

GLOSSARY OF LEGAL TERMINOLOGY

affidavit: a written declaration made under oath

appeal: an application to a higher court for a ruling or verdict to be reviewed and reversed

attorney-client privilege: a legal concept and the law in most of the United States that keeps all communications between a client and that person's attorney confidential

capital: punishable by death

chain of evidence: also called chain of custody; the careful handling and documentation of the whereabouts of all evidence in an investigation to ensure that evidence is not lost, contaminated, or tampered with

circumstantial evidence: evidence that indicates the possibility of guilt but does not directly prove it

cllemency: mercy or leniency extended by a person in authority to a convict

commute: to change a sentence to a less severe one, such as a reduction of a death penalty sentence to life imprisonment

coroner: a government official whose job is to investigate deaths that are not clearly due to natural causes. This investigation takes place by means of an inquest.

counsel: a legal adviser such as an attorney or advice given by such a person

exculpatory evidence: evidence that tends to show that a defendant is not guilty

forensic evidence: evidence that is obtained by the use of scientific methods

grand jury: a group of citizens who are summoned to decide whether a person should be formally charged with a crime (indicted)

indict: to formally charge a person with a crime. An indictment leads to a trial to determine the guilt or innocence of the person charged.

inquest: a legal inquiry, held before a jury and led by a coroner, into a suspicious death

jury: a group of citizens who are summoned to make a decision in a legal proceeding

medical examiner: a physician appointed by the government to conduct autopsies on the bodies of people who have died under suspicious circumstances

motion: a request by an attorney for a judge to take a specific action in a legal proceeding

overrule: to reject, in the role of judge, the request of an attorney in a legal proceeding

overturn: to reverse the verdict of a lower court as the result of a successful appeal

pardon: to release a convicted person from penalty for an offense

solicitor general: a government official who prosecutes cases against accused criminals

subpoena: an official summons to appear as a witness in a legal proceeding

verdict: the decision of a jury regarding a legal matter in a trial, such as the guilt or innocence of a person charged with a crime