



Standard Operating Procedures for Judge Jessel A. Costa III

Revised on 11/25/2024

Important Updates

- November 25th, 2024 – Complete revision of Judge Costa's Standard Operating Procedures. Please read thoroughly.

Contact Information

Judicial Chambers

Family Law Center
440 Ross Street
Suite 535
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Judicial Administrative Assistant

Tabatha Cramer, (412) 350-1663, tcramer@alleghenycourts.us

Judicial Tip Staff

Lisa Giorgetti, (412) 350-1662, lgiorgetti@alleghenycourts.us

Law Clerk

Aaron Klavon, (412) 350-1661, aklavon@alleghenycourts.us

Contents

I. Communication with the Court.....	2
II. Submission of Documents.....	3
III. Custody of Exhibits in Court Proceedings.....	4
IV. General Court Conduct.....	5
V. Remote Proceedings.....	5
VI. Motions.....	7
VII. Courtroom Decorum.....	14
VIII. Court Schedule.....	15
IX. Custody Trials.....	16
X. Divorce.....	16
XI. Exceptions.....	17

Communication with the Court

- A. Judge Costa's staff may address scheduling and administrative matters only. For questions about court procedure, you may speak with the Judge's Administrative Assistant, Tip Staff, or Law Clerk. The best way to do this is to send an email to tcramer@alleghenycourts.us or call the Judge's chambers at (412) 350-1663. You may also leave a voicemail with chambers at that number, and it will be reviewed in a timely manner.
- B. The Court cannot give you legal advice about your case. If you do not have an attorney, you are highly encouraged to use the services of the **Client Services Center** located on the first floor of the Family Law Center at 440 Ross Street in downtown Pittsburgh. More information about the Court's self-help services can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/client-services-center>.
- C. All opposing parties/attorneys **MUST** be copied on any email sent to the Court. The Court will not consider documents or communications sent from one party without verification that it was also sent to the opposing party. If opposing party is pro se, they must be included on the email as well.
- D. All emails must include the case name and number within the subject line.

- E. Attorneys should not copy their clients directly on e-mails to the Court, except as provided below (in the context of a motion to withdraw as counsel). Opposing parties represented by counsel should not be copied on emails to the Court. This may lead to inadvertent *ex parte* communication.
 - F. The body of each email should identify who is included on the correspondence and how they are involved in the case.
 - G. The email addresses referenced below are intended to facilitate: (1) submissions that comply with rules of Court; and (2) information specifically requested by the Court. The Court will not and cannot consider other documents or communications, including arguments between the parties/counsel. **Failure to comply with this directive may result in sanctions.**
 - H. Information about general court procedures can be found at <https://www.alleghecourts.us/family/departments>.
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Submission of Documents

- A. **All pleadings that are submitted to Judge Costa MUST contain the -002 suffix at the end of the docket number.** Pleadings without a docket number in the proper format will be returned.
- B. All submissions should have page numbers where appropriate.
- C. When submitting a document by email, please use the case name as the subject for the email (e.g., Smith v. Smith).
- D. Additionally, please name all files and documents you send to the court with the case name listed **first** (e.g., Smith v. Smith Proposed Order).
 - 1. Also be sure to number all pages of each document or exhibit before they are submitted to the Court. The Court has numerous cases and must be able to efficiently address and keep track of case filings. **Failure to do this may result in your submission being returned for correction.**
- E. In all documents submitted to the Court, the use of terms like Husband, Wife, Partner, Mother, or Father are preferred over terms like Plaintiff, Defendant, Petitioner, or Respondent. Please alert the Judge's staff as soon as possible if

you or your client objects to the use of these terms or would prefer that the Court use a specific term.

- F. The Court can sign and date PDF documents. Proposed Orders that are not consented to by all parties must still be submitted in Word format.
 - G. All submissions for conciliations, trials and hearings before Judge Costa should be submitted to costasubmissions@allegheycourts.us in accordance with any Judicial Scheduling Order.
 - H. **Any consent Orders submitted to the court involving physical custody must include a completed Custody Consent Verification Form and an updated Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification form.**
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Custody of Exhibits in Court Proceedings

