

# Indiana Court Systems

## Chapter 2

As you may have learned in your history or government class, there are three branches of government. The legislative branch writes the laws. The legislative branch, at the federal level, is the United States Congress. At the state level, the legislative branch is the Indiana General Assembly. The executive branch enforces the laws. At the federal level, the President is the chief of the executive branch. At the state level, the Governor is the chief of the executive branch. The judicial branch interprets questions about the laws and makes sure that the laws do not violate our constitutional or statutory rights. The judicial branch is the federal, state, and local courts.



### 1. How do the courts interpret laws?

Courts interpret laws by hearing cases. When people feel as though their rights have been violated or that someone has not followed the law, they file a case with the court. The judge will look at the law, look at the facts of what happened, and decide how the law applies to the case. The judge will make “findings” that explain why the court thinks the law applies to the facts of the case the way it does. Sometimes people file a case with the court because they think a law violates their rights. In those cases, the judge will look to see whether the law is valid (a good law) or invalid (a bad law).

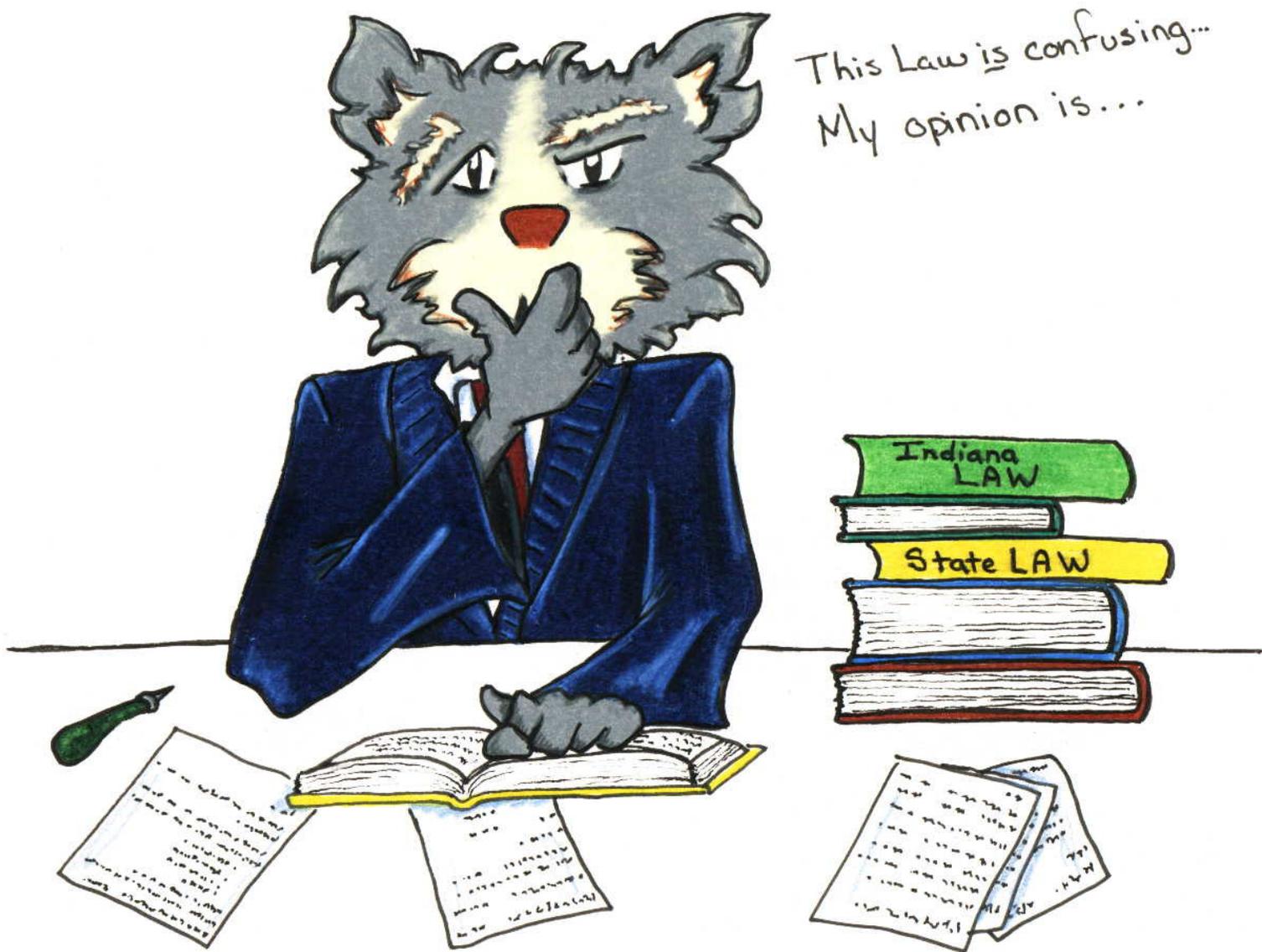
### 2. What if I don't agree with the court's decision?

When someone files a new case

with a court in Indiana, the case is filed with the trial court. The trial court level is the superior or circuit courts. The trial court judge will make a decision in the case or issue a ruling. If you don't like the ruling, you can appeal or ask another court to hear the case. The second court to look at the case is the Indiana Court of Appeals. If you still are not happy with the ruling, you can appeal your case to the Indiana Supreme Court. The Indiana Supreme Court may be the third court to hear your case; the Indiana Supreme Court is able to choose what cases it hears.

### 3. How does the court make laws?

When the trial court judge makes a decision in a case, it will enter a judgment or an order. That order has the same



effect as the statutes. When the Indiana Court of Appeals and Indiana Supreme Court make a decision in a case, a written decision will be issued. A decision that is published is called "case law" because the law that comes out of the case will be applied to other cases.

#### **4. Are there courts for youth?**

Yes. At the Indiana trial court level, there is a special court system set up to hear cases involving Indiana youth. This court is called the Juvenile Court. The word "juvenile" refers to people age seventeen or younger.