



Standard Operating Procedures for Judge Alyssa B. Cowan

Revised on June 10, 2025

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I. Communication with the Court

- A. Judge Cowans’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 cowanchambers@alleghenycourts.us or call the judge’s chambers at (412) 350-0507. 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 contact the Allegheny County Lawyer Referral Service at [\(412\) 261-0518](tel:(412)261-0518).

- C. All opposing parties or their attorneys **MUST** be copied on any email or communication 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 or their attorney.
- D. Information about general court procedures and forms can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments>.
- E. Miscellaneous Procedures.
- **Sheriff's Presence.** The Court does not routinely request a Sheriff's presence during exceptions or adult Motions Court. If you feel a Sheriff's presence might be advisable, please notify the Tipstaff in advance - err on the side of caution.
 - **Local and Administrative Rules.** Counsel should be familiar with all Administrative Orders and Local Rules, including, but not limited to, the rule concerning continuances within 30 days of a scheduled date. Even if consented to, continuances will not be granted within the 30-day period, except for appropriately pled good cause.
 - **Orders Changing Scheduled Date with Judge.** Counsel should immediately provide the Court's Administrative Assistant with a courtesy copy of any order scheduling or changing a date that 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.
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II. Submission of Documents

- A. **All pleadings that are submitted to Judge Cowan MUST contain the –021 suffix at the end of the docket number.** Pleadings without a docket number in the proper format may be returned.
- B. All submissions should have page numbers where appropriate.
- C. When submitting a document by email, please use the full case name and docket number as the subject for the email (e.g., Mary Smith v. John Smith, FD-24-xxxxxx-###).

- D. Additionally, please name all files and documents you send to the court with the full case name listed **first** (e.g., Mary Smith v. John Smith, Proposed Order).
- 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.
- NOTE: All pre-trial statements and proposed Orders must be named "Mother's (or Father's) proposed Order for Custody" and SHALL be in word format. These two documents shall be sent to cowanchambers@alleghenycourts.us
 - **ALWAYS** provide a Word version of your proposed Order.
- F. The Court is able to sign and date PDF documents.
- Proposed Orders that are consented to by all parties may be submitted in PDF format.
 - Proposed Orders that are not consented to by all parties must be submitted in Word format.
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III. General Court Conduct

- A. The Court uses the **Microsoft Teams** application to conduct much of its work, including most **conciliations**. See Section IV below for more information.
- B. **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

- C. It is your responsibility to be aware of and follow the within procedures. The “Revised on” date on page 1 will be updated any time a revision is made. Please remember that judicial resources are limited and that the Court has a full docket. Therefore, cooperation and civility between attorneys is essential and required.
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IV. Remote Proceedings

- A. The Court is using the [Microsoft Teams](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/download-app) application to conduct much of its work, including most **conciliations**. Microsoft Teams can be downloaded on most computers and mobile devices. More information can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/download-app>.
1. **NOTICE:** it is a crime to record a remote proceeding, except for the purpose of the creation of the official court record. 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 with no children present.
 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 self-represented party or attorney to be sure that the Court has an up-to-date email address and phone number for both them and their client well in advance of any remote proceeding. If you did not receive an invitation, but believe you should have, check your junk/spam folder as invitations often are sent there.
- B. **Hybrid Hearings.** 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. The specifics of the proceeding, including who can and cannot appear remotely, will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
1. A party may only appear remotely with the Court’s permission. Permission can be obtained by filing a motion or by court order.
 2. Third-party witnesses are only permitted to appear remotely with the consent of all parties or by permission of the Court.

- 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 shall decide whether an expert witness must appear in-person or may appear remotely. Permission can be obtained by filing a motion or by court order.
- C. **Juvenile Matters.** Attorneys, caseworkers, probation officers, and parties are to be present in the courthouse for proceedings unless otherwise notified by the Court.
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V. Consent Orders

A. General Information

1. All Consent Orders of Court can be emailed to this Court at cowanchambers@alleghecourts.us for signature. If additional documents are required to be completed and submitted alongside the consent order, failure to submit them may result in the Court rejecting it or taking no action.
 2. The Court will review and sign if appropriate. If the Order is signed, the Court will email it to the parties and file the original with the Department of Court Records.
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VI. Motions

A. General Information

- 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.
- DO NOT DELIVER ORIGINAL MOTIONS TO CHAMBERS.
- All motions for Judge Cowan must contain the **-021** suffix at the end of the docket number. Pleadings without a docket number in the proper format may be returned.