- A. Please review Rule 5101.4 Family Division Custody of Exhibits at the following link: [New-Local-Rule-on-Exhibits-Family-Divison.pdf \(allegheycourts.us\)](#)
- B. This rule applies to all proceedings before Judge Costa. The party proponent of the exhibit is the court designated custodian of the exhibit. The only exception to this is when the proponent of the evidence is a self-represented (Pro Se/Litigant without an Attorney) litigant, in which case judicial staff will serve as the custodian of the exhibit.
- C. Any party seeking to admit evidence must have each exhibit clearly labeled PRIOR to the proceeding. The party proponent of the evidence must be prepared to provide a copy of the exhibit or email the exhibit at the time of admission to costasubmissions@allegheycourts.us. The party proponent may email the labeled exhibit to costasubmissions@allegheycourts.us upon admission. Exhibits shall not be emailed or provided to the court in advance of any proceeding.
- D. The party proponent of the evidence must also keep an index of the exhibits. This index must list, and all of the party proponent's exhibits, must be filed with the Department of Court Records (DCR) within five (5) business days upon the conclusion of the hearing. This index list must indicate whether the exhibit was admitted or rejected into evidence and provide a description or identification of the exhibit. The proponent is required to email court staff at tcramer@allegheycourts.us once this has been completed, as required by rule.

- E. It is the responsibility of the proponent/custodian of the exhibits to maintain a copy of their exhibits, maintain a copy of the index/exhibit list, and to comply with this rule for all proceedings before Judge Costa. Pay special attention to Rule 5103.4 as it relates to Special Provisions for certain exhibits.
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General Court Conduct

- A. The Court is using the **Microsoft Teams** application to conduct much of its work, including most **conciliations**. Hearings, Trials, and other matters shall occur in-person. See [Remote Proceedings](#) below for more information.
 - B. Check the Fifth Judicial District's website **regularly** for updates to the family division and this Court's procedures. Changes are on-going and it is your responsibility to make sure you are aware of the latest procedures.
 - C. **ENTRY OF APPEARANCE.** Attorneys must officially enter a Praecipe of Appearance in each case they appear in before the Court. In Juvenile Court, this must be done electronically through PACFile. Failure to officially withdraw your appearance when necessary may result in disciplinary action.
 - 1. Self-represented parties must also enter their appearance as required by Pa.R.C.P. No. 1930.8. A form is available at www.pacourts.us/learn/representing-yourself/custody-proceedings
 - D. It is your responsibility to be aware of and follow the within procedures. The "Revised on" date stated above will be updated any time a revision is made. Please remember that judicial resources are limited and that the Court has a full docket. Accordingly, cooperation and civility between attorneys is more important than ever.
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Remote Proceedings

- A. The Court is using the **Microsoft Teams** application to conduct much of its work, including most **conciliations**. Hearings, Trials, and other matters shall occur in-person. Microsoft Teams can be downloaded on most computers and mobile devices. More information can be found at www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/download-app.

1. **NOTICE:** it is a crime to record a remote proceeding without permission from all parties. Any violations will be referred to the district attorney for prosecution.
 2. If you have a remote proceeding scheduled before the Court, you are expected to be familiar with Microsoft Teams and to appear by video from a quiet and private location.
 3. Invitations for remote proceedings will be sent out to the email addresses that the Court currently has on file. It is the responsibility of attorneys to be sure that the Court has an up-to-date email address and phone number for both themselves and their client well in advance of any remote proceeding.
- B. When a proceeding is scheduled to be in-person, parties may use the remote hearing technology in certain circumstances and at the discretion of the Court.
1. A party may only appear remotely with the Court's permission. Permission can be obtained by filing a motion.
 2. Lay witnesses are only permitted to appear remotely with the consent of all parties. If a party does not consent, then the party presenting the witness may file a motion requesting permission for the witness to appear remotely.
 - a. Plan to have your witnesses join the trial by forwarding the Teams invitation to them or have them on standby for you to notify them to join. They should have the Microsoft Teams application downloaded in advance and be familiar with it. It is the party's responsibility to forward the Teams invitation. Witnesses appearing remotely should be instructed to be ready to appear by video in a private and quiet setting.
 3. The Court prefers that expert witness appear in-person. Expert witnesses may only appear remotely with the Court's permission. Permission can be obtained by filing a motion.
- C. For **remote conciliations**, any necessary documents, such as marital asset summaries and proposed orders, **MUST** be filed electronically seven (7) days prior to the conciliation. If neither party files the proper documentation, the conciliation may be canceled and will only be rescheduled by Motion. If one party

fails to provide the necessary documentation the conciliation will proceed, however, the Court may impose sanctions on the non-compliant party.

