

HANDBOOK FOR SELF-REPRESENTED PARTIES  
IN FAMILY COURT

Delaware County Court of Common Pleas  
Media, PA

March 2024

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide self-represented parties involved in family court cases in Delaware County (custody, divorce, child and spousal support and protection from abuse) with general information about the family court system and procedures in Delaware County.

Only attorneys are permitted to provide you with legal advice. Therefore, you should not interpret anything in this Handbook as legal advice nor should this Handbook be cited as legal authority. Most of the information provided in this Handbook can also be found on state, county and state court system websites and this Handbook provides some of those website addresses. Additionally, no statements made in this Handbook should be interpreted or used as a suggestion to take or refrain from a particular course of action, strategy, or steps in your personal legal matter.

## SHOULD I REPRESENT MYSELF?

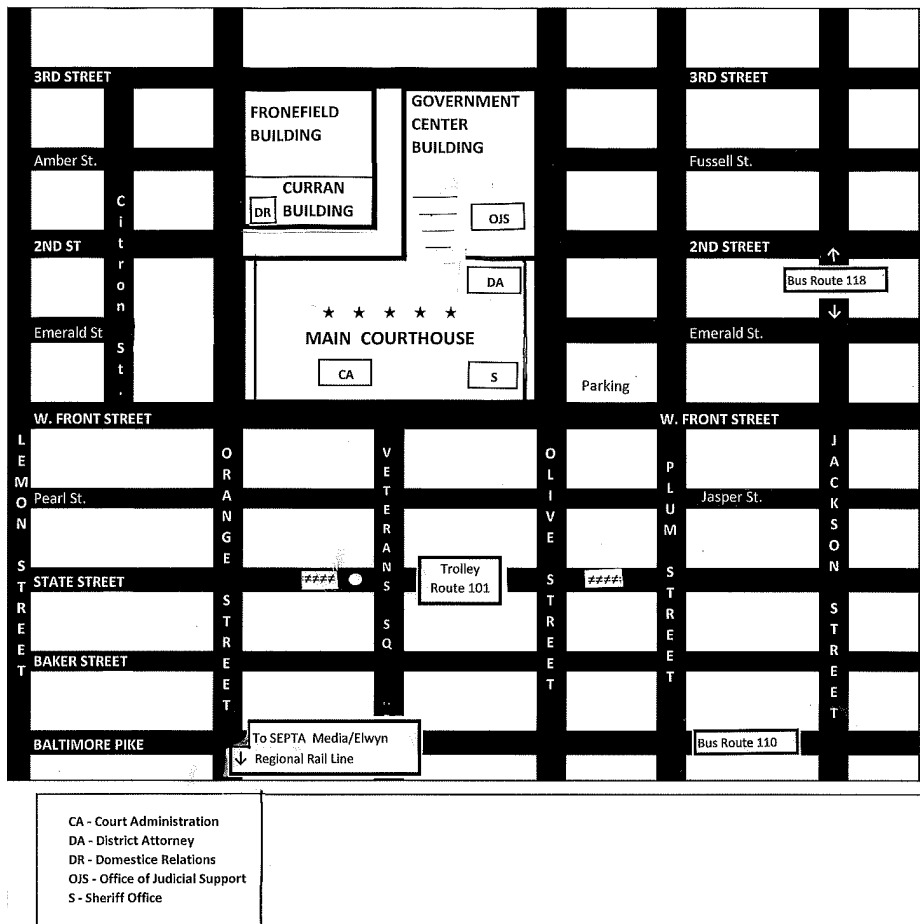
If you are thinking about representing yourself in Court in your family law case, you should know that you have an absolute right to do so. However, you should also realize that there are significant risks and responsibilities attached to that right. The law will not be ignored just because you choose to represent yourself without an attorney. You should expect that an attorney may represent the other party(s) and that therefore, your opponent may be more familiar with the applicable law and procedures than you.

You should also know that Judges, judicial staff and court employees are NOT allowed to (AND WILL NOT) answer legal questions or provide advice as to how you should proceed or what possible outcome you may achieve.