- If a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) has been appointed, a copy of the motion shall be sent to the CASA via e-mail.

B. **Self-Represented Parties.** Self-represented litigants who wish to have their motion considered by the Court must do so as follows. Failure to follow these procedures may result in the Court not taking any action.

- All self-represented litigants must follow the instructions posted at the first floor Information Desk in the Family Law Center for dropping off and signing up a motion.
- For assistance with a Protection from Abuse (PFA) motion, the self-represented party shall contact the PFA Department on the third floor of the Family Law Center.
- For assistance with a divorce motion, the self-represented party shall contact the Divorce Department on the fourth floor of the Family Law Center.
- For assistance with a child support motion, the self-represented party shall contact the Client Services Department on the first floor of the Family Law Center.
- Self-represented parties **responding to a motion** must submit their response by dropping off at the Information Desk on the first floor of the Family Law Center (440 Ross Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219 between 8:00AM-12:00PM Monday through Thursday). Self-represented parties are responsible for filing their responses with the Department of Court Records before the date set for presentation to the Court. Responses are not required.
 - Responses to motions are due by 12:00 PM two business days before the presentation date.
- The Court will consider the motion on the date and time stated in the notice of presentation unless otherwise determined by the Court.

C. **Attorneys.** Attorneys must submit motions and responses directly to the Judge by email to cowanmotions@alleghencourts.us. Failure to follow these procedures may result in the Court not taking action.

- The Court only accepts motions for the next scheduled motions day. The Motions Court schedule is available on the Fifth Judicial District Website at www.alleghencourts.us/family/calendar/.

- Motions must be submitted by **12:00 PM** four (4) days before the scheduled motions day.
 - **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.** Seven (7) days' notice of presentation of any motion is required unless it is an emergency.
 - **Motions and responses submitted to the Judge must also be filed with DCR (without proposed orders) before the date set for presentation. Failure to do so may result in the Court taking no action.**
 - **Responses are not required in order to argue a contested motion.**
- Once a motion and response have been submitted, further replies/responses are not permitted. Parties are discouraged from raising new matters in their response to a motion.
 - If you are not contesting a motion, please notify chambers by email to cowanmotions@alleghenycourts.us as soon as possible.
- **Counsel and self-represented parties on contested motions are expected to appear for argument in-person on the noticed Motions Court day, 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 their motion presentation is concluded.
 - Counsel should notify the Court if a matter is uncontested or withdrawn prior to presentation.
 - Attorney motions on uncontested or routine issues may be resolved prior to Motions Court and the Court will provide an order prior to the scheduled presentation.
- Attorneys are expected to fully comply with the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure and Local Rule 1930 where applicable. As a reminder:

- 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.**
- 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 are required to complete and submit the [Attorney Motion Submission Form](#) with every motion.
- Motions must include a **proposed order**, which should be attached 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 give the required seven (7) days’ notice does not constitute an emergency. A true custody emergency is where there is an immediate clear and present danger to a child.

- **Attorneys** filing an emergency motion must email the motion directly to the Court at cowanmotions@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.
- **Attorneys** responding to an emergency motion shall promptly submit a response to cowanmotions@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 response.
 - The Court will rule expeditiously.
 - Along with the submission of an emergency motion, attorneys must notify the judge’s chambers of the emergency submission by **telephone call to (412) 350-0507**.

- E. **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.
- F. **Discovery Motions.** Discovery motions must comply with the requirements posted on the Court Website. 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>.
- G. **Exhibits.** Custody of Exhibits in Court Proceedings. Please review Rule 5101.4 Family Division Custody of Exhibits at the following link: [New-Local-Rule-on-Exhibits-Family-Division](#)
- This rule applies to all proceedings before Judge Cowan. The party requesting the admittance 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.
 - 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 cowanexhibits@alleghenycourts.us, if requested. If so, the party proponent may email the labeled exhibit to cowanexhibits@alleghenycourts.us. **Exhibits shall not be emailed or provided to the court in advance of any proceeding.**
 - The party proponent of the evidence must also keep an index of the exhibits. This index must list 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 form shall also handle confidentiality of documents as required by the Statute. The proponent is required to mail court staff at cowanexhibits@alleghenycourts.us once this has been completed, as required by rule.

