

Standard Judicial Operating Procedures

Effective October 2018

Honorable Jennifer Satler

Adult Section, Family Division
Court of Common Pleas, Allegheny County
440 Ross Street, Suite 5073
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412-350-7576 412-350-7578 (fax)

CONTACTS WITH OFFICE

- Unless specifically requested by the Court, the Court will not entertain e-mails, letters or telephone calls requesting action of any kind. All matters shall be presented to the Court by way of motion or petition. Unsolicited letters will be returned, unread. This is true even if opposing counsel or party has been carbon copied on the correspondence. Such communication is still ex-parte and prohibited unless requested by the Court
- Counsel should not correspond with the Court by e-mail unless specifically requested to do so.
- Counsel and/or the parties shall not engage in ex parte communication concerning a pending case with the Court or staff. Such communication may be deemed a cause for referral to the disciplinary authorities, or other appropriate sanctions.
- Inquiries concerning Court procedures should be directed to the Secretary, Tipstaff, or Law Clerk.
- The Judge's Chambers is staffed from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM. On most days, staff goes to lunch from Noon to 1:00 PM. The Court discourages deliveries and/or visits except during the times staff is available.

COURTROOM DECORUM

- No food or drink (except water) is permitted in the Courtroom.
- No ringing cell phones or audible pagers are permitted in the Courtroom.

- Any proceeding in the Courtroom, whether motions, arguments or trial shall be conducted in a dignified and formal manner.
- This Court maintains a zero tolerance policy toward incivility. Colloquy between counsel is only permitted to expedite matters. Argument between counsel is strictly prohibited. All remarks should be addressed to the Court. Counsel should never act or speak disrespectfully to the Court, the Court's staff or opposing counsel in any manner.
- Only counsel and parties may sit at counsel table, unless the Court permits otherwise.
- At trial or at hearings, witnesses and parties should be instructed to wear clean, neat, and appropriate attire. In addition, witnesses and parties should be instructed as to proper behavior when Court is in session.
- Children, who are the subject of the litigation or who are in any way involved in the litigation, are under no circumstances to be present in the Courtroom during a proceeding unless requested by the Court. Counsel shall advise clients to make appropriate child care arrangements. Counsel and parties should be familiar with the location of the Children's Room and their hours of operation.
- Counsel should advise clients that while they are certainly welcome to attend Motions or arguments on Exceptions, they are not permitted to address the Court unless requested by the Court to do so. Counsel shall advise the Court that their clients are present in the Courtroom.

PRO-SE MOTIONS

- The Court will hear pro-se motions at 1:00 p.m. when Motions are scheduled for 2:00 p.m., and 9:30 a.m. when Motions are scheduled for 10:30 a.m. The Court will hear pro-se motions in the following order:
 - Motions with private counsel opposing the motion.
 - Motions involving the County Solicitor.
 - All other motions.
 - Motions to amend or vacate PFA's.
- The Court will only entertain pro-se motions or cases which are assigned to this Court.
- All parties are forewarned that the Court starts pro-se motions court promptly at the scheduled time. Failure to appear at the time scheduled may result in the motions being denied or granted without a party being present. In the event both

parties fail to timely attend, the Court may refuse to hear a motion until the next motions court.

- Pro-se litigants are expected to follow all rules of court and also shall comply with this Court's Standard Judicial Operating Procedures.
- Pro-se motions shall not be provided directly to the Judge's chambers, but rather must be submitted through the pro-se litigant program, even if the party has not used an attorney through the program.
- Pro-se litigants are not permitted to call and discuss substantive matters with the Court's staff. Further, staff is not permitted to give legal advice of any kind.

MOTIONS

- The Motions Court schedule is published in the Pittsburgh Legal Journal and is also available on the Court website which is <http://www.alleghencourts.us>
 - Regular Motions Court is usually scheduled at 2:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and is scheduled at 10:30 a.m. on Fridays.
 - In addition, on rare occasions, Motions may be moved to another day and/or may be scheduled at a different time. This change will be reflected in the PLJ and the Court website. The change will always be made at least seven (7) days in advance, except in the case of an extreme emergency. In the event this occurs, the Court will also attempt to post any changes around the Family Division Courthouse and at the elevators. Accordingly, counsel should check the schedule prior to notifying opposing counsel of presentation.
- Beginning immediately, all motions are to be emailed to the Law Clerk by noon on the day before the scheduled date of Motions Court. The Court also requires any responses and/or answers to motions to be filed by that time. Motions, responses, and/or answers are to be emailed to the following: rcipolat@alleghencourts.us. The Law Clerk will respond "Received" upon receipt. If you do not receive a response from the Law Clerk, then the document was not received and will not be placed on the presentation list.
- Emailed motions, responses, and/or answers should be sent in .pdf format only.