If the Court can provide any advice to self-represented parties, it would be that any person involved in a family law case should strongly consider consulting with an attorney. A directory of the attorneys in Delaware County, along with some information about areas of expertise, can be obtained from the Delaware County Bar Association Referral Service at 610-566-6625, extension 221 or: <https://delcobar.org/?pg=clientreferrals>. The Bar Association general website information is also provided in the last section of this Handbook.

## COURTHOUSE COMPLEX

The Delaware County Court of Common Pleas and Government Center or “Courthouse Complex”, is located at 201 West Front Street, Media, Pa. 19063.



The Main Courthouse has Courtrooms and Hearing Rooms located on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The Sheriff’s Office, District Attorney’s Office and Court Administration Office are located on the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor and the Law Library is located on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor (L Level).

The Government Center is connected to and located directly behind the Main Courthouse. The Office of Judicial Support is located on the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor.

The Domestic Relations Office is located in the Curran Building. There are also additional courtrooms in the Fronfield Building.

## GENERAL TIPS FOR REPRESENTING YOURSELF

### Before You Begin

- 1) Educate yourself about court procedures. Reading this Handbook in its entirety is a good start, but it should not replace more detailed research on your own or attorney representation. If you are unsure, or afraid of the court process, it may be best to hire an attorney for the entire process. You can obtain a lawyer by contacting the Delaware County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service at (610) 566-6625, ext. 221 or: <https://delcobar.org/?pg=clientreferrals>.
- 2) Read and familiarize yourself with the state and local rules of court – these rules outline the specific procedures that you must comply with, including but not limited to filing pleadings, appearing in court, courtroom procedures, and evidence. The Rules are available in the Courthouse Law Library (Read the section of this Handbook entitled Law Library) and website links can be found in the last section of this Handbook.
- 3) Keep your legal papers and case-related documents organized and in one place.
- 4) Keep track of important conversations with the attorney and/or party(ies) in your case.
- 5) Become familiar with the deadlines related to filing your pleadings and other documentation as required by the state and local rules of court noted in the last section of this Handbook.

### Preparing Your Court Papers

- 1) You may consult the Delaware County website for general legal information and to locate commonly used legal forms at: <https://delcopa.gov/ojs/forms.html> and/or use the Courthouse Law Library. The last section of this Handbook contains websites that you can access, however, please remember that this Handbook and all information contained herein is only a general guide and should not be a substitute for your own research.
  - a. Family case forms in multiple languages are also available at: <https://www.pacourts.us/forms>.
- 2) You must handle confidential information and documents as required by the state Case Records Public Access Policy.
  - a. You can read an FAQ about this policy at: <https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/PublicAccessFAQ.pdf> and access the required forms at: <https://www.delcopa.gov/courts/pdf/publicaccess/Confidential-Information-Form.pdf>. The form in Spanish can be accessed at: [https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/ConfidentialInformationForm\\_Spanish.pdf](https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/ConfidentialInformationForm_Spanish.pdf).
- 3) You will usually be required to submit a completed and signed Criminal History and Child Verification Form with a custody filing, therefore, it is your responsibility to research whether the Form should be submitted with your filing. The Verification Form can be found at: <https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/CriminalRecordAbuseHistoryVerification.pdf>.
- 4) Remember: court employees WILL NOT give you advice on what forms to file and when to file them, therefore, you should take advantage of all resources outlined in this Handbook along with conducting your own separate research.

## Preparing for Court

- 1) The Court provides non-English and sign language interpreters at no cost to the parties, as well as assistive listening and sight devices.
  - a. If you need an interpreter or suffer from any physical disability or impairment that affects your ability to communicate or participate in the court process, please notify court staff in advance of your hearing. You can also use this form: <https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20210215/192121-interpreterrequestformcivil-000232.pdf>.
- 2) Review the materials you are going to present in Court so that you are prepared and know exactly what you want to say.
- 3) The Judge will not tell you what evidence to present or what witnesses to call. You alone must decide your strategy, including the order of witnesses, the examination questions to ask and how to present your arguments.
- 4) All your witnesses must be present for Court proceedings and it is your responsibility to ensure that your witnesses are notified of the date and time of the court hearing. Court employees will not assist you in obtaining your witnesses, sending subpoenas, confirming participation, or providing notice of any kind to a witness.
- 5) You should bring at least three copies of your exhibits to Court so that the other side, the witness and the Court will have access to your documents.

