



Portage County Courts Online — Dockets, Tickets & Paying a Fine

Dockets, Tickets & Paying a Fine Online

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1783** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Here is the whole guide in a nutshell. Portage County has a Municipal Court with a Ravenna branch and a Kent branch, a Court of Common Pleas for larger cases, and a Clerk of Courts who keeps the records. Start only at portagecounty-oh.gov and type that address yourself. From the Clerk of Courts or Courts pages you can search public court records by name or by case number and read the docket, which is simply the list of events in a case. If you have a traffic ticket, find the ticket number, read the deadline, and use the county's own payment portal. The county warns against third party payment sites. Save your confirmation. A real court never demands gift cards and never asks for your password or a code by phone. If any of this feels tangled, that is exactly what I help neighbors with, so please call me.

1. What This Guide Covers

Dockets, tickets, and fines, explained gently.

If you have ever gotten a traffic ticket, a notice in the mail from a court, or just wondered how to look up a case, this guide is for you. Portage County puts a good deal of court information online, and you can use it from your kitchen table without standing in a line.

I wrote this guide for neighbors who feel nervous about anything involving a court. Take a breath. Looking up a record is not the same as being in trouble, and paying a fine online is usually much simpler than people expect.

We will cover who the different courts are, how to find the official county website, how to search for a case, how to read what you find, and how to pay a ticket safely. We will also spend time on scams, because people who owe a fine, or fear they do, are a favorite target.

- Which court handles which kind of case
- Searching the public court records
- Understanding a ticket and your choices
- Paying safely, and keeping your receipt
- Spotting fake fine notices

Take your time with each section. You can read a chapter, put the guide down, and come back later. Nothing in these pages has to be finished in one sitting.

GOOD TO KNOW

Nothing in this guide is legal advice. It explains how the online tools work. For questions about your own case, the court staff or a lawyer are the right people to ask.

2. Which Court Is Which

Three names you will hear most.

Portage County has more than one court, and the names can blur together. A short map helps. There is the Portage County Municipal Court, which has a Ravenna branch and a Kent branch. There is the Portage County Court of Common Pleas. And there is the Clerk of Courts, who keeps the paperwork.

Most people meet the Municipal Court first, usually through a traffic ticket or a minor criminal charge called a misdemeanor. Common Pleas handles the heavier matters, such as felonies, larger civil lawsuits, and family cases like divorce.

The Clerk of Courts is not a judge and does not decide cases. Think of the clerk as the careful record keeper and cashier. Filings, case files, and many payments pass through that office.

- Municipal Court: traffic tickets, misdemeanors, small claims
- Common Pleas: felonies, larger civil cases, domestic relations
- Clerk of Courts: case files, filings, and payments

If the three names still blur together, that is completely normal. Even people who have lived here all their lives mix them up, and the paper from the court always says which one it is.

TIP

If you are not sure which court your paper came from, look at the top of it. The court name is almost always printed there, along with a case or ticket number.

3. The Municipal Court in Ravenna and Kent

One court, two buildings.

The Portage County Municipal Court serves the whole county from two locations. The Ravenna branch is at 203 W. Main St. in Ravenna, and the Kent branch is at 303 East Main Street in Kent. Which one handles your matter usually depends on where the ticket or incident happened.

Both branches share a traffic and criminal division. That means a speeding ticket written in the Kent area and one written near Ravenna are handled by the same court, just at different buildings. Your paper will tell you which branch to use.

Phone numbers I found on the county website are (330) 297-3639 for Ravenna and (330) 678-9100 for Kent. Numbers and hours can change, so confirm them on the official site before you drive anywhere.

- Ravenna branch: 203 W. Main St., Ravenna
- Kent branch: 303 East Main Street, Kent
- Traffic and misdemeanor cases at both

It helps to picture the two buildings as two front desks for the same organization. The rules are the same, and only the address and the counter you walk up to differ.

WATCH OUT

Do not go to the wrong building on court day. Read your notice for the branch name and time, and call ahead if anything looks unclear.

4. The Court of Common Pleas

Where the larger cases are heard.

The Court of Common Pleas is the county's main trial court for serious matters. It has a General Division, which hears felony criminal cases and larger civil lawsuits, and a Domestic Relations Division, which handles divorces, custody, and support.