1. If both parties are represented by attorneys, the Court will meet with the attorneys without the parties present before involving the parties in the conciliation, if appropriate. **An Attorney shall inform the Court if their client is present with them or listening in before the conciliation begins.**

D. **Juvenile Matters.** Attorneys, caseworkers, probation officers, and parties are to be present in the courthouse for proceedings unless otherwise notified by the Court.

Motions

A. General Information

1. The procedure for motions is different depending on whether the party filing the motion is represented by an attorney, self-represented, or if the matter is an emergency. Please review the following procedures carefully to ensure that your motion is heard in a timely manner.
2. All motions for Judge Costa must contain the **-002** suffix at the end of the docket number. Pleadings without a docket number in the proper format will be returned.
3. Judge Costa will decide non-emergency Motions in person, on the days he is assigned to do so on the Motions Calendar. Please refer to the Motions Calendar located on the Fifth Judicial District's website for Judge Costa's Motions dates. Non-emergency Motions should be noticed for the next available Motions date on his calendar.
4. Meet and Confer requirements are still in effect.
5. Once Meet and Confer requirements are met, electronic copies of Motions must be emailed to the Court at motionscosta@allegheycourts.us one week (7 days) prior to the scheduled Motions date. Any responses from the opposing party must be submitted no less than 24 hours prior to Judge Costa's scheduled Motions date.

B. **Self-Represented Parties.** If you are representing yourself, you must prepare and submit your motion at the Information Desk in the rotunda in the Family Law Center, 440 Ross Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Self-prepared motions may be dropped off any business day that the Court is open, generally Monday through Friday, from 8am to 12pm. Please keep in mind that as a pro se client, you are acting as an attorney, who must comply with the legal process. Court staff in the Family Law Center are not permitted to provide you with legal advice. A resource sheet is available at the Information Desk with agencies that may be able to assist you. When submitting a completed pro se motion, please be aware of the following: 1. Your motion must be in the proper legal format, including a cover page (with a caption and your Family Division docket number), a motion asking for specific relief, a proposed order, and any relevant attachments (for example, if you are asking to change an order on your case, attach a copy of that order), 2. You will be asked to complete a demographic information sheet, and 3. You will be given a Notice Of Presentation after your motion is scheduled, with the date, time, and location of your motions hearing where you must appear before the Judge. You will be required to serve this motion on the other party, so they have notice of the court date. You will also be required to file your motion with the Department of Court Records, 1st Floor City-County Building, 414 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Motions must be presented to the assigned judge. If the other party is represented by an attorney, you will also be required to notice and serve their attorney. If you are represented by an attorney, you will not be permitted to go through the Information Desk to submit your prepared motion, as your attorney of record will be required to follow the guidelines outlined in these Standard Operating Procedures for attorney motions. If your motion is not properly and promptly served, promptly filed with the Department of Court Records, and/or not in the proper form, please be advised that the Judge may deny your motion. If you have an emergency (this is generally defined as a time-sensitive or child safety issue), you may submit and file your self-prepared motion on the same day to the Information Desk at the days/times stated above. The staff will provide you with further information about how your emergency motion will be heard. Please be advised that this means the other party will not have notice or time to contest your motion, which means the Judge is unlikely to grant the relief unless there are compelling and special circumstances. Except in rare situations, the Judge will likely deny the emergency same day motion and require you to re-present it with proper notice to the other party.

1. Self-represented parties **responding to a motion** may submit their response by email to motionscosta@alleghecourts.us.

- a. Responses to **non-emergency motions** are due by 12:00 PM on the business day before the motion will be presented to the Court for argument.
 - b. Responses to **emergency motions** that were sent to the Court *before* 12:00 PM on a weekday when the Court is in session are due by 3:00 PM that same day. Responses to motions that were submitted *after* 12:00 PM are due by 12:00 PM on the next business day.
 2. Non-Emergency Motions will be scheduled for a brief, in-person argument. The parties are expected to appear at the Family Law Center in the scheduled courtroom and be prepared to explain their motion or response to the Judge and to answer any questions that the Judge may have. If necessary, Parties may request to appear remotely by contacting the judge's chambers.
 3. All contested Motions and Petitions must contain:
 - a. A certificate of compliance with Rule 1930(a)(7) (re: meet and confer);
 - b. A certificate of service, appearing on a separate page;
 - c. A Proposed Order in Word Format, which shall also be affixed to the last page of the petition or motion.
- C. **Attorneys.** Attorneys may submit motions and responses directly to the Court by email to motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include “Motion, Case Name, and Case Number” in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.** Attorneys are encouraged to hand-deliver motions that exceed twenty (20) pages including any exhibits. These must be received at least 3 days prior to the scheduled Motions date.
1. Motions that are hand-delivered must also be emailed to Chambers at motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us seven (7) days prior to the Motions Court date. Motions sent by email must include the opposing party, if possible, with the following information included in the email: (1) the names of both parties and counsel; (2) the docket number; (3) the date of presentation; and (4) whether the motion is contested or uncontested.

