

The 2026 Maryland Defense Toolkit

*When life takes an unexpected turn,
the next decision matters.*

Your rights, your first moves, and the Maryland-specific facts that protect you, from the trial attorneys at Cochran & Chhabra Law Group. Read it now. Keep it close. Use it if you ever need it.

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Hablamos español.

Read this first

Most people don't think about legal risk until they are already in it. When something happens, instinct takes over, and instinct is usually wrong. The right move at the right moment is what changes the outcome.

This is not legal advice. It is a framework, built by attorneys who handle these cases in Maryland every day, so you know what to do, what not to do, and exactly when to call. Pages marked **Fillable** are designed to print and write in.

01

Say less.

You are not required to explain yourself. Silence is a constitutional right, not a sign of guilt. Use it.

02

Document everything.

Names, times, locations, photos, messages, paperwork. Save it before it disappears. Digital evidence vanishes fast.

03

Call early.

The sooner you speak with a lawyer, the more options you have. Waiting costs leverage. Early guidance prevents worse outcomes.

How to use this toolkit

Sections 01–07

Read them now, before you need them: your rights, your first moves, Maryland DUI law, what not to say, the first 24 hours, how a criminal case moves, and when to call a lawyer.

Sections 08–11

Fillable pages. Print them, fill them in while details are fresh, and keep them with your court papers.

Sections 12–13

What happens when you contact us, plus quick first steps for expungement, injury and family-law situations.

Current as of

September 2026. Maryland law changes; if your situation is urgent, call us for the rules that apply today.

01 Know Your Rights

Whether you are pulled over, approached by police or arrested, these constitutional rights protect you. Knowing them is the first step in any defense.

I The Right to Remain Silent

During a traffic stop, show your license and registration when asked. Beyond that, you don't have to answer questions about where you've been or what you've had to drink. Anything you say can be used against you.

II The Right to an Attorney

You can ask for a lawyer before and during any questioning. Once you ask, stop talking until you have one. If you can't afford a lawyer, you can apply for a public defender.

III The Right Against Unreasonable Searches

Police generally need a warrant to search your home. A car is different: officers can search it without a warrant if they have probable cause. Either way, say clearly that you do not consent. It may not stop the search, but it preserves your right to challenge it later.

IV The Right to Know the Charges

If you are arrested, you have the right to know what you are charged with. You will receive a charging document, and a District Court commissioner will go over the charges with you.

SAY IT EXACTLY LIKE THIS

"I am exercising my right to remain silent."

"I would like to speak with my attorney before answering any questions."

"I do not consent to a search."

"Am I free to leave?"

02 If This Happens — Do This

Three situations where your first moves matter most.

DUI / DWI stop

- Pull over safely, turn off the engine and keep your hands visible on the wheel.
- Provide your license, registration and proof of insurance when asked.
- You may decline roadside field sobriety tests, such as the walk-and-turn and the one-leg stand.
- A breath or blood test after an arrest is different. Under Maryland's implied-consent law, refusing it carries its own license suspension. See Section 03.
- Stay calm. Don't argue, resist or flee.

Arrest

- Do not resist, even if you believe the arrest is unfair.
- Say clearly: "I am exercising my right to remain silent."
- Ask for a lawyer before answering any questions.
- Say that you do not consent to any search.
- Remember the names and badge numbers of the officers involved.

Accident or injury

- Call 911 if anyone is hurt. Safety comes first.
- Do not admit fault — not to police, not to the other party.
- Document everything: photos, witness information, officer names and report numbers.
- Do not give a recorded statement to any insurer without counsel.
- Get medical attention promptly, even for what seems minor.

03

DUI & DWI in Maryland

Maryland treats driving under the influence (DUI) as the more serious charge and driving while impaired (DWI) as the lesser one. The numbers below are why an early, strategic defense matters.

FIRST-OFFENSE PENALTIES — AT A GLANCE		
	DUI (first offense)	DWI (first offense)
Maximum jail	1 year	2 months
Maximum fine	\$1,200	\$500
License points	12 — the revocation level	8 — the suspension level
With a child in the vehicle	Up to 2 years and \$2,000	Up to 1 year and \$1,200

Statutory maximums under Md. Code, Transportation §21-902 and §16-402; actual sentences are often lower. Repeat offenses carry higher penalties, including mandatory jail for a second DUI within five years.