Most seniors never need this court for anything but a lookup. Perhaps a family member is involved in a case, or you want to confirm a filing. The county's online records include the Common Pleas General and Domestic Relations divisions, so you can look them up in the same place as other courts.

You may also see Probate Court mentioned, which deals with estates and guardianships. It appears in the county's court links and records, though it is a separate court with its own staff.

- General Division: felonies and larger civil cases
- Domestic Relations: divorce, custody, support
- Probate: estates and guardianships

For most readers, this chapter is simply background. You may never need anything from Common Pleas, but knowing it exists keeps a notice from feeling like a mystery.

GOOD TO KNOW

Case numbers often include letters that hint at the type. Civil cases, for example, carry the letters CV, and domestic relations cases carry DR.

5. What the Clerk of Courts Does

The record keeper for the courts.

The Clerk of Courts is the office that receives, stamps, stores, and sends out court paperwork. When someone files a lawsuit, pays court costs, or asks for a copy of a document, the clerk's office is usually involved.

For you, the clerk matters in two ways. First, the clerk's office runs the online system where you can search the public records. Second, the county directs people to the clerk's online portal to pay certain court amounts, rather than to outside websites.

The clerk cannot give legal advice. Staff can tell you how a process works, where to find a form, and what a document is called. They cannot tell you what to decide or how your case will turn out.

- Keeps case files and filings
- Runs the public records search
- Takes payments through the county portal
- Cannot give legal advice

A good rule of thumb is that the clerk answers questions about paperwork and process, while a lawyer answers questions about what you should decide.

TIP

When you call, have your case or ticket number in hand. It lets staff find you in seconds and saves you from spelling your name three times.

6. What to Have Ready First

A few things make the whole visit easier.

Before you sit down at the computer, gather what you can. You do not need everything on this list, but each item saves time. The most useful single item is your ticket or case number.

- Your ticket, citation, or notice, with its number

- Your full legal name as the court would spell it
- A computer, tablet, or phone with internet
- A debit or credit card, if you plan to pay online
- A pen and paper for your confirmation number

If you are only searching, you may need nothing but a name. If you are paying, the number on your ticket is the key that unlocks the right account. Without it, the portal may not find you.

Give yourself a calm half hour. These pages are not timed in a way that should rush you, and there is no prize for speed.

Having these items together before you start prevents the common frustration of getting halfway through a page and having to hunt for a missing number.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you have lost your ticket, you can often find the number by searching your name in the public records, or by calling the clerk or court.

7. Getting to the Real Website

Start at the county, not at a search ad.

The county's official website is portagecounty-oh.gov, which ends in dot gov. The courts and the Clerk of Courts each have pages there. Type that address into the bar at the top of your browser yourself.

From the home page, look for a menu or heading called Courts, Municipal Court, or Clerk of Courts. Each leads to information, forms, and links to the records search and payment options.

The online payment portal I found listed on the county's pages is at services.portageco.com. The county's notice specifically says not to use third party services when you pay. If you ever reach a portal through some other route, go back and start at portagecounty-oh.gov instead.

- 1 Open your browser and click the address bar.
- 2 Type portagecounty-oh.gov and press Enter.
- 3 Look for Courts or Clerk of Courts in the menu.
- 4 Follow the link for records or payments from there.

Bookmarking the county site once you have reached it the correct way means next time you are only one click from the real thing, with no typing and no guessing.

WATCH OUT

Search engines sometimes show paid ads above the real result. Skip anything labeled Ad, and look for the dot gov address.

8. Finding the Court Records Search

One doorway to several courts.

Portage County offers a public court records search. According to the county's Court Links page, the site holds case information from the Common Pleas General and Domestic Relations divisions, Probate Court, and the Ravenna and Kent Municipal Court, going back to 1992.

That is a lot of history in one place, and it means one search can reach several courts. You do not need to know in advance which court your case is in.

The exact wording of the link may change over time. Look for a phrase such as Search Court Records on the Clerk of Courts page or the Courts page of portagecounty-oh.gov.