2. Responses must be noticed for the Judge's next scheduled Motions date and must be submitted by **12:00 PM** on the *business day* before the scheduled motions day. The Motions Court schedule is available on the Fifth Judicial Districts Website at www.alleghenycourts.us/family/calendar/. If in doubt about the deadline for a motion or response, please contact chambers.
 - a. **Please note that regardless of when a motion is submitted to the Court, it must still comply with all requirements regarding notice to the opposing party.** As explained below, seven (7) days' notice of presentation of any motion is required unless it is an emergency.
 - b. **Motions and responses submitted to the Court shall be filed with DCR before the date set for argument.**
3. Once a motion and response have been submitted, further replies/responses are not permitted unless the response specifically raises new matter or by leave of Court. Parties are not permitted to submit a new matter within a response. **Any new matter MUST be raised through a new motion and must be compliant with the seven (7) day notice of presentation.**
4. Attorneys on contested motions are expected to appear for argument on the noticed Motions Court day. **Parties are expected to appear in-person unless permitted to appear remotely by the Court. Parties represented by attorneys are not required to appear if their attorney will be present for argument.** When appearing for argument, parties should check-in with the Judge's staff and remain in the courtroom until the presentation of their Motion is concluded.
 - a. Parties should notify the Court if a matter is uncontested or withdrawn prior to argument. Attorney motions on uncontested or routine issues may be resolved prior to Motions Court and attorneys will be notified if there is no need to appear.
5. Attorneys are expected to fully comply with the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure and Local Rule 1930 where applicable. As a reminder:

- a. Motions must include a **Notice of Presentation** and **Certificate of Service** unless presented by consent. The Notice of Presentation and Certificate of Service should be on a separate page of the motion or petition following the cover sheet. **The Notice must specifically state the date, time, and location of argument on the motion.**
- b. Attorneys are required to **MEET and CONFER** with the opposing party before filing a motion. Please see Administrative Order 225 of 2015 for more information. Attorneys must include the Certificate of Compliance with each filing, preferably at the beginning of the document along with the certificate of service. The Certificate must specify the date that you contacted the opposing party and the way in which that party was contacted. This is required even if the opposing party is not represented by an attorney.
- c. **Seven (7) days' notice** of presentation of any motion is required absent an emergency or consent by the opposing party to a shorter notice of presentation. Motions that have not been properly served on the opposing party will not be heard.
- d. Motions must include a **proposed order**, which should be attached as the last page of the motion or petition. If submitting your motion by email, please attach your proposed order as a separate file in the **Microsoft Word** or .docx format.

D. **Emergency Motions.** The Court has discretion to determine the nature of any motion designated as an “emergency.” Failing to allocate sufficient time for a response does not constitute an emergency. A true custody emergency is where there is an immediate clear and present danger to a child. **An emergency includes, but is not limited to, a risk that a parent has or will run away from the county with the child without a known destination, plans to remove the child from Pennsylvania with no intent to return, when neither parent is available to care for the child, or the child is at imminent and serious risk of physical, psychological, or emotional harm.**

- 1. **Self-Represented Litigants** must file emergency motions and responses to emergency motions with the Client Services Center as explained in [Subsection B](#) above.

