

## CfJJ's Guide for Attending Court in Massachusetts

Attending court in support of someone with a pending court case is a great way to help and encourage them while they deal with the stress and pressure of navigating the legal system. This document provides tips and guidance for those who plan to attend court proceedings in support of a defendant in a criminal legal case to ensure that the experience is positive for you and helpful for them and their case. The information in this document is based upon both court rules and long-standing traditions and standards in the Massachusetts Court system. Courts personnel, including judges, hold certain expectations of those attending court proceedings, including maintaining a positive and respectful environment in the court that demonstrates respect for the law and for the important matters before the court.

Attending court proceedings of any kind – particularly cases alleging acts of violence – can be very emotional and stressful. Following these tips can help prepare you for the experience and ensure that your presence creates a positive impression for the person you are supporting in their court case, rather than being cast as a negative in a way that can inadvertently harm their case.

### Tips to Follow When Attending Court

1. Arrive at the courthouse well ahead of the scheduled time so that you can get through security, find the correct courtroom, and check in with the defendant's attorney if necessary.
2. Do not bring signs or other items into the courtroom. This is frowned upon.
3. Be prepared to wait for other cases to be heard. Be patient. Listen and observe. Courts often have a busy docket, and it may take a significant period of time for the case you are there for to be called.
4. Be prepared to see friends and/or family of the alleged victim in a criminal case, as they are likely waiting to attend the same court hearing or trial. If this happens, you should maintain a respectful and polite distance and do your best to avoid any type of negative encounter. Once you go into the courtroom, you will generally sit on the left side of the courtroom behind the defense counsel table, while the friends and families of the alleged victim typically sit on the right side of the courtroom behind the prosecutor's table.
5. Dress in a way that shows respect for the court. You do not have to buy new clothes for court, but halter tops, worn out jeans, and T-shirts aren't appropriate. Be certain that your clothing appears neat and clean. Avoid wearing distracting clothing, including anything with profanity or language that can be perceived as controversial, as this can cast a negative impression on the person you are there to support.
6. Upon entering the courthouse, you will pass through a brief security check, including walking through a metal detector. Make sure that you do not bring any weapons or contraband on your person.
7. If possible, do not bring young children to court. Children can be perceived as a distraction from the important events taking place in court and many topics that come up are considered inappropriate for children to hear. It is also difficult to attend to the needs of children and remain focused on the proceedings.
8. If you have no other options and must bring children, have someone come with you who can watch them while you are in the courtroom and bring books or quiet games to keep children occupied.

# Rules and Responsibilities When Inside the Courtroom

1. Sit quietly when court is in session. Do not chat or whisper with others.
2. Be courteous, fair, and polite to everyone you encounter.
3. Hats or other head coverings should not be worn into the courtroom unless worn for religious reasons.
4. Do not chew gum, eat, or drink in the courtroom.
5. Do not read newspapers or books in the courtroom or use your phone.
6. Pay attention to what is going on in the courtroom even if it is not your turn to be heard. Listen, observe, and learn from other matters being heard. This will help your understanding when the case you are there for is called.
7. Be prepared to stand when the judge enters or leaves the courtroom. The court officer will say "all rise" to tell you when to stand and when the Judge sits the court officer will say "you can be seated". If you're in doubt, stand when the judge is standing. You can usually sit down once the judge is seated unless you are speaking with the judge.
8. Do not talk on your way in or out, even right outside the door of the courtroom. Many times, another hearing may be wrapping up, or starting as soon as yours ends, and your talking can interfere with the previous or next case.
9. During the hearing, you may hear things that are painful, triggering and that may make you emotional. Be prepared for this and try to control your emotions. Do not yell or react to other speakers by sighing or gesturing or acting in a manner that could negatively catch the attention of the judge. This will not help the case of the person you are there to support, it makes their attorney's job more difficult, and could actually hurt the case .
10. Check in with the attorney for the person you are supporting. The visual of family and community support is powerful and making sure that the attorney can reference it is important. If there are people in support who can provide services or support to the defendant, mention that to the attorney so that he can use that in his arguments before the judge if appropriate.
11. If you are asked to address the court, stand when called upon and always address the judge as "your honor".

## Cell Phone Usage at the Courthouse

1. Court visitors may use cell phones and other PEDs in the public areas of the courthouse, provided the activity does not disrupt or disturb court business or proceedings. **However, it is important to note that cell phones or cameras may not be used to take photographs or video in a courtroom, or anywhere else inside a courthouse.**
2. Cell phones and cameras belonging to members of the public must be turned off or set to silent mode and stowed away prior to entering a courtroom.
3. These are strict court rules and violating them may result in confiscation of your phone for the duration of the court visit, or expulsion from the courthouse.
4. If you need to use your phone, including texting, quietly exit the courtroom and go back into the hallway. Court officers typically frown upon frequent entry and exiting from the courtroom, so try not to do this too often.



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