- 1 Go to portagecounty-oh.gov.
- 2 Open the Clerk of Courts or Courts page.
- 3 Click the link for searching court records.
- 4 Read the short notice on the first screen and accept it to continue, if asked.

The records search looks a little plain, and that is fine. Plain pages are easier to follow, and each box has a label above or beside it telling you what to type.

GOOD TO KNOW

The county includes a disclaimer that it does not guarantee the information is accurate. Treat the screen as a helpful lookup, and check with the clerk if the details matter.

9. Searching by Name

The easiest way to start.

If you do not have a case number, a name search is the natural place to begin. You will usually see boxes for a last name and a first name, and a way to choose which court to search or to search all of them.

Start small. Type the last name and first name exactly as you think they appear on court paperwork. If you get too many results, add details. If you get none, try again with fewer.

- Try the full legal name, not a nickname
- Try with and without a middle initial
- Check the spelling of unusual surnames
- Common names return many results, so narrow them

Remember that many people share the same name. Seeing a record that matches a name does not always mean it belongs to the person you have in mind. Look at other details, such as the case type and dates, before drawing conclusions.

There is no harm in searching several times with different spellings. The search only looks things up and does not send anything to the court or change any record.

TIP

If a name search shows too much, add the case type or a date range if the form offers it. That trims the list quickly.

10. Searching by Case or Ticket Number

The most exact way to find a case.

A number search takes you straight to one case. Your ticket or notice shows a number, and typing it in is faster and more precise than searching a name.

Case numbers often combine a year, letters for the type of case, and a sequence number. The clerk's public notices show examples such as a year followed by CV and digits for a civil case. Type the number just as it appears on your paper.

The county's older payment instructions advised that, for an initial search, you enter the ticket number only. If a search fails, try the number alone, without extra spaces or dashes, and try again carefully.

- 1 Find the number on your ticket or notice.
- 2 Choose the number search option on the screen.
- 3 Type the number with care, character by character.
- 4 Select Search and wait for the result.

Take your time typing. A single wrong character is the most common reason a search fails, and it has nothing to do with whether your case exists.

WATCH OUT

Zero and the letter O look alike, as do the number one and the letter I. If a number will not work, double check these first.

11. Reading a Docket

What the list of entries means.

A docket is simply the running list of everything that has happened in a case, in order. Each line records an event, such as a filing, a hearing date, a judge's order, or a payment.

When you open a case, you may see basic information at the top: the parties, the case type, the court, and the judge or assigned officer. Below that, the docket lists entries with dates.

Read from the oldest entry to the newest to follow the story. The newest entry tells you where things stand. If you see a future date, it is often a scheduled hearing, so write it down.

- Top section: who, what court, what type
- Entries: dated events in order
- Future dates: hearings or deadlines
- Payments: shown when the court records them

Reading a docket is a skill that comes quickly. After you have looked at one or two, the layout becomes familiar and the formal wording stops feeling so strange.

WATCH OUT

Do not worry if some wording sounds stiff. Court entries are written in formal language. If a line confuses you, ask the clerk's office to explain what it means, in plain words.

12. Common Words You Will See

A small glossary for the docket.

Court records use words most of us do not say at the dinner table. A few of them come up again and again. Knowing them takes much of the fear out of reading a docket.

- Plaintiff: the person or business who brings a civil case
- Defendant: the person who is being charged or sued
- Citation: the ticket you were handed
- Arraignment: the first hearing, where charges are read

- Continuance: a hearing moved to a later date
- Disposition: how the case ended
- Waiver: a way to resolve certain tickets without a hearing

None of these words mean something is wrong. They simply label the steps. A continuance, for instance, is very common and often just means everyone needed more time.

You do not need to memorize any of these. Keep the list beside you when you read a docket, and look words up as they appear, one at a time.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a term is not listed here, a quick search for its plain-English meaning is fine. The Ohio Legal Help website is a reliable place to read about court terms.

13. What the Online Record May Not Show

Know the limits of the screen.

The public search is useful, but it is not a complete picture. Some documents may not be available online, some details are kept private by law, and entries may take time to appear after something happens in court.

Records involving certain matters, such as sealed cases or protected personal details, will not appear or will be partly hidden. That is intentional and protects people.