## Going to Court

- 1) Be on time! The Court has a busy schedule. If you are late, your Complaint or Petition may be dismissed entirely, a judgment or unfavorable ruling made against you, or your matter might be postponed to another date.
- 2) You should address the Judge as “Your Honor” or “Judge.”
- 3) Be respectful to everyone. This includes the Judge, court staff, the other party, and lawyers.
- 4) Do not use profanity.
- 5) Do not react to statements made in Court by the opposing party or attorney, and especially the Judge, until it is your turn to speak. Do not speak at the same time or interrupt anyone who is properly asking or answering questions at the time.
- 6) Court staff can help you with simple non-subject matter related questions such as when your hearing is scheduled or if you are in the right courtroom, but they cannot give you legal advice or recommendations about what you should do. (Read the section of this Handbook entitled Communication with a Judge.)

## COMMUNICATION WITH THE JUDGE

Under the Code of Judicial Conduct, Judges are not allowed to have *ex parte* communications. *Ex parte* means “on one side only” or “by one party only.” An *ex parte* communication occurs when a party to a case, or someone on the party’s behalf, communicates directly with a Judge about the issues in a case without the other party’s knowledge. This means that a Judge will not have any communication outside of court with you, a family member or a friend – this includes phone calls, emails or letters.

The ban on *ex parte* communication helps assure that Judges decide cases fairly and impartially. It also preserves public trust in the legal and court system. You can best understand this concept by considering the following question: *Would you like it if the Judge spoke to the other side about your case without your knowledge? Would you like it if the Judge read an email written by the lawyer or party on the other side of your case without your knowledge and/or permission? . . . of course not!* So, if you, the self-represented party, want to tell the Judge anything about your pending case, you must do so either on the record in open court or in a written and properly filed document.

You may have a question completely unrelated to the subject matter of your case, such as: “*what courtroom is the Judge sitting in today*” or “*what time does court start today?*”. You should first try to get the answer to your question from court staff before contacting a Judge’s chambers. If court staff is unable to provide an answer, you may email your question to the Judge’s chambers and copy the other party or their lawyer on that email. That will ensure that everyone involved in the case knows about your question and the Judge’s staff will respond, if necessary and/or appropriate.

## FAMILY COURT PROCEEDINGS

1. Protection from Abuse (PFA)
2. Child and Spousal Support Conference
3. Support Appeal *De Novo* Hearing
4. Support Contempt Conference
5. Support Contempt *De Novo* Hearing
6. Divorce (Equitable Distribution) Conferences and Hearing
7. Divorce (Equitable Distribution) *De Novo* Trial
8. Custody Conciliation Conference and Hearing
9. Custody *De Novo* Trial
10. Custody Contempt Hearing
11. Appeals
12. *In Forma Pauperis* Petition
13. Continuances
14. Law Library

### **1. Protection from Abuse (PFA)**

Whether you are the plaintiff (the person filing the PFA petition) or defendant (the person against whom the petition is filed), you do not have a constitutional right to a court appointed lawyer because a PFA is a civil case, not criminal. Of course, you may, and should seriously consider, hiring a lawyer to represent you.

You can find general information about the PFA process at:

<https://www.pacourts.us/Storage/media/pdfs/20211027/175607-protectionorderhearingprocess.pdf> and <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/protection-orders>.

During Courthouse business hours a PFA action is started by filing a Petition.

**LOCATION: PFA PETITIONS ARE FILED IN THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT, ROOM 129, 1<sup>st</sup> FLOOR, GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA.**

After the Petition is filed, you, the self-represented plaintiff, will have a conference with a Judge to determine whether you should get a temporary order, after which the Petition will be scheduled for a hearing for a final order.