- Original motions, responses, and/or answers are to be brought to Motions Court. The Court will not accept motions sent via fax or hand-delivery.
- The motion or cover letter should clearly indicate the date of presentation. Failure to indicate the date of presentation may result in the motion being placed at the end of the list or not being placed on the list at all. The motion will be placed on the list when received. If the motion is withdrawn or consented to after sign-up, please notify the Law Clerk via email immediately so that the Court does not waste time reviewing those motions prior to the start of Motions Court.
- The cover letter transmitting the motion should contain no substantive information. Any and all pertinent matters should be contained in the motion itself. Any information contained in cover letters will not be considered.
- If a motion is being presented on a case with which the Court is not familiar, counsel should notify the Law Clerk so that the Judge's file may be brought to Motions Court.
- Motions may be presented at a scheduled conciliation, but only upon proper 7 days notice to opposing counsel, or with the consent of opposing counsel.
- All motions should be clearly marked with the appropriate numerical suffix indicating which Judge the case has been assigned to, or should contain some explanation (by post-it note, etc.) as to why no suffix has been added. Failure to follow this procedure may result in the motion being placed at the end of the list.
- This Court will not entertain motions without a docket number. Counsel or parties should always acquire a docket number prior to presentation.
- The Court will not entertain motions or a matter assigned to another Judge unless that matter is a consent motion and does not involve enforcement or calendar control issues. The Court may, at its discretion, hear emergency matters involving cases assigned to another Judge; however counsel is forewarned that the matter must be a true emergency and it will be this Court's policy to enter only a temporary order until such time as the matter can be heard by the Judge assigned to the case. It is not an emergency if counsel simply isn't available when the assigned Judge is scheduled.
- This Court's assigned cases may be presented to another Judge in cases of true emergency. When doing so, a copy of the motion should be provided to this

Court so it can be discussed with the Motions Judge. It is not an emergency because counsel is (or was) unavailable when this Court is scheduled to be on Motions.

- The Court, if time permits, will sign consent orders prior to the beginning of Motions Court. In the event there is any problem with the consent motion or proposed order, it will be dealt with in Motions. Counsel should not assume that the order will be signed and should be available in the event the Court has questions.
- The Court will consider signing a consent order if brought to Chambers and the Judge is available to sign it. Unless specifically requested, a consent order should not be dropped off for signature nor should Judge Satler be interrupted during court proceedings to obtain her signature. Consent orders will be considered at any time during motions court while the judge is on the bench.
- Proposed orders scheduling a conference hearing of any kind should include proper notification language, such as “If party fails to appear at a conference and/or hearing as directed by Order of Court, the Court may issue a bench warrant for the arrest of said party.”
- The Court will not entertain discovery motions that do not comply with the requirements of the Court Manual. This includes a completed chart of the questions and responses. Failure to comply may result in the Court’s refusal to hear the matter.
- When presenting motions, counsel should be cognizant that once the motion is filed, all pages of the motion, including the attachments and exhibits, will be scanned and published on the Prothonotary’s website. Accordingly, counsel should be particularly careful about attaching documents of a sensitive nature and/or documents with social security numbers or financial information.
 - In the event such information is pertinent to the matters contained in the motion, but counsel does not want this information on the Prothonotary’s website, counsel should submit this information separately, but simultaneously, with the motion. In no circumstances should counsel or the party wait until the motion is being argued to submit pertinent documents.
- The Court does not routinely request to have a sheriff present during Exceptions or regular Motions Court. If you feel that a sheriff’s presence might be advisable, please notify the Tipstaff in advance. Err on the side of caution.

- Counsel should be familiar with all Administrative Orders and local rules, including, but not limited to, the rule concerning continuance within 30 days of a scheduled date. Continuances, even if consented to, will not be granted within the 30-day period, except for good cause, appropriately pled in the motion for continuance
- Counsel should immediately provide the Court's secretary with a courtesy copy of any orders scheduling or changing a date which has been scheduled directly before the Court. This rule is particularly true with regard to emergency matters, but it covers all scheduling matters before the Court – conciliations, hearings, and trials.

COURT SCHEDULE

- It is the Court's expectation that counsel shall comply with all Orders of Court prior to attendance at conciliation. Failure to timely file appropriate documents, such as stipulations, offers, pre-trials etc., will result in a continuance of the conciliation and/or the imposition of fines and counsel fees. In situations where a second (or third) conciliation has been scheduled and amended marital asset summaries are ordered, an amended marital asset summary must be filed. Counsel (or parties) who fail to file an amended marital asset summary and then inform the Court that "nothing has changed" will be fined or sanctioned or failure to file may result in a continuance.
- Counsel should be familiar with the Court's standard orders for conciliations, pre-trials, and trials, which may be different from the orders utilized by other Family Division Judges. Standard orders accompany the Court's scheduling orders, but such orders are also available by calling the Tipstaff or Secretary.
- Court, including conciliations and arguments, shall begin at the appointed time. Lateness may result in proceedings beginning without counsel, and in extreme cases, imposition of fines and/or counsel fees. Promptness is also expected of parties and witnesses.
- Except in very rare circumstances, attendance in another hearing or courtroom, which delays counsel, will not be considered a valid excuse ---- Counsel should schedule his or her day accordingly.
- In the event a matter is settled prior to a proceeding, including conciliation, the Court will expect an appropriate order.