Because of that, a missing entry does not prove nothing happened. If a payment you made does not show yet, do not panic. Wait a few days, and then contact the clerk with your receipt in hand.

- Entries can lag behind real events
- Sealed or protected records may not appear
- Not every document is viewable online
- The county does not guarantee accuracy

When in doubt, a short phone call to the clerk's office is more reliable than any guess. Ask them to confirm what the court's official file shows today.

WATCH OUT

Never rely only on a screen to decide whether you have a deadline. If a date matters, confirm it with the court by phone.

14. Understanding Your Traffic Ticket

What the paper in your hand tells you.

A traffic ticket looks like a form full of boxes, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Slow down and look for just a few items. Everything you need to act is on that sheet.

- The ticket or citation number
- The court name and which branch
- The charge, in brief words
- A date to appear or respond by
- Instructions for how to pay or contest

The date on the ticket matters. It tells you when you must either take care of it or appear in court. Mark it on your calendar the moment you get it.

The ticket may also describe your options, such as paying a fine by the deadline or appearing before a judge. If the wording is unclear, the court's phone number is printed there or can be found on the county website.

Most of the stress around a ticket comes from the unknown. Once you have found the number, the date, and the court, the matter becomes a short list of tasks.

TIP

Take a photo of the ticket with your phone, front and back, as soon as you receive it. Paper gets lost, and the photo gives you the number whenever you need it.

15. Your Choices With a Ticket

Pay it, or ask to be heard.

In general, a minor traffic ticket gives you two paths. You can accept the charge and pay the fine, or you can ask to appear before a judge to explain or contest it. Which one is right depends on your situation and on what the ticket says.

Some tickets allow a waiver, which lets you plead guilty and pay by mail or online without going to court. The county posts a waiver information sheet for traffic and criminal citations on its Clerk of Courts pages. Not every charge qualifies, so read your paper to see whether yours does.

Paying a fine usually counts as admitting the violation, and it can affect your driving record and insurance. That is worth thinking about before you pay.

- Pay by the deadline, if the ticket allows it
- Appear in court to contest the charge
- Ask the court which options apply to you

Whichever path you choose, act before the deadline on the ticket. A late response tends to make a simple matter more complicated and sometimes more costly.

GOOD TO KNOW

I am not a lawyer and cannot tell you which choice is best. For serious charges, speak with an attorney. Ohio Legal Help lists free legal resources.

16. Paying a Ticket Online, Step by Step

Using the county's own portal.

Paying online is quick once you know the path. The county directs people to the Clerk of Courts online portal for court payments. Start from the county website, not from an email or text.

- 1 Type portagecounty-oh.gov into your browser yourself.
- 2 Open the Clerk of Courts or Municipal Court page.
- 3 Choose the link for paying a ticket or making a payment online.
- 4 Search using your ticket number, as printed on your citation.
- 5 Check that the name and charge match your paper.
- 6 Choose how to pay and enter your card or bank details.
- 7 Review the total, then confirm.
- 8 Save or print the confirmation page.

If anything on the screen does not match your ticket, stop and call the court before paying. It is far easier to ask first than to correct a payment afterward.

Go slowly on each screen and read it before clicking. The portal is built for ordinary people, and nothing happens until you press the final confirmation button.

WATCH OUT

Do not pay unless the web address in the bar ends in a county or dot gov style address you reached from portagecounty-oh.gov. If unsure, call the court.

17. Fees and Payment Methods

Costs, in plain words.

The fine itself is set by the court. When you pay by card online, a processing fee is usually added. An older county document I found mentioned a percentage fee on major credit cards, but I could not confirm whether that is still the rule, so the portal will show you the real amount before you finish.

Look for a line that shows the fine, any court costs, and any fee for using a card. These add up to your total. Read it before you click the final button.

If the extra fee bothers you, ask the court whether paying by check or money order, by mail or in person, avoids it. Many people choose that route for exactly this reason.

- Fine plus court costs make up the base amount
- Card payments often carry a processing fee
- Checks and money orders may avoid that fee
- Always read the total before confirming

You may wish to jot the amount and date on a piece of paper as well, so that you can compare it later against your card or bank statement.

TIP

Only use a card you are comfortable using online. A debit card ties directly to your bank, so some people prefer a credit card for the extra protection.