BAC thresholds

- **0.08 or more:** DUI per se, for most drivers.
- **0.07 to 0.079:** evidence of DWI, not a separate legal limit. DWI can also be charged at lower levels based on driving and other evidence.
- **0.04 or more in a commercial vehicle:** a one-year CDL disqualification.
- **Under 21:** any alcohol at all violates your license restriction.

Implied consent

By driving in Maryland, you have agreed to chemical testing. Refusing a breath or blood test after an arrest brings a separate MVA suspension — 270 days for a first refusal.

That is not the same as declining roadside field sobriety tests. An attorney can tell you which applies to your stop.

The deadline to know. Requesting an MVA hearing within 10 days of the date on your Order of Suspension can preserve your temporary driving privilege while the MVA process is pending. A hearing may still be requested within 30 days, but a request made after day 10 does not extend the 45-day temporary license.

04 What Not to Say

The fastest way to make things worse is to start explaining. Restraint is your strongest tool. These are the mistakes people make every day.

✗ Do not admit fault. Not at the scene. Not to police. Not to insurance. Not casually. Anything that sounds like an admission becomes part of the record.	✗ Do not guess. If you are unsure of something, say less. A guess under pressure becomes a statement on the record.
✗ Do not post online. Posts, stories, check-ins and comments can become evidence faster than people realize.	✗ Do not keep talking. Explaining rarely helps in the moment. It hands over details that can be used against you in ways you did not expect.

“Good legal outcomes start with what you did not say — not what you did.”

05 The First 24 Hours

The next 24 hours can change the direction of a case. What you do, and don't do, matters more than most people realize.

DO THIS

- ✓ Exercise your right to remain silent.
- ✓ Ask for a lawyer before answering questions.
- ✓ Write down everything you remember while it is fresh.
- ✓ Save photos, messages, receipts and documents.
- ✓ Note officer names, badge numbers, the time and the place.
- ✓ Tell one trusted person what happened.
- ✓ If you were charged with DUI, find the date on your Order of Suspension.

AVOID THIS

- ✗ Do not consent to a search if asked.
- ✗ Do not discuss the case with others in custody, or on a jail phone.
- ✗ Do not contact witnesses or the other party.
- ✗ Do not post anything on social media.
- ✗ Do not delete digital evidence, even unfavorable material.
- ✗ Do not assume it will go away on its own.

06 The Criminal Process, Step by Step

If you are charged in Maryland, understanding the path ahead reduces fear and helps you make informed decisions. Most cases move through some or all of these stages.

1 **Arrest and booking**

You are taken into custody, fingerprinted and processed.

2 **Initial appearance**

A District Court commissioner tells you the charges and decides whether to release you, and on what conditions, no later than 24 hours after the arrest.

3 **Bail review**

If you are not released, a judge reviews the commissioner's decision at the next session of court.

4 **Preliminary hearing (felonies)**

In a felony case, you can ask for a preliminary hearing, where a judge decides whether there is probable cause. It doesn't happen if a grand jury indicts first.

5 **Arraignment and plea**

You enter a plea: not guilty, guilty or, with the court's approval, nolo contendere (no contest).

6 **Discovery and pretrial motions**

Both sides exchange evidence. Your attorney investigates, files motions and builds your defense.

7 **Trial or plea agreement**

Your case is resolved through negotiation, or at a trial before a judge or jury.

8 **Sentencing**

If you are convicted, the court decides the sentence based on the charges, your history and any mitigating factors.

The earlier you involve an attorney, the more options you have: evidence can be challenged, charges reduced, and some cases dismissed entirely.

07 When to Call a Lawyer

Not every situation needs a lawyer. The ones that do usually become obvious fast.

You were charged, arrested or questioned.

Call

There are injuries, insurance issues or blame being assigned.

Call

You received legal documents, a court date or an official notice.

Call

You received an Order of Suspension from the MVA.

Call

Someone is threatening legal action against you.

Call

You are not sure what applies to you or what to say next.

Call

“Early guidance does not create a problem. It prevents a worse one.”

