



WASHINGTON COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS PRO SE CUSTODY PACKET

NOTICE

ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN LITIGATION ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL LEGAL ADVICE FROM AN ATTORNEY. Court staff cannot offer any legal advice. The information in this packet is not a substitute for professional legal advice. The Court assumes no responsibility and accepts no liability for actions taken by users of these documents, including reliance on their contents.

If you want to hire an attorney and do not know one, you should call the Bar Association's Lawyer Referral Service (LRS) at 724-225-6710 to schedule a half-hour consultation with a licensed, insured attorney who has experience in the area of law related to your legal matter. The initial half-hour consultation with the attorney is \$50.00 to be paid in advance to the Bar Association; any fees beyond the first half-hour should be discussed and agreed upon by you and the lawyer.

If you meet certain income and other qualifications, you may be able to secure an attorney through Southwestern PA Legal Services at 724-225-6170. Ask if you are eligible for the Bar Association/Bar Foundation "Limited Representation Custody Program," and, if so, you may be referred to an attorney who will represent you at no cost at the initial custody meeting.

If you have questions about domestic violence or believe that you may be the victim of domestic violence, we strongly recommend that you contact the *Washington County Domestic Violence Services* at 724-223-8349.

If you suspect child abuse, please contact *CHILDLINE* at 1-800-932-0313. You can report suspected child abuse 24 hours per day and remain anonymous.

COURTROOM CONDUCT

Before you come to Court:

1. If not typed, forms should be filled out in BLUE INK, not pencil. Signatures on original documents should be in blue ink.
2. DO NOT write on the BACK of any paper that you present to the Court.
3. If you are presenting a Petition for Special Relief, Continuance, Withdrawal, Petition to Intervene, Relocation or Contempt, you MUST have given the other party five (5) business days' notice meaning you sent them a complete copy of the document which you intend to present to the Judge.
4. If the other party has an attorney of record, the ATTORNEY must be served notice, not the party. See Custody FAQs # 11 for more information.
5. If you have an existing Custody Order, you MUST attach a copy to your Petition. If you do not have one, you will need to request one from the Prothonotary's Office. (Note: the Prothonotary's Office charges .25 per page for copies.)
6. You must fill out all papers with the same caption (top section where the name of the Plaintiff and Defendant is) as your existing Custody Order. That means that if you are the Defendant on your Custody Order, you will ALWAYS be the Defendant when you fill out custody papers.
7. You must provide the Judge's Chambers with a copy of any motion for their consideration, whether contested or uncontested, before 12:00 noon on the Friday prior to the scheduled presentation.

In the Courtroom:

8. Do not bring your children into the courtroom.
9. Completely turn OFF all cell phones.
10. To present a Motion on your own behalf, you must step **INSIDE** of the courtroom. Be seated and wait until you are called up by the Judge. Do not leave the courtroom.
11. Please do not talk while others are presenting their Motions.
12. Properly dispose of your chewing gum before entering the Courtroom. Do not place your personal items on the bar.
13. You must be **DRESSED APPROPRIATELY** for Court. You can be turned away if you are not dressed appropriately. It is within the Court Staff's discretion to determine whether your attire is appropriate. Generally, **YOU CANNOT WEAR:**

Tank tops	Halter tops	Strapless tops	Shorts
Flip flops	Sweatpants	Hats	Ripped clothing
14. Once the Judge calls you to the bar, speak clearly and loud enough for the Judge to hear. Address the judge as Your Honor. Speak to the Judge and **not** the opposing party.
15. Be respectful to the courtroom staff.