18. Avoiding Look-Alike Payment Sites

The county's own warning.

The county's payment page carries an important warning. To make sure the Clerk of Courts actually receives your online payment, do not use third party applications or services. Use the official portal only.

Why does this matter? Outside sites may charge extra fees, may be slow in passing the money along, or may simply be built by scammers to collect your card number. A late or missing payment can cause real trouble on your case.

The easy fix is the habit we have talked about. Begin at portagecounty-oh.gov, follow the links the county provides, and never begin from a link in a message.

- Start at the county's dot gov site

- Follow only the county's own payment link
- Skip convenience sites that offer to pay for you
- Keep your confirmation as proof

Bill's rule is simple: if you did not type the address yourself, or if the county's own page did not send you there, do not enter a card number.

WATCH OUT

A site promising to pay your ticket for a service charge, or to make it vanish, is not the court. Close it and use the county's portal.

19. Saving Your Receipt

Proof that you paid.

After you pay, you should see a confirmation page with a number and the amount. That page is your proof. Please keep it, even if it feels like overkill.

- Use your browser's Print option for a paper copy
- Choose Save as PDF to keep a digital copy
- Write the confirmation number in a notebook
- Note the date and the last four card digits only

A confirmation email may also arrive. Emails get deleted, so I would still print or save the page itself.

A few days later, you can search your case again to see whether the payment appears. If it does not show after a reasonable wait, call the clerk and give them your receipt number. With proof in your hand, the conversation is short and friendly.

Put the receipt in the same place every time. People who keep one tidy folder rarely spend an afternoon searching for proof they already had.

GOOD TO KNOW

Keep your receipt at least as long as the court's record shows the case closed. A simple folder labeled Court is plenty.

20. Paying by Mail

A quiet option if you prefer paper.

If you would rather not enter a card online, paying by mail is a long-standing option. The county's older waiver instructions said payment by check or money order should be made payable to the Portage County Municipal Court, with the defendant's name and ticket number written on it.

Because details may have changed, call the court or read your ticket for the correct payee and mailing address before you send anything. The Ravenna branch lists a post office box on county materials, so use whatever address your own paperwork or the court gives you.

- 1 Confirm the payee name and mailing address with the court.
- 2 Write your name and ticket number on the check or money order.
- 3 Make a copy or take a photo of what you send.
- 4 Mail it early, allowing time for delivery before the deadline.
- 5 Check the record online later to see it posted.

Mailing takes longer than paying online, so choose this option early. A payment that arrives after the deadline may not count as being on time.

WATCH OUT

Use a method that leaves a trail, such as a check or money order, and never mail cash.

21. Paying in Person

Face to face at the clerk's counter.

Some neighbors simply prefer to hand over a payment and get a receipt on the spot. You can do this at the court office. The older county materials listed weekday daytime hours, but hours can change, so call first.

Bring your ticket, a photo ID, and your payment. Ask which forms of payment the counter accepts, since this may differ from the online options.

- Call ahead to confirm hours and payment types
- Bring your ticket and photo ID
- Go to the branch named on your paper
- Ask for a printed receipt before you leave

The staff see people in your position every day, and they are generally patient. You do not need to explain yourself at length. Just say you are there to pay a ticket and show them the

paper.

If you are nervous about going alone, ask a friend or relative to drive you and wait nearby. Having company often makes the errand much calmer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Parking in downtown Ravenna and Kent can take a few extra minutes. Leave early so you are not rushed at the counter.

22. Calling the Court With Questions

What to say and what to ask.

A phone call can clear up a lot. Court staff can confirm whether a ticket is on file, which branch it belongs to, and which ways of paying are available. They can also tell you what a certain term on your paper means.

Before dialing, get your ticket in front of you, a pen, and a quiet spot. Begin by saying your name and ticket number. Then ask your question in one sentence.

- Is my ticket on file, and at which branch?
- What is the deadline to respond?
- Can I pay online, by mail, or in person?
- How do I ask for a court date?
- How will I know my payment was received?

Write down the name of the person you spoke with and the date and time. It sounds fussy, but it helps if something is mixed up later.