**LOCATION: PFA HEARINGS ARE HELD IN COURTROOM 1, MAIN COURTHOUSE, MEDIA, EVERY THURSDAY.**

At the hearing for a final order, it is up to the plaintiff to prove to the Judge by a



preponderance of the evidence that the defendant has committed abuse. Both parties may ask questions of all witnesses, present their own witnesses, and testify on their own behalf, and then when all evidence has been presented, the Judge will make a decision.

If you, the self-represented defendant is charged by the District Attorney's Office with indirect criminal contempt (ICC) of a PFA Order, you must be represented by an attorney, either a private attorney or the Public Defender's Office, located at 220 North Jackson Street, Media (610) 8981-4100, if you are financially unable to afford a private attorney. If the Public Defender's Office determines that you are indigent (a low or no income party), a Public Defender will be assigned to represent you.

**LOCATION: PFA CONTEMPT HEARINGS ARE HELD IN THE MAIN COURTHOUSE, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA EVERY FRIDAY.**

## **2. Child and Spousal Support Conference**

Whether you are the plaintiff (the person seeking payment of support) or the defendant (the person against whom support is sought) you do not have a constitutional right to a court appointed lawyer because support is a civil matter, not criminal. Of course, you may, and should seriously consider, hiring a lawyer to represent you.

Child and/or spousal support cases are started by filing a Petition in Domestic Relations. A Domestic Relations employee will help you, the unrepresented party, to complete it properly. Additional information on the filing process is available at:

<https://delcopa.gov/courts/domesticrelations/applyforsupport.html>. Domestic Relations will serve the complaint upon the defendant by mail.

**LOCATION: FILING OFFICE IS ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE, CURRAN BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

Domestic Relations will schedule a support conference for several weeks after the Petition is filed. Both the plaintiff and the defendant must be present. Under certain circumstances, a party may participate by telephone or videoconferencing.

Detailed information on what you need to bring to the conference is available at: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/domesticrelations/preconference.html>. The support conference is conducted by a Domestic Relations Conference Officer who will examine all income documentation and try to get the parties to agree upon the amount and terms of a support order. If the parties cannot agree upon the amount and terms of a support order, then the Conference Officer may prepare, and a Judge will sign, a recommended temporary order.

If one or both parties notifies the Conference Officer that they are dissatisfied with the recommendations, then the case will be scheduled for a hearing before a Domestic Relations Hearing Officer.

At the hearing, the Hearing Officer will examine all income documentation, use the state support guidelines and issue a recommended temporary order which will be signed by a Judge. If a defendant fails to appear, the conference or hearing may still take place and a support order entered in the defendant's absence.

**LOCATION: SUPPORT CONFERENCES AND HEARINGS ARE HELD IN THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE, CURRAN BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

If either party is dissatisfied with the recommended temporary order then that party has the right to appeal and request a *de novo* hearing before a Judge. The request must be filed within twenty (20) days after the notice of the recommended temporary order was mailed. The request must be made in writing and filed with the Domestic Relations Office. If no request is filed within twenty (20) days the temporary order becomes a final order.

### **3. Support Appeal *De Novo* Hearing**

**LOCATION: SUPPORT APPEAL HEARINGS ARE HELD EVERY TUESDAY IN COURTROOM 15, FRONEFIELD BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

*De novo* means "from the beginning". This means that the Judge is not bound to accept any of the Hearing Officer's findings and will basically conduct a new hearing

Notice of the hearing will be mailed to the parties several weeks in advance of the hearing.

If you, the self-represented party, request a hearing but do not appear for the hearing, the hearing may be dismissed and the temporary order will become a final order.

The *de novo* hearing before a Judge is more formal than the support conference or a hearing with a Hearing Officer. All witnesses (each party may bring witnesses) will be sworn and the parties will have a chance to ask questions of all witnesses. Both plaintiff and defendant must bring all documentation, including but not limited to paystubs, W2s, tax returns, childcare expenses, etc.

