

The Court System

Courts are a very important part of the law enforcement process. Courts have the power to assess penalties for breaking the law and settle disputes between people or organizations. Courts also protect the rights of an accused person, who is innocent until proven guilty.

There are two systems of courts in the United States--the **federal system** and the **state system**. The state courts deal with state laws. The federal court system was created by the *U.S. Constitution*. Federal courts handle cases involving federal laws, the Constitution and disputes between states and persons who live in different states.

The Federal court system consists of **District Court**, the **Court of Appeals** and the **Supreme Court**. There is at least one District Court in each state with a federal judge who presides over it. A federal district attorney is appointed for each court district to represent the government. The judges are selected by the President of the United States and approved by the Senate.

There are eleven (11) **Federal Courts of Appeals** in the United States. If a person feels a District Court decision was incorrect, an appeal may be filed with the **Circuit Court of Appeals**. Following a decision by the Circuit Court of Appeals, an appeal can be filed with the highest level--the **United States Supreme Court**.

Each state also has a court system. Since each state has the power to make its own laws, courts are different in each state. A decision from the highest state court may also be appealed to the United States Supreme Court if it involves a Constitutional matter; a treaty; or an Act of Congress.

This extensive system of state and federal courts assures each citizen the protection of the rights provided by the U. S. Constitution.

Additional Resources:

Available from the NH Bar Association's Law-Related Education Program include:

- ◆ *Understanding the NH Courts*
- ◆ *Welcome to the Federal Courts*
- ◆ *Federal Courts and What They Do*