Keep the call short and polite. Court staff handle a great many calls, and a clear question with a ticket number ready gets you the quickest, kindest answer.

WATCH OUT

You are the one calling the court. If someone calls you claiming to be the court and asks for payment, hang up and call the number from the county website yourself.

23. Court Dates and Deadlines

Writing them where you will see them.

Few things matter more than dates. A ticket or notice names a date by which you must act or show up. Missing it can lead to additional penalties or a warrant, so treat it with respect.

The moment a date arrives in your hands, put it on a wall calendar and set a reminder on your phone if you have one. Add a second reminder a week earlier, to give yourself time to pay or prepare.

- Write the date and time on a wall calendar
- Note the branch, Ravenna or Kent
- Set a reminder a week ahead
- Plan your ride and parking in advance
- Bring your paperwork and photo ID

If you cannot attend because of illness or a conflict, contact the court before the date, not after. Courts are far more understanding when you reach out early.

Many people find a paper checklist taped to the refrigerator the most reliable reminder system of all, even in a house full of phones and tablets.

TIP

Ask a family member to double check the date with you. A second pair of eyes often catches a mix-up of morning and afternoon.

24. If You Missed a Date or Deadline

Do not hide from it.

It happens. A notice got buried in the mail, an illness took over, or the date slipped by. The worst response is to ignore it, because problems tend to grow while they are ignored.

Contact the court as soon as you realize. Explain plainly what happened and ask what you need to do next. Depending on the matter, there may be a way to reschedule or resolve it. The staff can tell you the process, though they cannot promise an outcome.

- 1 Find your ticket or notice and its number.
- 2 Call the correct branch, Ravenna or Kent.
- 3 Say that you missed a date and ask what to do.
- 4 Write down the instructions you are given.
- 5 Follow them quickly and keep your receipts.

Most courts would rather hear from you late than not at all. A calm explanation and a willingness to fix the problem go a long way with the staff.

WATCH OUT

Be wary of anyone who contacts you offering to fix a missed date for a fee. Only deal with the court itself or a licensed attorney.

25. Small Claims in Brief

A simpler court for smaller disputes.

The Municipal Court also handles small claims, which are for civil disputes involving limited amounts of money, such as a landlord disagreement or an unpaid bill. People often handle these without a lawyer.

Online, you can look up a small claims case the same way you look up any other, by name or number. The county's court pages and the Clerk of Courts can point you to the forms and the filing steps.

Because the details, limits, and fees can change, I will not quote them here. Ask the clerk's office for the current rules and the right paperwork, and read each form slowly.

- Small claims are heard in the Municipal Court
- Look up cases by name or number
- Ask the clerk for current forms and limits
- You may bring evidence, such as receipts or photos

Because small claims rules are specific, never rely on a neighbor's memory of how it worked years ago. Ask the clerk for the current rules before you file.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ohio Legal Help has plain-English articles on small claims that are worth reading before you decide whether to file or respond.

26. Fake Fine Notices by Text or Email

The most common trick.

A very common scam arrives as a text or email that says you owe a fine, a toll, or a ticket, and must pay immediately through a link. It often looks official and uses frightening language to push you into acting quickly.

A real court does not start a conversation about a new fine by sending you a link to click. Genuine notices come on paper, from a named court, with a case or ticket number that you can check yourself on the county website.

- Urgency, such as pay in an hour or face arrest
- A link you are told to click
- Payment requested by gift card, wire, or crypto
- A ticket number that does not exist on the county site

If a message worries you, do not click anything. Go to portagecounty-oh.gov, search the records, and see whether a real case exists.

Scammers count on your fear. Slowing down is the single best defense, because the pressure to hurry is the one thing every one of these tricks has in common.

WATCH OUT

Delete the message after checking. Forwarding it to others can spread the trap, and replying only tells the scammer your number works.

27. Phone Calls Claiming to Be the Court

Hang up, then check.

Another trick is a phone call from someone claiming to be a deputy, a clerk, or a court officer. They say you missed jury duty or owe a fine, and that you must pay immediately or be arrested. The voice may sound stern and sure of itself.

The real court does not demand payment by gift card, never asks for your bank password, and never asks you to read back a code that was sent to your phone. Those requests are the giveaway.