- If counsel believes that a Court Reporter is necessary for a particular proceeding, notify the Tipstaff so that arrangements may be made, subject to the Court's approval.
- If counsel believes that a meeting with the Court, on the day of the proceeding, prior to a trial or hearing, may be helpful or necessary, both counsels should inform the Tipstaff as early as possible. If the meeting is to be protracted, every effort should be made to schedule it prior to the time set for the trial to commence. For example, if trial is to start at 9:30 a.m., counsel should endeavor to schedule the meeting at 9:00 a.m. or before.
- In the event a matter is settled prior to trial, counsel shall be responsible for notifying the Docket Clerk and the Court so that the matter can be removed from the Court/s calendar.

MISCELLANEOUS PROCEDURES

- The Court's orders requiring counseling and/or therapy in custody cases shall be enforced unless a party seeks appropriate relief. In the event either party fails to comply, counsel fees and/or sanctions will be imposed.
- Counsel will be required to submit a proposed Order of Court either at the time of or prior to any trial, hearing, or conciliation.
- Testimony via telephone is only allowed by permission of the Court. Such permission should be obtained prior to trial or hearing.
- In the event any equipment (audio visual, recording, etc.) is necessary for a trial or hearing, counsel must make appropriate arrangements.

EXHIBITS

- The Court will retain exhibits until 40 days after a final decision or order is entered if no appeal to the order is taken. If an appeal is filed, the Court will retain documents until 5 days after the Court's Opinion to the Appellate Court is filed. After those time periods, if counsel or the parties do not request return of the documents, they will be destroyed.

PFA PROCEDURES

- Final PFA's with the 017 suffix are usually scheduled for conciliation before the Court. A hearing may or may not be scheduled on the same day as the conciliation. If a final hearing is necessary, the Court will attempt to schedule the hearing as expeditiously as possible.

EXCEPTIONS

- Generally, the Court will hear argument on exceptions in the order in which they are listed in the PLJ, but from time to time, the Court may change the order. Counsel should note that exceptions are often withdrawn or continued, so the list can move more quickly than anticipated.
- The Court requires the exceptant to deliver a courtesy copy of the transcript and brief to chambers at the same time as the original is filed with the Court. The responding party is likewise expected to deliver a courtesy copy of the response brief to chambers at the same time as the original is filed with the Court.

TRIAL PROCEDURE

- In all cases, but particularly in custody cases, counsel should be mindful of the time allotted for trial and should plan his or her presentation accordingly. Additional trial time may not be available for several months.
- Court procedures shall begin promptly at the scheduled times. Trial shall end at approximately 4:30 PM. Counsel should be mindful that the Court often has prior obligations during the day, so that reduction of the lunch break may not always be possible to give additional time for trial testimony. Plan accordingly. Counsel should cooperate in the scheduling of an expert's testimony. The Court will always consider taking expert testimony out of order.

DIFFICULT LEGAL ISSUES

- If difficult questions of law or evidence are anticipated during the trial, counsel should alert his or her opponent and the Court should be supplied with a memorandum of law, in duplicate, at least one day prior to the time it is anticipated that the question will arise.

- When documents are to be entered into evidence and/or presented to the Court, counsel should provide copies to opposing counsel and to the Court. Continual requests for copies because counsel did not anticipate use of the document will be frowned upon.
- Rise when addressing the Court or making objections.
- Witnesses, including the opposing party, should be treated with fairness and consideration. Witnesses should not be shouted at, ridiculed, or abused in any manner.
- Although most proceedings are of an emotional nature, counsel is expected to allow opposing counsel to finish their statements without interfering (other than objections) or talking at the same time.

SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTS

- In all documents submitted to the Court, use of terms such as Husband/Father and Wife/Mother are preferred over plaintiff/defendant, petitioner/respondent, etc. Original pleadings and submissions should be filed with the Family Court Prothonotary, with a courtesy copy provided to the Court.

AMENDMENT

- It is anticipated that these procedures will be amended from time to time.

COURT PERSONNEL

412-350-7576

Secretary

Pam Palmosina

Law Clerk

Rachel M. Cipolat

Tipstaff

Matt Weinstein

