

RI and Federal Court Systems & The Rights of the Accused

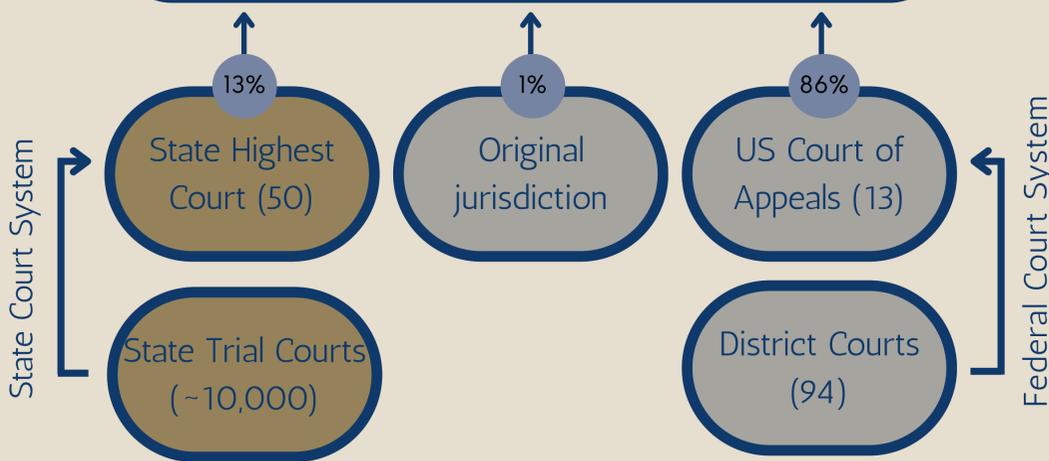
RHODE ISLAND COURT SYSTEM

The Rhode Island court system is a multi-level system. Lower courts such as the Municipal and Traffic Tribunal Courts can appeal to the District Court which hears cases involving lesser charges. Family and Workers' Compensation Courts have limited jurisdiction and only hear cases concerning specific issues. Appeals of Family Court judgments are to the Supreme Court, while appeals from the Workers Compensation trial court are to the Appellate Division. The Superior Court hears felony cases and civil cases concerning more than \$10,000. Cases from Superior Courts can be appealed to the state Supreme Court, and, in certain instances, from there to the Supreme Court of the United States. Rhode Island has 5 Supreme Court justices and 21 Superior Court judges. The case of *Rhode Island v. Innis* began in the Rhode Island District Court with a bail hearing. The case was tried in Superior Court, appealed to the RI Supreme Court, and was then appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States.



Rhode Island Supreme Court, Courtesy of the Rhode Island Supreme Court

Supreme Court of the United States



The *Rhode Island v. Innis* case started at the Kent County Superior Court (State Trial Court), was appealed to the Rhode Island Supreme Court (State Highest Court) and then appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States. After the Supreme Court's ruling, the case was finally remanded back to the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

FEDERAL COURT SYSTEM

The Federal Court system is established by Article III of the Constitution and changes are made as needed by Congress. Federal Judges, including Supreme Court Justices, are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. It is structured similarly to many state court systems and consists of three levels of courts: District Courts, Courts of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court. Federal cases must involve a constitutional question or parties from different states.

United States District Courts: There are 94 District Courts. Each state or territory has 1-4 District Judges based on state population. District Courts function as the trial courts in the federal system. Appeals from District Courts are heard by Courts of Appeals.

United States Courts of Appeals: There are 13 Courts of Appeals; 12 are territorial and 1 represents the Federal Circuit. Courts of Appeals Judges sit in three-judge panels and hear appeals from the District Courts in their circuit.

Supreme Court of the United States: Located in Washington D.C., the nine Supreme Court Justices hear appeals from both the U.S. Courts of Appeals and State Supreme Courts. The Court has both original (rare) and appellate jurisdiction. In most instances, in order for a case to be heard in the highest Court, four Justices have to agree to grant *certiorari* (order review of a lower court). Supreme Court rulings have the authority of federal law, clarify constitutional law, and uphold or overrule the rulings of lower courts.

The Federal and State Court Systems rarely interact, however in some instances, a State Supreme Court ruling may be appealed directly to the US Supreme Court, such as in *Rhode Island v. Innis*.

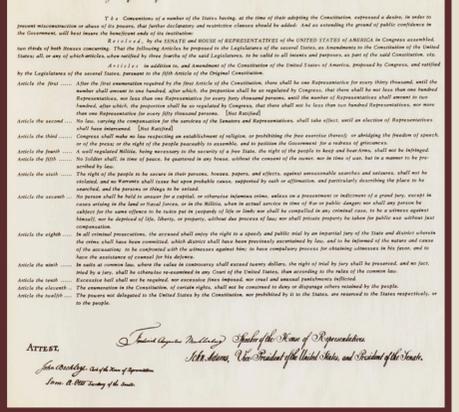
RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED

A person accused of a crime has certain rights and privileges which guarantees a fair trial for that individual including:

- 5th Amendment:** This amendment gives an accused individual the right to remain silent, protection against double jeopardy and self incrimination (being forced to say something that could lead to an individual being convicted of a crime)
- 6th Amendment:** The main aspect of this Amendment that was brought into question with *RI v. Innis* was Innis' request for a counsel multiple times before his unprompted confession in the police wagon about the concealed weapon.

Miranda Rights and Rhode Island v. Innis: During the course of his apprehension and arrest, Thomas Innis was made aware of his Miranda Rights four times by three different police officers. After he was arrested and placed in a police car, an officer voiced concerns about a weapon Innis supposedly had, a sawed-off shotgun, being hidden near a school with disabled students. After hearing the officers conversation, Innis instructed the officers to pull over and directed them to the weapon.

Bill of Rights
Congress of the United States,
begun and held at the City of New York,
Wednesday the fourth of March, one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine.



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