- 1 Stay calm and do not give any information.
- 2 Say you will call back, and hang up.
- 3 Look up the court number on portagecounty-oh.gov.
- 4 Call that number yourself and ask whether anything is pending.
- 5 Tell a family member or me about the call.

If you have already shared a card number or a password, call your bank immediately and change your passwords. Acting quickly limits the damage, and there is no shame in it.

TIP

Caller ID can be faked, so a number that looks like the courthouse proves nothing. Calling back on a number you looked up yourself is the safe move.

28. Your Privacy and Public Records

What others can see about you.

Court records are generally public in Ohio, which is how the online search works. That means anyone who types your name may find a case that involves you, such as an old ticket.

This is normal and does not mean you have done anything wrong. Many records are simply traffic matters from years ago. Still, it is good to know what is out there so no surprise catches you.

You can look yourself up from time to time. If you see something that looks wrong or does not belong to you, contact the clerk's office. They can look into whether it is a record error or a different person with the same name.

- Court records are public by design
- Search your own name occasionally
- Report suspicious or wrong entries to the clerk
- Do not post case numbers on social media

Public does not mean everything about you is out there. It generally means court filings and dockets, not your medical details or your bank accounts.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some records can be sealed or hidden by court order. Ask an attorney or Ohio Legal Help about whether this applies to you.

29. Helping a Family Member

Together, not instead.

Many of my clients ask for help because their mother, father, or spouse received a notice. It is kind to help, and it works best when the person involved stays in charge of the decisions.

Sit together and read the paper first. Find the number, the branch, and the date. Then look up the case together so both of you can see the same screen.

If you are paying for someone else, use their ticket number and make sure the receipt goes to them or to a shared folder. The person named on the ticket should know the matter is resolved.

- Read the paper together first
- Write down the date and branch
- Look up the case on the county site
- Save the receipt where both can find it

If you are helping with money, keep records of what you paid and when. Clear notes protect both you and the person you are helping.

WATCH OUT

If you worry that a loved one is being pressured by a caller, step in gently. Offer to make the call to the court together, using the number from the county website.

30. Using a Library or Shared Computer

Safe habits on a public machine.

You can look up a court record on a library computer, and many people do. The Portage County District Library has public computers and staff who are happy to answer questions about getting started.

The key is to leave nothing behind. Court records can be personal, and a payment involves card details. On a shared machine, treat them with extra care.

- Do not let the browser save your card information
- Close the browser window when you finish
- Do not leave printouts at the shared printer
- Avoid paying on a public computer if you can wait for your own device

If you only need to look something up, a public computer is fine. If you plan to pay, I would suggest doing so at home or from your own phone on your own connection.

If the library is busy, ask a librarian for a quiet corner or a time slot. They are used to helping people with unfamiliar websites and are glad to do it.

TIP

Bring a USB drive or plan to email yourself a copy of the confirmation, then delete it from the public machine.

31. Making Text Bigger and Printing

Comfortable reading helps.

Court websites often use small type. You do not have to squint. Every browser lets you enlarge a page, and doing so does not change how the site works.

- Computer: hold Ctrl or Command and press the plus key
- Phone or tablet: spread two fingers apart on the screen
- Return to normal size with Ctrl or Command and zero
- Your device's accessibility settings can enlarge text everywhere

Printing helps too. A paper copy of a docket, a receipt, or a notice is easier to read and easier to hand to a family member or lawyer. Use the browser's Print option and choose a larger scale if one is offered.

If a page still feels cramped, try turning your phone sideways, or use a larger screen. Comfort matters more than speed.

You can also ask your phone or computer to read pages aloud. Look in the accessibility settings for a feature often called read aloud or speak screen.

GOOD TO KNOW

The printed page from a docket is not an official certified copy. If you need an official copy, ask the clerk's office how to request one.

32. When Something Will Not Work

A calm checklist.

Websites sometimes act up. A search returns nothing, a payment page freezes, or a button does nothing. Before assuming something is wrong with your case, work through a few simple checks.

- Confirm you began at portagecounty-oh.gov
- Retype the name or number slowly
- Try fewer search words, or the number alone
- Refresh the page, or close it and try again

- Try a different browser or device
- Wait a few hours and try again

If a payment page times out, do not pay again right away. First check your bank or card statement and search the case to see whether the first attempt went through. Paying twice is a headache.