08 Defense Checklist

FILLABLE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ Write down everything you remember as soon as possible.

☐ Do not delete any digital evidence, even unfavorable material.

☐ Note the names and badge numbers of everyone involved.

☐ Attend every court date. Missing one can lead to a warrant.

☐ Do not contact the alleged victim or witnesses directly.

☐ Ask about diversion, expungement and plea options.

☐ Save photos, videos, texts, emails and receipts.

☐ Get a copy of the police report when it is available.

☐ Keep all court documents and notices in one folder.

☐ Follow all release conditions exactly as stated.

☐ Do not sign anything you do not fully understand.

☐ Speak with your attorney before making any case decisions.

09 My Incident Record

FILLABLE · WRITE WHILE IT IS FRESH

Memory fades and details matter. Fill this in as soon as you safely can, then bring it to your consultation.

DATE & TIME

LOCATION

WHAT HAPPENED, IN YOUR OWN WORDS

OFFICER NAME(S) & BADGE #

CHARGES / CITATION #

WITNESSES & HOW TO REACH THEM

POLICE REPORT NUMBER

EVIDENCE SAVED

- ☐ Photos / video ☐ Texts / emails ☐ Receipts / documents ☐ Medical records
- ☐ Names of witnesses

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Contacts & Court-Date Log

FILLABLE · KEEP IT ALL IN ONE PLACE

Key contacts

NAME / ROLE	PHONE	EMAIL / NOTES

Court dates & deadlines

DATE	TIME	COURT / PURPOSE

11 Questions to Ask Before You Hire a Maryland Attorney

FILLABLE · BRING THIS TO EVERY CONSULTATION

- ☐ Have you handled cases like mine in this county, and how did they turn out?
- ☐ Will you personally handle my case, or will someone else?
- ☐ What are the likely outcomes, and what is your honest assessment of mine?
- ☐ How, and how often, will you communicate with me?
- ☐ How do your fees work, and what could change them?
- ☐ What can I do right now to help my own case?
- ☐ Are there diversion, expungement or plea options worth considering?

MY OWN QUESTIONS

12

What a Free Consultation Looks Like

Reaching out costs nothing and commits you to nothing. Here is what to expect.

I You tell us what happened A few details about your situation are all we need to start. Confidential from the first word.	2 We review it, free A real member of our team gives you an honest read on your options, usually within 24 hours.	3 You decide, no pressure If we are a fit, we explain fees clearly and up front, with no surprises. If not, you have lost nothing.
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How fees work

Fees depend on the type and complexity of your case. We explain them clearly before you commit, and personal-injury matters are typically handled on a contingency basis, meaning you pay nothing unless we recover for you. Submitting a form or calling does not create an attorney–client relationship.

13 Quick Guides — Other Situations

Expungement — quick eligibility check

Many charges, and some convictions, can be cleared from your record once you are eligible. You may qualify if:

- ☐ Your case ended in an acquittal, a dismissal, a nolle prosequi or a probation before judgment.
- ☐ Enough time has passed since the case closed (waiting periods vary by outcome).
- ☐ You have no pending charges, and the offense is eligible under Maryland law.

Checked a box or two? The rules are specific. Try the free Expungement Check at blog.cclaw.group/expungement-check, or call us.

Personal injury — first steps

- Get medical attention and keep every record and bill.
- Photograph injuries, the scene and any property damage.
- Do not give a recorded statement to an insurer without counsel.
- Do not accept a quick settlement before you know the full extent of the harm.

Family law emergency — first steps

- Document communications carefully and avoid heated written exchanges.
- Keep children out of the conflict and off social media.
- Secure copies of key financial and custody documents.
- If anyone is in danger, call 911 first, then seek counsel.

NEED HELP NOW?

One conversation can change everything.

If you or someone you know is facing criminal charges, a DUI, an injury or a family law matter in Maryland, talk to us. Free, confidential consultations. We serve clients in English, Spanish, Punjabi and Hindi.

[REQUEST A FREE CONSULTATION](#)[CALL 410.268.5515](tel:410.268.5515)

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This toolkit is general information, not legal advice, and it reflects Maryland law as of September 2026. Contacting the firm does not create an attorney–client relationship. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome.

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