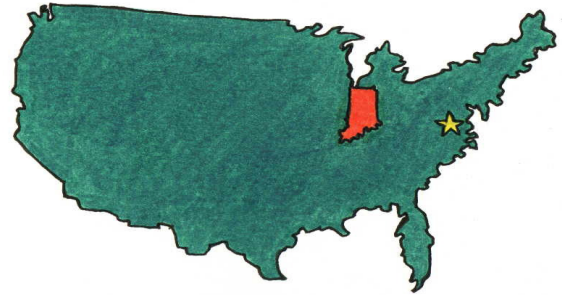


Sources of Law

Have you ever gotten into trouble for breaking a rule that you didn't know existed? Did you think it was unfair that you got into trouble? Did you wonder why there are so many rules? In our society, there are many rules called laws. Even though you are not an adult, it is your responsibility to know and follow the law. This chapter explains where the law comes from.



1. Where does Indiana law come from?

Indiana law comes from the Indiana constitution, Indiana statutes, and Indiana case law. The Indiana constitution is a document that describes the laws and explains what the government can and cannot do. Indiana statutes are the laws made by the Indiana General Assembly. The Indiana General Assembly is a group of politicians that Indiana citizens, age eighteen and over, vote for. The laws the General Assembly write are called the Indiana Code (I.C.). Indiana case law comes from Indiana judges who interpret and apply the laws that the Indiana General Assembly write.

2. What is the United States Code?

The United States Code is the name of the laws the United States Congress writes that apply to all fifty states of the United States. Before laws become part of the United States Code, they are approved by the President.

3. What is the difference between state law and federal law?

State laws apply to everyone in that state, whether they live there or are visiting. Each state has its own body of laws. For instance, if you are in Kentucky on vacation, then Kentucky law applies to you while you are in the state of Kentucky. Federal laws apply to everyone in the United States of America. The federal laws are the same for all fifty states.

4. Are there city laws?

Yes. Every city has its own special laws that apply to just that city. City laws are called "city ordinances." Each city in Indiana has city ordinances.

5. What is the difference between civil law and criminal law?

Civil laws are laws that relate to the way you interact with other people. Civil laws tell you when you can marry, when contracts are valid, and how to operate a business. Criminal laws are laws that relate to the way you interact with society as

a whole. When you break a criminal law, society as a whole is hurt, not just the individual victim.

6. Are there special laws for youth?

Yes. The following chapters will explain the Indiana laws that apply to youth under age eighteen.

