

Infographic for Immediate Release

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The first stages of a criminal trial

HARRISBURG — Have you ever wondered how a **preliminary arraignment** is different from a **preliminary hearing**? The infographic below highlights the purpose of these first few stages of a criminal trial – as well as the timing and components of an **arraignment**. We encourage reporters to use the full graphic, or parts of the graphic, by [downloading a high-resolution version](#).

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Preliminary Arraignment

- Typically follows an arrest and is the initial appearance of a defendant usually before a magisterial district judge
- Defendant is given a copy of the charges and advised of legal rights
- Bail is determined
- Preliminary hearing date and time set

Preliminary Hearing

- This is not a trial - and helps protect people from unlawful arrest and detention
- Prosecution (referred to as the Commonwealth) must present evidence that a crime has been committed and that the accused is likely the one who committed the crime
- Judge will dismiss charges if insufficient probable cause, or order the case to move forward to the Court of Common Pleas

Arraignment

- Preliminary proceeding in the Court of Common Pleas (trial court) where the defendant is advised of the criminal charges
- Plea is entered – "guilty," "not guilty" or "no contest"
- Jury or nonjury trial requested by defendant
- Timeline identified for future court action

plea

Disclaimer: This contains simplified definitions for general informational purposes and does not encompass the full range of implications or contexts for the terms defined. The information set forth here should not be used in place of legal advice; a lawyer should be consulted for advice on specific legal issues.

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