Key Terms in Criminal Law

- **Presumption of innocence**: The idea that all people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty.

- **Burden of proof**: The duty of the prosecution to prove that the defendant committed the crime for which he or she has been charged.

- **Standard of proof**: The level of evidence needed to convince the court of a person’s guilt. This level can vary based on the degree of the alleged crime. The standard for a murder case is “Beyond a reasonable doubt.”

- **Reasonable doubt**: In a criminal case, prosecutors must present sufficient evidence to overcome the presumption of innocence and prove a defendant’s guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt.” In other words, no reasonable doubt about the defendant’s guilt could exist in the mind of the judge or jury based on the evidence presented.

- **Hearsay evidence**: A statement provided by someone who did not witness an event. Instead, someone else told him or her what happened. Such evidence is not usually allowed in court.

- **Evidence presented in court**: For a conviction to be legitimate, it must be based on the evidence presented in court and directly related to the crime.

- **Circumstantial evidence**: A collection of details that can point to a specific conclusion but does not provide conclusive proof. Other explanations are possible.