At the end of the hearing, the Judge will either dismiss the appeal or issue a Final Support Order based on the evidence taken during the hearing.

### **4. Support Contempt Conference**

**LOCATION: SUPPORT CONTEMPT CONFERENCES ARE HELD IN THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE, CURRAN BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

You, the self-represented defendant, are required by state law to pay your court ordered child support. Information on compliance with your support order is available at: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/domesticrelations/complysupportorder.html>. The first step in the contempt (failure to pay the court ordered support amount) process will be a contempt conference, where a conference officer will meet with you to discuss your case history and options to get your payments on track.

Notice of the hearing will be mailed to the parties several weeks in advance of the hearing.

At the conclusion of this conference, depending on the outcome, the case may be scheduled for a *de novo* hearing before a Judge and you will receive notice directly from the conference officer or by mail if you failed to attend the conference.

At the contempt conference (or by mail) you, the self-represented defendant, will be provided with written notice of your right to counsel. The notice of right to counsel is an extremely important document which tells you in detail of the potential sanctions that may happen if you are found in contempt, including but not limited to incarceration. Remember that Domestic Relations will not provide you, the self-represented defendant, with a lawyer and the Judge will not appoint a lawyer to represent you. The notice contains contact information for the Public Defender's Office and the Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service (contact information for both offices is in the last section of this Handbook). Because of the serious consequences of being found in contempt, you may, and should seriously consider, hiring a lawyer to represent you.

## **5. Support Contempt *De Novo* Hearing**

**LOCATION: SUPPORT CONTEMPT *DE NOVO* HEARINGS ARE HELD EVERY MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY IN COURTROOM 15, FRONEFIELD BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

Notice of the hearing will be provided to the parties at the conference and/or mailed to the parties several weeks in advance of the hearing.

If you, the self-represented defendant, fail to hire a private attorney or fail to qualify for a Public Defender to represent you, the contempt hearing will still proceed.

The *de novo* hearing before a Judge is more formal than the support conference. All witnesses (each party may bring witnesses) will be sworn and the parties will have a chance to ask questions of all witnesses. At the hearing before the Judge, a lawyer for Domestic Relations will be present, the other party and possibly your caseworker. Both parties may ask questions of all witnesses, present their own witnesses, offer documentary evidence and testify on their own behalf.

If you are found in contempt, the Judge may order you to participate in a job progress program, wage garnishment, seizure of your bank account and/or income tax refund, and any other action permitted by law, the most serious being incarceration.

## **6. Divorce (Equitable Distribution) Conferences and Hearing**

Whether you are the plaintiff (the person filing the divorce) or defendant (the person against whom the divorce is filed), you do not have a constitutional right to a court appointed lawyer because divorce is a civil matter, not criminal. Of course, you may, and should seriously consider, hiring a lawyer to represent you.

A divorce case is started by filing a Complaint and all other documents required by the state and local rules. Divorce filing procedures, fee schedule and forms are available at: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/selfhelpdivorce.html>.

**LOCATION: DIVORCE FORMS ARE FILED IN IN THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT, ROOM 124 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

All divorce actions are initially assigned to a Hearing Officer who handles all preliminary matters. It is your responsibility to review the statutes and rules to determine how you should proceed and what decisions you should make about the issues in your case.

Notice of conferences will be mailed to the parties several weeks in advance.

After all preliminary matters are addressed by the Hearing Officer, an equitable distribution hearing with the Hearing Officer will be scheduled. Equitable distribution is the division of the marital estate, including how the assets and debts are assigned to the parties.

Notice of the hearing will be provided to the parties at a conference and/or mailed several weeks in advance of the hearing.

The hearing is informal and testimony is not recorded, however, the Hearing Officer will review any documents provided by the parties. The Hearing Officer will address all equitable distribution issues, alimony, legal fees and court costs at the hearing. After the hearing, the Hearing Officer will prepare a written report with recommendations for the Judge. If nobody appeals the Hearing Officer's report, the Judge will accept the recommendations and sign them as a final order.