2. **Attorneys** filing an emergency motion must email the motion directly to the Court at emergencycosta@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include “Emergency Motion” in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.** Counsel *must* send a copy to the opposing party when submitting their motion.
 - a. Emergency motions submitted **before 12:00 PM** on weekdays when the Court is in session will generally be ruled on the same day. Emergency motions submitted **after 12:00 PM** will generally be ruled on the next business day.
 - b. Along with the submission of an emergency motion, attorneys must notify the judge’s chambers of the emergency submission by **telephone call to (412) 350-1663**.
 3. **Attorneys** responding to an emergency motion shall submit a response to emergencycosta@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include “Emergency Motion” in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.** If an emergency motion is submitted *before* 12:00 PM on a weekday when the Court is in session, then the response is due by **3:00 PM** that same day. Otherwise, the response is due by **12:00 PM** on the next business day. Counsel *must* send a copy to the opposing party when submitting their response.
- E. **Consent Motions.** Attorneys may submit motions consented to by all parties directly to the Court by email to costaconsent@alleghenycourts.us. Consent motions will be accepted at any time. **Please include “Consent Motion, Case Name, and Case Number” in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.** The Court will attempt to address consent motions in a timely manner.
1. **Any consent Orders submitted to the court involving physical custody must include a completed Custody Consent Verification Form and an updated Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification form.**
 2. **QDROs.** You may follow the same procedure for QDROs as for Consent Motions. However, if the institution requires an original ink signature, you may mail or hand-deliver the QDRO to chambers along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If emailed, please send directly to Tabatha Cramer, at tcramer@alleghenycourts.us.

3. **WITHDRAW AS COUNSEL.** The email correspondence should include the client and opposing counsel or the other party. The Order must contain all signatures, otherwise it must be presented as a contested motion. Additionally, counsel should provide all contact information for the client including email address, phone number, and mailing address directly within the proposed order.

F. **Praeipie Approving Grounds for Divorce.** Please see [Divorce](#) for more information regarding Orders Approving Grounds for Divorce.

1. All submissions must include the case name and docket numbers, and all parties and counsel must be included on all correspondence. These may be sent to motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us.
2. Please reference the Court website for all forms at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/forms/>.
3. Any Praeipie Approving Grounds for Divorce must strictly comply with the Pennsylvania Rule of Civil Procedure 1920.42, or they will not be approved.

G. **Discovery Motions.** Discovery motions must comply with the requirements of the Court Manual. Motions regarding complex discovery matters will generally be referred to the appropriate Hearing Officer for a conciliation if they can't be ruled on based on the pleadings. Attorneys should submit a proposed order with their motion directing the case to the Hearing Officer and, upon receipt of the signed order, follow the Hearing Officer's Standard Operating Procedures to get a hearing date. The Court will require the moving party to pay the full cost of the Hearing Officer's hearing subject to possible reallocation by the Hearing Officer. Hearing Officer procedures can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/divorce/hearing-officers>.

H. **Motions for Contempt or Enforcement.** Motions regarding contempt or enforcement may be referred to the appropriate Hearing Officer for resolution. Attorneys are encouraged to submit a proposed order with their motion directing the case to the Hearing Officer, especially if it involves enforcement of a MSA or ED/Divorce Consent Order. The Court will require the moving party to pay the full cost of the Hearing Officer's hearing subject to possible reallocation by the Hearing Officer. Hearing Officer procedures can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/divorce/hearing-officers>.

- I. **Equitable Distribution.** If you believe a case is ripe for an Equitable Distribution conciliation or hearing, submit a motion to motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us. In your motion, you MUST demonstrate that the matter is ripe for the requested proceeding. If grounds for divorce have been established, you may go directly to the Hearing Officer. Unless the motion is consented to by all parties, it will be held for seven (7) days to allow for response. Include a Proposed Order directing the case to the Hearing Officer and, upon receipt of the signed Order, follow the Hearing Officer's procedures to have the matter scheduled for a conciliation. The Court will split the cost of the hearing unless otherwise requested/determined.
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Courtroom Decorum

- A. Any party/participant, including an attorney, who is experiencing symptoms or illness or is in quarantine should remain at home and participate remotely. Attorneys should inform the Judge of any client or witness requesting to appear remotely due to illness/quarantine.
- B. No ringing cellphones or other audible devices are permitted in the courtroom.
- C. All proceedings shall be conducted in a dignified and formal manner.
- D. This Court maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward incivility. During proceedings, discussion between attorneys is only permitted to expedite matters; argument between attorneys is strictly prohibited. All remarks should be addressed to the Court. Attorneys should never act or speak disrespectfully to the Court, the Court's staff, or opposing counsel in any manner.
- E. Witnesses are expected to be in a quiet and private location and able to participate by video. If a person does not have Wi-Fi access, a party may request that a witness be able to participate by phone, but that request should be made before the hearing begins. Attorneys or the parties are responsible for explaining how to access the proceeding to their witnesses.
- F. Witnesses, including the opposing party, should be treated with fairness and consideration. Witnesses should not be shouted at, ridiculed, or disrespected in any manner.

