COURTS SERVICE

The Courts Service was set up in November 1999 to manage the courts. We must, by law, take account of the needs of court users, including witnesses and victims of crime. Our mandate is set out in the Courts Service Act, 1998.

The Courts Service:

- is responsible for the management and administration of the courts;
- provides facilities for court users;
- manages and maintains court buildings;
- gives information on the courts system; and
- takes into account the needs of court users, including crime victims, when developing policies and strategies to apply our mandate.

Please note that we cannot comment on or intervene in any way in sentencing matters and the giving of evidence by victims. These are matters for the judge, who is independent in carrying out his or her functions. You can only address a judge's decision through the courts – for example, through an appeal.

YOUR GUIDE TO THE CRIMINAL COURTS

Court	Criminal cases heard	Heard by	Location
District Court	Minor offences	One judge, no jury	130 courthouses
Circuit Court	More serious offences, except offences such as murder, rape, serious sexual assault Also deals with appeals from the District Court	One judge with jury	8 circuits with at least one Circuit Court sitting in each county
High Court	Known as the Central Criminal Court when trying criminal cases outside the jurisdiction of the Circuit Court – for example, murder, rape and serious sexual assault cases	One judge with jury	Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin and locations outside Dublin from time to time
Special Criminal Court (set up in 1972)	Specified offences mainly related to terrorism and serious 'organised' crime	Three judges, no jury	Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin
Court of Criminal Appeal	Appeals from the Circuit, Central and Special Criminal Courts Decisions are final, unless they involve a point of law of exceptional public interest	One Supreme Court judge and two High Court judges	Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin

Court	Criminal cases heard	Heard by	Location
Supreme Court	<p>Appeals from the Court of Criminal Appeal on a point of law of exceptional public interest</p> <p>Appeals against High Court Orders in Judicial Review applications</p> <p>Cases stated from the Circuit Court (a case stated is a written statement setting out the facts of the case)</p>	Three or, in some cases, five Supreme Court judges	Four Courts in Dublin

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