If a party is dissatisfied with the recommendations of the Hearing Officer then that party has the right to appeal by requesting a *de novo* hearing before a Judge within the time period specified in the Hearing Officer's report.

## **7. Divorce (Equitable Distribution) De Novo Trial**

If you, the self-represented party, appeal the Hearing Officer's recommendation, then an equitable distribution *de novo* trial will be scheduled in front of a Judge.

**LOCATION: EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION TRIALS ARE HELD IN MAIN COURTHOUSE, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

Before the trial is scheduled, the Judge assigned to your case may hold a pre-trial conference to address any preliminary or procedural matters. You are required to appear for any conference scheduled by the Judge and be prepared to participate.

The trial before a Judge is more formal than the hearing with the Hearing Officer. All witnesses (each party may bring witnesses) will be sworn and the parties will have a chance to ask questions of all witnesses. All testimony will be recorded and all admitted evidence will be made a part of the record. Both plaintiff and defendant should bring all witnesses and evidence.

After the trial, the Judge will issue a Final Equitable Distribution Order that will address all equitable distribution and/or alimony issues.

## **8. Custody Conciliation Conference and Hearing**

Whether you are the plaintiff (the person filing the custody complaint) or defendant (the person against whom the custody complaint is filed), you do not have a constitutional right to a court appointed lawyer because custody is a civil matter, not criminal. Of course, you may, and should seriously consider, hiring a lawyer to represent you.

A custody case is started by filing a Complaint and all other documents required by the state and local rules. Custody filing procedures, fee schedule and forms are available at: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/pdf/17CustodyFormsforDelawareCountyPA.pdf>.

**LOCATION: CUSTODY FORMS ARE FILED IN IN THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT, ROOM 124, 1<sup>st</sup> FLOOR, GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

It is your responsibility to serve the notice scheduling your conciliation conference, along with the underlying Complaint, on all parties. If you fail to provide proof of service of the notice and Complaint on all parties, your conference may be rescheduled or your Complaint dismissed.

At the conciliation conference, you will meet with the parent or other parties involved in your custody dispute before a Hearing Officer who will attempt to negotiate an agreement. If the parties can reach an agreement, the Hearing Officer will reduce the agreement to writing and it will be signed by a Judge.

If the custody conciliation conference does not resolve all the custody issues, the

Hearing Officer will schedule the parties for a hearing. The hearing is informal and testimony may not be recorded. All witnesses (each party may bring witnesses) will be sworn and the parties will have a chance to ask questions of all witnesses. After the hearing, the Hearing Officer will prepare a recommendation for the Judge to sign as a temporary order.

If a party is dissatisfied with the recommended order then that party has the right to appeal by requesting a custody *de novo* trial before a Judge.

### **9. Custody *De Novo* Trial**

If you, the self-represented party appeals the temporary Order, a *de novo* trial will be scheduled in front of a Judge.

#### **LOCATION: CUSTODY TRIALS ARE HELD IN MAIN COURTHOUSE, MEDIA, PA.**

Before the custody trial is scheduled, the Judge assigned to your case may hold a pre-trial conference to address any preliminary or procedural matters. You are required to appear for any conference scheduled by the Judge and to be prepared to participate.

The trial before a Judge is more formal than the hearing with the Hearing Officer. At the custody trial, all witnesses (each party may bring witnesses) will be sworn and the parties will have a chance to ask questions of all witnesses and submit evidence. All testimony will be recorded.

After the trial, the Judge will issue a Final Custody Order that will address all outstanding custody issues.

### **10. Custody Contempt Hearing**

A parent or other party who violates the terms of a child custody order may be held in civil contempt of court. When a custody contempt petition is filed, it will be scheduled for a hearing before a Judge.

#### **LOCATION: CUSTODY CONTEMPT HEARINGS ARE HELD IN MAIN COURTHOUSE, MEDIA, PA.**

If you are found to have violated a custody order you may be held in civil contempt, which may result in sanctions. Often contempt cases can be settled by agreement between the parties before the hearing. Therefore, you should always get to the courthouse before the hearing is scheduled to start so that you will have chance to discuss a resolution with the other party or the attorney representing the other party.

