



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.

How to file for custody in Washington County

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A case begins with the filing of a custody complaint. If a case already exists, then all subsequent filings must be done under the original number.

How to file a custody complaint:

1. Receive the custody complaint paperwork from the County website.
2. Fill out the paperwork in its entirety. **PRINT LEGIBLY.--PLEASE USE BLUE INK**
3. Bring the completed paperwork with two (2) copies to the Court Administrator's Office – Civil Division (Custody Office), Suite G006.
4. The Custody Office will forward the paperwork to the Judge. The Judge will review it and sign an Order scheduling a meeting with the Conference Officer.
5. The Custody Office will call the filing party to pick up the paperwork in their office.
 - a. You will receive a Parenting Plan
 - i. Must be completed and returned to the Custody Office **at least 10 days before the scheduled meeting.**
 - b. You will receive information on the Custody Education Program
 1. **Failure to complete the Custody Education Program prior to the conference may prohibit the offending party from presenting testimony. If the offending party is the plaintiff, the case may be dismissed.**
6. File the original custody complaint in the Prothonotary's Office.
7. Pay the filing fee of \$325.25.
 - a. If you are unable to pay the fee and meet the poverty guidelines you may present an In Forma Pauperis Petition to the Family Court Judge in motions court (this can be picked up in the Divorce and Custody Office).
8. The opposing party must be **SERVED** with a time-stamped copy of the custody complaint. This is your responsibility.
9. After service is made to the opposing party, an Affidavit of Service **must** be filed in the Prothonotary's Office.
10. Attend the custody meeting.