

CONSTITUTION

"The organic and fundamental law of a nation or state, which may be written or unwritten, establishing the character and conception of its government, laying the basic principles to which its internal life is to be conformed, organizing the government, and regulating, distributing, and limiting the functions of its different departments, and prescribing the extent and manner of the exercise of sovereign powers."

"The written instrument agreed upon by the people of the Union (e.g. United States Constitution) or of a particular state, as the absolute rule of action and decision for all departments (i.e. branches) and officers of the government in respect to all the points covered by it, which must control until it shall be changed by the authority which established it (i.e. by amendment), and in opposition to which any act or ordinance of any such department or officer is null and void."

Source: Black's Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990

CHARTER

"An instrument emanating from the sovereign power, in the nature of a grant, either to the whole nation, or to a class or portion of the people, to a corporation, or to a colony or dependency, assuring to them certain rights, liberties, or power."

"A city's organic law. Charter of municipal corporation consists of the creative act of incorporation, together with all those laws in force which relate to the incorporation, whether defining the power of the corporation or regulating the mode of exercise thereof, and statute does not fail to become part of charter simply because it is not labeled as such."

"A charter differs from a constitution, in that the former is granted by the sovereign, while the latter is established by the people themselves."

Source: Black's Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990

STATUTE

"A formal written enactment of a legislative body, whether federal, state, city, or county. An act of the legislature declaring, commanding, or prohibiting something; a particular law enacted and established by the will of the legislative department of government; the written will of the legislature, solemnly expressed according to the forms necessary to constitute it the law of the state."

Source: Black's Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990

ORDINANCE

“A rule established by authority; a permanent rule of action; a law or statute. In its most common meaning, the term is used to designate the enactments of the legislative body of a municipal corporation. It designates a local law of a municipal corporation, duly enacted by the proper authorities, prescribing general, uniform, and permanent rules of conduct relating to the corporate affairs of the municipality.”

“An ordinance is the equivalent of a municipal statute, passed by the city council, or equivalent body, and governing matters not already covered by federal or state law. Ordinances commonly govern zoning, building, safety, etc. matters of municipality.”

Source: Black’s Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990

REGULATION

“Regulation is rule or order having force of law issued by executive authority of government (e.g. by federal administrative agency).”

Source: Black’s Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990

COMMON LAW

“Body of unwritten law developed in England from judicial decisions based on custom and earlier judicial decisions. It constitutes the basis of the English legal system and became part of American law.”

Source: National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994

“As distinguished from statutory law created by the enactment of legislatures, the common law comprises the body of those principles and rules of action, relating to the government and security of persons and property, which derive their authority solely from usages and customs of immemorial antiquity, or from the judgments and decrees of the courts recognizing, affirming, and enforcing such usages and customs, and, in this sense, particularly the ancient unwritten law of England. In general, it is a body of law that develops and derives through judicial decisions, as distinguished from legislative enactments.”

Source: Black’s Law Dictionary, Sixth Edition 1990