### **11. Superior Court Appeals**

If you, the self-represented party, wish to appeal a Court Order to the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, there are very specific rules, including time limitations and filing deadlines, that you must follow so that your appeal is properly processed. These rules are contained in the state Rules of Civil and Appellate Procedure as well as the local rules. You can also find appeal forms and related information at:

<https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?file=/secure/pacode/data/210/chapter9/s904.html&d=reduce>

Remember that court employees are only required to docket your appeal documents. They are specifically prohibited from giving you any legal advice, including when you should file your appeal, what order you should appeal from or what you should write in your appeal.

**LOCATION: IN A CUSTODY, DIVORCE, OR PFA CASE, YOU MUST FILE YOUR NOTICE OF APPEAL IN THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT, ROOM 124, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA.**

**LOCATION: IN A CHILD OR SPOUSAL SUPPORT CASE, YOU MUST FILE YOUR NOTICE OF APPEAL IN THE COURT UNIT, BASEMENT LEVEL OF THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE, CURRAN BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA.**

You will find the Transcript Request form at:

<https://delcopa.gov/courts/electronicrecording.html>.

More detailed instructions can be found online at [www.pacode.com](http://www.pacode.com) (click on "Browse," highlight "Appellate Procedure," and click on "Select") as well as in the state Rules of Appellate Procedure provided in the last section of this Handbook.

## **12. *In Forma Pauperis* Application**

Custody and divorce filing fees can be found at: <https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/civilfees.pdf>

If you, the self-represented party, believe that you cannot afford to pay filing fees for a custody or divorce filing/document, you may be able to apply to proceed *in forma pauperis* (IFP) by completing and filing this form: <https://delcopa.gov/ojs/ojsforms/InFormaPauperisPetition.pdf>.

**LOCATION: IFP PETITIONS ARE FILED IN THE OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT, ROOM 127, 2ND FLOOR, GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA.**

You must submit financial documentation with your IFP Petition. Failure to do so may result in your IFP Petition being dismissed. You may also be scheduled for a hearing on your IFP Petition.

If a Judge grants your IFP Petition, you will not be required to pay the filing fee for the related filing/document. If a Judge denies your IFP Petition, then you must pay the filing fee. If you do not pay the filing fee, then your filing/document will be dismissed.

### **13. Continuances**

Judges generally frown on continuances, particularly requests that are made at the last minute or contain frivolous, vague or unsubstantiated reasons, and repeat continuance requests. However, Judges will continue hearings or other court appearances for a later date if there is a good reason to do so or a legitimate “last minute” emergency. All continuance requests must be submitted using a hard copy Continuance Application form.

**LOCATION: CUSTODY, DIVORCE AND PFA CONTINUANCE APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE IN AND SHOULD BE FILED IN COURT ADMINISTRATION, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR ENTRANCE, MAIN COURTHOUSE, MEDIA, PA.**

**LOCATION: SUPPORT CONTINUANCE APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE IN AND SHOULD BE FILED IN THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE, CURRAN BUILDING, COURTHOUSE COMPLEX, MEDIA, PA.**

If you request a continuance, it is also your responsibility to contact the lawyer or party on the other side to see whether they agree or disagree with your request and to note same on the application.

The Court does not accept continuance requests through email, phone call, or letter. It is your responsibility to plan ahead and be prepared in case of inability to attend a court listing.

### **14. Courthouse Law Library**

**LOCATION: L LEVEL (TOP) FLOOR OF THE MAIN COURTHOUSE, MEDIA, PA.**

The Courthouse Law Library is free and open to the public during regular business hours, Monday-Friday, 8:30AM – 4:30PM.

In the Law Library, you, the self-represented party, will have hard copy and internet access to both the state and local rules of court procedure, as well as all Pennsylvania and federal cases and statutes, and other helpful resources. The law library is not a lending library, but there is a photocopier if you want to make copies (there will be a per page charge for making copies).

