

FREE EDITION

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The Pro Se Starter

10 Things Every Texas Pro Se Litigant Should Know
Before Their First Hearing

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Real Ryan Nichols LLC

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“When the facts don’t add up, I help you organize the truth.”

FROM THE AUTHOR

Before We Begin

If you are representing yourself in a Texas court — in a custody case, a criminal matter, a property dispute, a CPS issue, or anything else where the system has handed you a bad deck — this guide is for you.

This is **not legal advice**. I am not an attorney. What I am is someone who has been on the receiving end of a broken legal system and lived to document it. In 2024, a federal judge — Judge Thomas F. Hogan — ruled on the record that my due process and constitutional rights had been violated during my January 6th prosecution. I was the only one of more than 1,500 defendants in that cohort to get that ruling. That didn't happen because I had the best lawyer. It happened because I was organized.

I wrote this guide because courts do not hand you a manual when you walk in pro se — and being disorganized is what loses winnable cases. The ten things on the pages that follow are basic. They are also the difference between being taken seriously and being dismissed before you open your mouth.

Read this cover to cover before your first hearing. Print it. Bring it. If something applies to your case, circle it. If something scares you, ask an attorney.

You do not need a law degree to be credible in a courtroom. You need to be organized, documented, and composed. This PDF covers the composure. The rest — the organizing and the documenting — is what I do for a living.

— Ryan

The 10 Things

1. Dress Like You Mean It

Button-down or collared shirt. Slacks. Closed-toe shoes. Ironed. The court reads your appearance as respect or disrespect before you say a word. Disrespect costs you nothing tangible — but it costs you everything intangible: credibility, goodwill, benefit of the doubt. Dress to signal that you take this seriously. No t-shirts, no shorts, no sandals, no hats, no slogans.

2. Bring Three of Everything

One copy for the judge. One copy for opposing counsel. One copy for yourself. Paper, not a phone. Three-hole punched when you can manage it. Judges cannot rule on what they cannot see, and you cannot argue from your phone. If you are offering an exhibit, it must be printed and labeled.

3. Stand When the Judge Enters or Speaks

Rise when they walk in. Rise when they address you directly. Sit only when told. This is universal — do not overthink it. When in doubt, stand. Silent respect for the bench buys you more patience than you can imagine.

4. Address the Judge as “Your Honor”

Every single time. Not “Judge.” Not “Sir.” Not “Ma’am.” “Your Honor” is the single phrase that earns you the most patience from the bench for the least amount of effort. Make it automatic.

5. Don’t Interrupt, Don’t Argue With the Judge

Even when the judge is wrong. *Especially* when the judge is wrong. Note the ruling. Note the issue. Keep moving. You preserve your objection for appeal by saying “I respectfully object, Your Honor” — not by arguing. Arguing with a judge in real time is how pro se litigants go from winning to losing in one sentence.

6. Bring a Notebook

Write down every ruling, every comment, every deadline the judge gives you. You will not remember. The notebook is also the move that signals “this person is organized” to a courtroom full of people looking for a reason to underestimate you. A simple legal pad is fine. Use it.

7. Know the Rules You're Using

The Texas Rules of Civil Procedure are free online. Know **Rule 21** for how motions are served. Know **Rule 196** for requests for production. Know **Rule 197** for discovery interrogatories. Judges cut slack for pro se litigants who cite rule numbers, because it signals you did the homework. You do not have to memorize them — you have to know they exist and where to find them.

8. Don't Swear, Don't Cry, Don't Emote

The judge is legally not permitted to consider emotional displays. They can only consider evidence and argument. Emotion hurts your credibility and gives opposing counsel ammunition. Save it for after the courtroom. Inside, be clinical. Be flat. Be the calmest person in the room.

9. Have Your Timeline Ready

A one-page chronology of what happened, when, and what evidence supports it. Judges *read timelines*. Judges do not read 300-page document dumps. If you give a judge one clean page they can follow in sixty seconds, you have already out-prepared eighty percent of pro se litigants. Make the timeline. Bring three copies.

10. If You Don't Understand, Say So

“Your Honor, I am representing myself — could you clarify what you need from me?” is **fine**. It is not weakness. Trying to bluff when you do not know the procedure is what destroys cases. Ask. Clarify. Then proceed. Judges will almost always explain a procedure to a pro se litigant who asks respectfully.

NEXT STEPS

When You Need More Than Basics

The ten things above are the minimum — the baseline that keeps you from looking disorganized on day one. Everything here is basics.

If you get to a point where you need more — a clean one-page timeline, a courtroom-ready exhibit list, a Texas Public Information Act request drafted, a document pile summarized, or a full review of what you are walking into — **that is what I do for a living.**

I do not promise outcomes. I do not practice law. I help you get organized enough that the truth at least has a fighting chance in a room designed to ignore it.

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Stay organized. Stay documented. Don't give up.

— Ryan

WHO I AM

About Ryan Nichols

I am a United States Marine Corps veteran, independent investigative researcher, and advocate for families and defendants who have been steamrolled by a legal system that does not care whether the facts add up.

In January 2021, I was arrested as part of the federal January 6th cases. Over the next three years, I watched the prosecution make a series of moves that any fair-minded person would have recognized as due-process violations. Most of my co-defendants could not get a single motion heard. I kept filing anyway. I kept documenting. I kept organizing.

In 2024, **United States District Judge Thomas F. Hogan** — a senior federal judge with forty years on the bench — ruled on the record that my due-process and constitutional rights had been violated. I was the only defendant out of more than 1,500 in the Jan 6 cohort to receive that ruling. That ruling exists today as part of the court record. You can look it up.

I did not win that ruling because I was a better lawyer than my own attorney. I won it because I organized my case, documented every violation in real time, and never gave up. That is the same thing I now help other people do.

Today, Real Ryan Nichols LLC operates out of East Texas. I work with families in custody disputes, defendants facing criminal charges, victims of CPS overreach, whistleblowers, and anyone else dealing with a system that has stopped listening. I am based in Harrison County and I take cases across Gregg, Smith, Upshur, and surrounding counties — as well as remote cases throughout Texas.

I am not an attorney and I do not give legal advice. What I do is investigative, organizational, and advocacy work. I help you build the timeline. I help you organize the evidence. I help you prepare the exhibits. I help you find the public records that everyone else overlooked. And sometimes — when the facts are strong enough — I help you get the truth in front of the people who need to see it.

If this guide was useful to you, subscribe to **The Legal Spotlight** at realryannichols.com for weekly investigations and pro se guidance. Everything I publish is free. The paid services exist because not every case can be handled from a blog post.

Thank you for reading.

— Ryan Nichols

IMPORTANT

Legal Disclaimer

Real Ryan Nichols LLC is not a law firm. It is not authorized to provide legal advice, and nothing in this guide should be interpreted as legal advice.

Ryan Nichols is not an attorney. Ryan is a United States Marine Corps veteran, independent researcher, investigative journalist, and case-preparation advocate. All services offered through Real Ryan Nichols LLC are investigative, organizational, and advocacy in nature.

The information in this guide is general and informational. Every case is different. Every court is different. Every judge is different. The practices described here are common-sense guidance based on years of real-world observation — not law.

Always consult a Texas-licensed attorney for legal matters specific to your case. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact your county's legal aid office or visit **TexasLawHelp.org** for free resources.

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