- **NOTE:** 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.
 - **All exhibits must be printed out for use in the courtroom in all proceedings. If you have an IFP, the Court will print your electronically submitted exhibits for the Court's use. The Court will not allow litigants to pull up photos, texts, etc. on their phones to present as evidence.**
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VII. Courtroom Decorum

- A. **NOTICE:** it is a crime to record a remote proceeding, except for the purpose of the creation of the official court record. Any violations will be referred to the district attorney for prosecution.
- B. **CHILDREN.** 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 childcare arrangements. Children should never be brought to conciliations without acquiring permission from the Court. Counsel and parties should be familiar with the location of the **Children's Playroom in the Family Law Center** and its hours of operation.
- C. Any party/participant, including an attorney, who is experiencing symptoms or illness 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.
- D. Always be on time for your court proceeding. Lateness may and can result in a failure to hear your argument and testimony, penalties and/or the dismissal of your legal case. If for some reason there is an emergency and you are going to be late or must leave early, you must contact court staff and let them know about the reason for your special request. Requests will not automatically be granted.
- E. No ringing cellphones or other audible devices are permitted in the courtroom.
- F. All proceedings shall be conducted in a dignified and formal manner.

- G. 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.
 - H. 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.
 - I. Witnesses, including the opposing party, should be treated with fairness and consideration. Witnesses should not be shouted at, ridiculed, or disrespected in any manner.
 - J. 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.
 - K. 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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VIII. Trials and Hearings

- A. **All instructions and guidelines will be set forth in a Pre-Trial/Hearing Order that the Court will provide prior to a scheduled trial or hearing.**
- B. **Time Allotment:** 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.
- C. **Start and End Time:** Court procedures shall begin promptly at the scheduled time. Trials shall end at approximately 4:30pm. After 4:30pm, there are no sheriff deputies available,

and the Court will not risk the safety of participants because counsel could not finish on time.

- D. **Expert Testimony:** Counsel should cooperate in scheduling an expert's testimony. The Court will always consider taking expert testimony out of order. Unless a party has a reasonable objection, experts may testify remotely.
- E. **Exhibits.** Custody of Exhibits in Court Proceedings. Please review Rule 5101.4 Family Division Custody of Exhibits at the following link: [New-Local-Rule-on-Exhibits-Family-Division](#)
- This rule applies to all proceedings before Judge Cowan. The party requesting the admittance 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.
 - 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 cowanexhibits@alleghecourts.us, if requested. If so, the party proponent may email the labeled exhibit to cowanexhibits@alleghecourts.us. **Exhibits shall not be emailed or provided to the court in advance of any proceeding.**
 - The party proponent of the evidence must also keep an index of the exhibits. This index must list 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 form shall also handle confidentiality of documents as required by the Statute. The proponent is required to mail court staff at cowanexhibits@alleghecourts.us once this has been completed, as required by rule.
 - **NOTE:** 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.
 - **All exhibits must be printed out for use in the courtroom in all proceedings. If you have an IFP, the Court will print your electronically submitted exhibits for the Court's use. The Court will not allow litigants to pull up photos, texts, etc. on their phones to present as evidence.**

IX. 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 Praecipe for Order Approving Grounds for Divorce can be found on the Fifth Judicial District's Website at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/divorce/court-order-approving-grounds-for-divorce/>. It can be submitted along with a proposed Order Approving Grounds for Divorce to the Judge by emailing it to cowanchambers@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include "Order Approving Grounds" in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.**

X. 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. Procedures for **divorce** matters can be found at <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/divorce/hearing-officers/filing-exceptions-to-the-divorce-hearing-officer/>.

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.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES IN GENERAL.

These standard operating procedures represent a general framework for conducting business with the court. The court recognizes the fluid nature of family law practice and will endeavor to accommodate all counsel and litigants as best as practicably possible. As such, the court may use its discretion of deviating from these procedures as the court deems necessary.

Additionally, these Standard Operating Procedures are not exhaustive and many of the Court's preferred and mandated procedures are contained in the Court's scheduling orders, for example, the Court's Pretrial Order for hearings. Counsel and parties are expected to not only follow the requirements of the Standard Operating Procedures, but also all scheduling and other orders.

These procedures will continue to be updated and amended should circumstances necessitate. However, in all cases of uncertainty, please feel free to reach out to court staff with any questions or concerns.