

# You have been charged with a criminal offence in Ontario:

## Checklist: Prepare for your first appearance

Your first appearance will take place at the Ontario Court of Justice, at the address and date and time set out on the release form the police gave to you.

Your first appearance is not your trial date.

**Arrive at the courthouse at least 30 minutes before you are required to be in court** so you can speak with the people who can help you with your case. To find out what courtroom you are in, check the court lists (dockets) posted in the courthouse. Some courts have an information desk or counter where you will check-in before court.

### Bring with you to court:

- Any papers the police or anyone else gave you relating to your charge.
- Any papers you think may be important to your case (e.g. letters from doctors, counsellors, employers, schools)
- Any financial information for your Legal Aid application (e.g. pay stubs, proof that you are receiving employment insurance or social assistance)

### Decide if you will:

- Hire a lawyer or legal representative:
  - You can access a list of local criminal lawyers by:
    - going to the Law Society of Upper Canada website: [www.lsuc.on.ca](http://www.lsuc.on.ca) and clicking on “Find a Lawyer or Paralegal”,
    - calling the Law Society at 1-800-268-8326 or 416-947-3330 (in the GTA), or
    - looking in your local Yellow Pages.
  - If your lawyer cannot be at your court appearance, bring a letter from him/her that includes details of the next step you wish to take in the process.
- Apply for Legal Aid to help pay for a lawyer:
  - Legal Aid Ontario may pay for your lawyer if you meet certain financial and legal criteria. You can learn whether you qualify for legal aid before your first appearance by calling the Client Service Centre at 1-800-668-8258.
  - Or, you can speak to a legal aid lawyer (duty counsel) at the

courthouse on your first appearance.

- Represent yourself:
  - There are legal aid lawyers (duty counsel) at the courthouse to help you on your court date if you do not have a lawyer. Duty counsel may provide advice and can assist you with a guilty plea **if you qualify financially**. Duty counsel cannot represent you at a trial.

- Get the following documents (papers or forms) from the Crown (your lawyer or duty counsel will be able to tell you how to get them) and read them carefully:
  - Crown Screening form – tells you the sentence the Crown will ask the Court to impose if you are found guilty
  - Disclosure – the Crown case against you.

- Ask the Court for an interpreter if you do not understand English well. You can also ask that your trial be conducted in French instead of English. Tell your lawyer or Duty Counsel if you will be asking for an interpreter or French trial.

- If you are First-Nation, Non-Status, Inuit, or Métis, identify yourself as an Aboriginal person. Tell your lawyer, duty counsel, or the native court worker so they can gather information related to your case.

- Get your fingerprints and/or photo taken by the police if you were given a date and time to do so. If you do not do this by the time you have been told, a warrant for your arrest may be issued and you may be charged with another criminal offence.

You can ask for an adjournment at any court appearance, but you must have a reason for the request. You can ask the court to set a trial date or plead guilty at any time in the process.

Speak to your lawyer, legal representative, or duty counsel for more information.

## **You must appear in Court before you leave the courthouse.**

If you or your lawyer do not appear in court on your court date, a warrant for your arrest may be issued and more charges may be laid.