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| Criminal Justice Unit II vocabulary

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| **actus reus** | An illegal act, or failure to act when legally required. |
| **civil law** | All law that is not criminal, including tort, contract, personal property, maritime, and commercial law. |
| **criminal law** | The body of rules that defines crimes, sets out their punishments, and mandates the procedures for carrying out the criminal justice process. |
| **criminal negligence** | Liability that can occur when a person's careless and inattentive actions cause harm. |
| **criminal procedure** | The rules and laws that define the operation of the criminal proceedings. Procedural law describes the methods that must be followed in obtaining warrants, investigating offenses, effecting lawful arrests, conducting trials, introducing evidence, sentencing convicted offenders, and reviewing cases by appellate courts. |
| **decriminalization** | Reducing the penalty for a criminal act without legalizing it. |
| **ex post facto law** | A law that makes an act criminal after it was committed or retroactively increases the penalty for a crime. |
| **excuse defenses** | A defense in which a person states that his or her mental state was so impaired that he or she lacked the capacity to form sufficient intent to be held criminally responsible. |
| **justification** | A defense for a criminal act claiming that the criminal act was reasonable or necessary under the circumstances. |
| **mala in se** | In common law, offenses that are from their own nature evil, immoral, and wrong. Mala in se offenses include murder, theft, and arson. |
| **mens rea** | A guilty mind: the intent to commit a criminal act. |
| **obitiatry** | Helping people take their own lives: assisted suicide. |
| **penumbral crimes** | Criminal acts defined by a high level of noncompliance with the stated legal standard, an absence of stigma associated with violation of the stated standard, and a low level of law enforcement or public sanction. |
| **public safety or strict liability crime** | A criminal violation—usually one that endangers the public welfare—that is defined by the act itself, irrespective of intent. |
| **stalking** | The willful, malicious, and repeated following, harassing, or contacting of another person. It becomes a criminal act when it causes the victim to feel fear for his or her safety or the safety of others. |
| **stare decisis** | To stand by decided cases: the legal principle by which the decision or holding in an earlier case becomes the standard by which subsequent similar cases are judged. |
| **substantive criminal law** | A body of specific rules that declare what conduct is criminal and prescribe the punishment to be imposed for such conduct. |
| **torts** | The law of personal injuries. |

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