Write down any message you see on the screen. When you call the clerk, those exact words will help them understand what happened.

If none of that helps, the problem may be on the county's end. Waiting and trying later in the day often solves it without any effort from you.

WATCH OUT

Never pay a second time just because a page froze. Verify first, then decide.

33. A Few Plain Questions and Answers

What neighbors ask me most.

Q: Is looking up a court case free? A: Looking up public records on the county site has not required payment in what I found. Paying a fine is separate and the portal shows the total.

Q: Can I pay my ticket without going to court? A: Often yes, if the ticket allows it. Read your paper or call the court to be sure.

Q: Will paying online take care of everything? A: It records the payment, but keep your receipt and check the case afterward.

Q: Should I use a website that offers to pay for me? A: No. The county advises against third party services.

Q: Who do I call about a Kent ticket? A: The Kent branch, at the number on your paper or on the county site.

These answers are general, and your situation may differ. When a detail truly matters, confirm it with the court using the phone number on your own paper.

TIP

If your question did not make this list, it is probably a good one for a phone call. Court staff answer questions about process, and I am happy to help with the computer side.

34. Legal Help and Where to Learn More

Reliable places to turn.

This guide explains the tools, but sometimes you need real legal help. That is nothing to be embarrassed about. Court matters can have lasting effects, and a qualified person can look at the details of your situation.

Ohio Legal Help is a statewide website with plain-language articles and information on finding free or low-cost legal aid. It also has a page about the Portage County Municipal Court. It is a trustworthy place to learn the basics and find resources.

You can also ask the court clerk about self-help forms and the process for your kind of case. Staff cannot advise you, but they can point you toward the right paperwork.

- Ohio Legal Help for articles and referrals
- The clerk's office for forms and process
- A private attorney for serious charges
- Family and friends for support and rides

Whatever you choose, keep a written record of every call, receipt, and date. Organized records make any legal conversation faster and less stressful.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a charge could mean jail time or a loss of your license, speak with an attorney before deciding how to respond.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

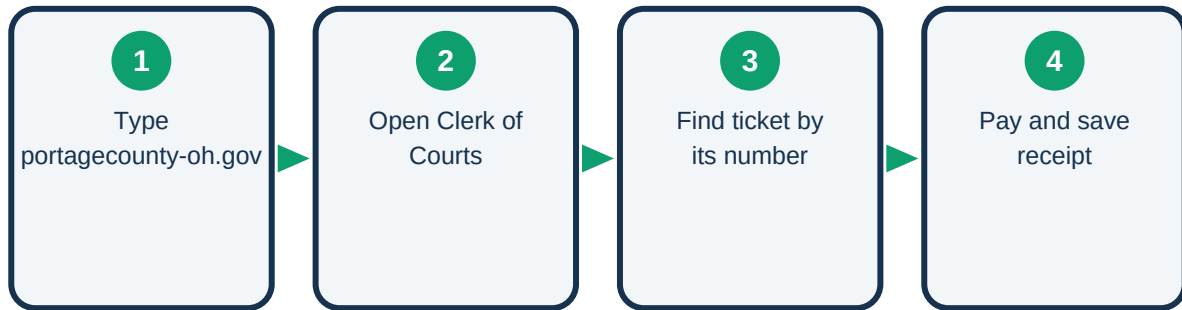
Keep this by the computer. I want to... Get to the real site: type portagecounty-oh.gov yourself. Search a case: open Clerk of Courts, choose Search Court Records, use a name or number. Pay a ticket: use the county's payment link and your ticket number. Prove I paid: print or save the confirmation. Check a scary message: ignore the link and search the county site. Ask the court: call the Ravenna or Kent branch listed on your paper. Get help: call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Paying a Ticket Online

Start at the county, end with a receipt.



Always begin at the county's own dot gov site.

Illustration - details vary by device, plan, and provider. Always check your own setup.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Who Handles What

Three court offices in Portage County.



Ravenna and Kent are both Municipal Court branches.

Illustration - details vary by device, plan, and provider. Always check your own setup.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.