The Law Library has an attendant librarian to provide limited assistance, generally related to the location of requested or appropriate research tools. The librarian is not an attorney nor is the librarian permitted to give you legal advice. The librarian will not assist you with legal research other than general guidance on the location of resource materials.



## SIX ADDITIONAL TIPS

- 1) Do not go to a hearing and ask a Judge to call someone or to look up a fact online. You must have all your witnesses present for your hearing and have all your evidence ready for presentation. Please consult the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence (in the last section of this Handbook) about evidentiary questions you may have. Remember that a Judge is required to hold a fair and impartial proceeding and will not “bend” the Rules of Evidence simply because you are not represented by an attorney.
- 2) Although this should not need to be said, always be honest in your dealings in the courtroom and with the Judge. If you “stretch the truth” or lie, it may affect your credibility.
- 3) If there is a conflict in the testimony of certain witnesses, it is up to the Judge to determine all issues of credibility. It is improper for you to interrupt testimony or to make other demonstrations as to your displeasure. At the end of the proceeding (after all the witnesses have finished testifying) you will be given an opportunity to tell the Judge why your witnesses and/or testimony is more credible than the that of the other side.
- 4) Try to remain open minded about the possibility of settling your case before your court date. You can call the lawyer on the other side or, if there is no lawyer representing the other side and there is no prohibition directing no contact, call the other side to discuss an out-of-court resolution.
- 5) If you do not prevail, do not take it personally. The Judge is not ruling against you because the Judge does not like you or is attacking you as a person. The Judge is required to decide cases after careful examination of all the evidence, using the applicable law as the basis for all decisions. That is a Judge’s job. Often, a decision made by a Judge will be based on legal concepts and factors that may be unfamiliar to you or that you may disagree with, however, that will not stop a Judge from making the fair and impartial decision that he or she is required by law to make.
- 6) Acquaint yourself with the applicable State and Local Rules of Court, the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence (all of which are provided in the last section of this Handbook) and any statutes or case law governing your matter.

## HELPFUL ONLINE INFORMATION FOR SELF-REPRESENTED PARTIES

Becoming involved in the court system can be intimidating, especially if you are not represented by an attorney. If you would like to find a lawyer to help you, please contact the Delaware County Bar Association's Lawyer Referral Service at 610-566-6625, extension 221 or visit the Bar Association website listed below.

### **REMEMBER, THESE RESOURCES ARE NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTING WITH AN EXPERIENCED ATTORNEY.**

- 1) AOPC Resource Center: <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/representing-yourself>
- 2) Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure: <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?titleNumber=231&file=/secure/pacode/data/231/231toc.html>
- 3) Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence: <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?titleNumber=225&file=/secure/pacode/data/225/225toc.html>
- 4) Pennsylvania Rules of Appellate Procedure: <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?file=/secure/pacode/data/210/part1toc.html&d=>
- 5) Delaware County Local Rules of Civil Procedure: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/localrules.html>
- 6) Delaware County Court of Common Pleas: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/index.html>
- 7) Delaware County Court Administration: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/administration/index.html>
- 8) Delaware County Domestic Relations: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/domesticrelations/index.html>
- 9) Delaware County Office of Judicial Support: <https://www.delcopa.gov/ojs/index.html>
- 10) Francis J. Catania Courthouse Law Library: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/lawlibrary.html>
- 11) Delaware County Courts Self-Help Custody: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/selfhelpcustody.html>
- 12) Delaware County Courts Self-Help Divorce: <https://delcopa.gov/courts/selfhelpdivorce.html>
- 13) Delaware County Bar Association: <https://delcobar.org/>
  - a. Lawyer Referral Service: <https://delcobar.org/?pg=clientreferrals>
- 14) Delaware County Public Defender's Office: <https://delcopa.gov/departments/publicdefender.html>
- 15) Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania: <https://www.lasp.org/>
- 16) PA Law Help: <https://www.palawhelp.org/>