

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA  
DOMESTIC RELATIONS SECTION

## **IMPORTANT NOTICE - EXCEPTIONS**

**If you do not agree with the “Findings and Recommended Order” of the Hearing Officer, you may file Exceptions to the Family Court Judge.**

Exceptions are problems and/or issues with the Findings and Recommended Order that you want the Family Court Judge to resolve. Each issue should be clearly explained in a sentence.

Exceptions may be filed to the recommendation, to rulings on objections to evidence, to statements or findings of facts, to conclusions of law, or to any other matters occurring during the de novo hearing.

You cannot file exceptions to any issue that you did not discuss in front of the Hearing Officer. The Judge will only consider issues raised or evidence presented during your de novo hearing.

If your reason for disagreeing with the Findings and Recommended Order is based on a change to your circumstances that occurred around or after your de novo hearing, you should discuss with your enforcement officer whether you should file a Petition for Modification instead.

**EXCEPTIONS MUST BE FILED WITH THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS DOCKET ROOM NO LATER THAN TWENTY (20) DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDED ORDER.**

When you file Exceptions, you are obligated to also do the following:

- 1) Order a Transcript of the de novo hearing.
- 2) File a written brief supporting your exceptions
- 3) Attend argument court to discuss your exceptions with the Family Court Judge.

If you fail to do any of the above things, your exceptions may be dismissed or rejected.

For detailed instructions on the exceptions process, see the next page.

**If you do not file exceptions, the findings of the Hearing Officer will become a final Order of Court after twenty (20) days.**

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**HOW TO FILE EXCEPTIONS**

**1) PREPARE EXCEPTIONS**

You must prepare your own exceptions. Each exception should be no longer than a single sentence. You may raise multiple exceptions in one filing. Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure, "Each exception shall set forth a separate objection precisely and without discussion." A form is attached to this packet that you may use if you wish.

**2) ORDER A TRANSCRIPT**

The Judge must be able to review the de novo hearing to decide your exceptions. You must provide a transcript to the Court to make this possible. Fill out a **Transcript Request Form**, make a copy, and file the original form at the Domestic Relations Docket Room. **Ordering a transcript requires a \$50.00 deposit.** Request that your copy of the request form be time-stamped.

Take the time-stamped copy of your Transcript Request form and deliver the copy, along with the receipt for your \$50 deposit, to the office of Court Administration. Court Administration is located on the first floor of the main Courthouse building.

Mail a copy of your transcript request form to the opposing party, or their attorney of record if they have one.

**If you do not order a transcript, your exceptions will not be accepted by the Domestic Relations Docket Room for filing.**

**3) FILE THE EXCEPTIONS**

Within twenty (20) days of the issuance of the Hearing Officer's Findings and Recommended Order, file your Exceptions with the Domestic Relations Docket Room.

Exceptions may be filed in person or mailed to the following address:

Court of Common Pleas of Washington County  
Domestic Relations Docket Room  
Family Court Center  
29 W. Cherry Avenue, Ste 311  
Washington, PA 15301

Once filed, you should mail or serve time-stamped copies of your exceptions on the opposing party or their attorney of record. Exceptions filed after 20 days will not be accepted.

**4) FINALIZE THE TRANSCRIPT**

When the transcription is concluded, you will be contacted by the Court Reporter. You must pay for the remaining cost of the transcript if your \$50 deposit did not cover the entire cost. Once you have paid, the transcript will be filed for you.

## **5) PREPARE AND FILE A BRIEF**

A court order will be issued scheduling Argument Court to discuss your Exceptions with the Family Law Judge. This Court Order will also contain a deadline to submit a “Brief in Support of Exceptions.”

A brief is a written argument prepared by a party or their attorney. The brief should discuss each exception and why the exception should be granted. The brief is your opportunity to provide more than a single sentence to explain why you feel the Hearing Officer made a mistake.

Generally, a Brief contains 1) a summary of the facts of your case, 2) cites to relevant laws, statutes, or rules, 3) argues how those laws apply to the facts of your case or why they support your position, and 4) a conclusion that clearly states what you want the Judge to do

File your brief with the Domestic Relations Docket Room and mail time-stamped copies to the opposing party **and to the office of the Family Court Judge so that they can read it.**

If you file your brief late, or if you fail to file a brief, the Judge may choose not to consider your exceptions.

## **6) ATTEND ARGUMENT COURT**

Attend Argument Court in the Courtroom of the Family Court Judge on the date and time in the scheduling order. You will have a dedicated fifteen (15) minute period of time to make your argument to the Judge.

Following this hearing, the Judge will issue a decision and it will be mailed to all the parties.