- G. In all cases, but particularly in custody cases, attorneys should be mindful of the time allotted for trial and should plan their presentation accordingly. Additional trial time may not be available for several months.
 - H. While many proceedings are of an emotional nature, attorneys are expected to allow opposing counsel to finish their statements without interfering (other than objections) or talking at the same time.
 - I. Attorneys should cooperate in the scheduling of an expert's testimony. The Court will always consider taking expert testimony out of order.
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Court Schedule

- A. It is the Court's expectation that attorneys shall comply with all Orders of Court prior to attendance at conciliation or trial. Failure to timely file appropriate documents, such as stipulations, offers, pre-trials, proposed orders, etc. may result in a continuance of the proceeding and/or the imposition of fines and counsel fees.
- B. Court proceedings, 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.
- C. Parties with matters before the Court may submit a Motion to motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us to schedule a judicial conciliation/trial. Please note the number of days of trial requested in the motion. Parties are advised to choose the least number possible, as the Court's resources are limited. The Court will schedule conciliations/trials according to the Court's schedule and you will receive notice when the matter is scheduled.
- D. Praecipes to schedule matters before the Judge should be sent to Adult Judicial Scheduling at adultjudicialscheduling@alleghenycourts.us.
- E. **School Choice.** Litigants are advised to make the Court aware of school choice issues in custody matters as early as possible. Parties that wait until the summer may have difficulty getting a hearing scheduled before school begins. Additionally, Judge Costa generally prefers that parties seeking to change a child's school file a Petition to Modify Legal Custody and proceed through

Generations. If the matter is not resolved, then the Judge will schedule a hearing to determine which parent shall be the educational decisionmaker for the child(ren).

Custody Trials

- A. **Pre-Trial Statements** and all other required documents should be emailed to the Judge's staff at costasubmissions@alleghenycourts.us as set forth in the pre-trial order you received from Judge Costa. **Please include "Pre-Trial Statement" in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.**
- B. **Witnesses.** Please see [Section IV](#) for information regarding having a witness appear remotely.
- C. **Settlement.** Do not use your trial date as a place holder for you and your opponent to reach settlement. The Court is facing a backlog and it is wasteful to take up a day of judicial resources when another case could be scheduled for that day.
 - 1. In the event a matter is settled prior to a proceeding, including conciliation, the Court will expect an appropriate order. In the event a matter is settled prior to trial, attorneys shall be responsible for notifying the Docket Clerk and the Court so that the matter can be removed from the Court's calendar.
 - 2. Please ensure that all Orders settling or continuing a matter are sent to Chambers in a timely manner. Chambers should be alerted if a consent order is being circulated to settle or continue matters.

All proposed custody settlement orders **must** conclude with the following language: This is a Final Order of Court. Notice as required by Rule 236 shall be sent by the Department of Court Records.

- D. **Any Consent Order submitted to the Court that involves physical custody must include a completed Custody Consent Verification Form and an updated Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification.**
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Divorce

- A. **Hearings.** Parties must obtain an Order of Court approving grounds for divorce as set forth in Pennsylvania Rule of Civil Procedure 1920.42 before scheduling a hearing with the Divorce Hearing Officer. The statutory requirements for grounds to be established are set forth in 23 Pa.C.S.A. §3323(9).

1. For reference, a blank Praeceptum for Order Approving Grounds for Divorce can be obtained from the Court website <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/forms/>. It can be submitted along with a proposed Order Approving Grounds for Divorce to chambers by emailing it to motionscosta@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include “Order Approving Grounds” in the subject line of the email along with the case caption, and ensure all parties are included within the correspondence.**
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Exceptions

- A. Please refer to the Fifth Judicial District’s Website for the procedure to file exceptions to a Hearing Officer’s report and recommendation.
1. Procedures for exceptions in **custody** matters can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/child-custody/filing-exceptions>.
 2. Procedures for **child support** matters can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/support/support-exceptions>.
 3. Materials related to Exceptions should be submitted to exceptionscosta@alleghenycourts.us.
- B. General Procedures
1. Unless otherwise noted, you have **20 days** from the date of the mailing/emailing/or receipt of an order to file exceptions.
 2. Before filing exceptions, you must order the transcript of the hearing by contacting the Office of the Court Reporter.

3. Argument on exceptions will be scheduled and parties will be notified of the argument date. Argument is typically limited to 1 hour and will be held in-person.