



Standard Operating Procedures for Judge Schmidt Bresnahan

Revised on 01/26/2026

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I. Communication with the Court

- A. Judge Schmidt Bresnahan’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 SchmidtChambers@allegheycourts.us or call the judge’s chambers at (412) 350-5502. 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:4122610518).

- 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>.
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II. Submission of Documents

- A. **All pleadings that are submitted to Judge Schmidt Bresnahan MUST contain the –017 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).
 - 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 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](https://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. 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 only 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.

V. Consent Orders

A. General Information

1. All Consent Orders of Court can be emailed to this Court at SchmidtChambers@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

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 Schmidt Bresnahan must contain the **-017** suffix at the end of the docket number. Pleadings without a docket number in the proper format may be returned.

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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. For assistance with a divorce motion, the self-represented party shall contact the Divorce Department on the fourth floor of the Family Law Center.
4. 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.
5. Responses are not required. 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. 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 to motions are due by 12:00 PM two business days before the presentation date.

6. 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 Motionsschmidt@alleghenycourts.us. Failure to follow these procedures may result in the Court not taking action.

1. 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.alleghenycourts.us/family/calendar/.
2. Motions must be submitted by **5:00 PM** seven (7) days before the scheduled motions day.
 - **Please note**, 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. If you wish to file a response, responses are due forty-eight (48) hours before the scheduled Motions Court. If Motions Court is on a Monday, then responses are due on the Friday before Motions Court. Untimely responses may not be reviewed by the Court.**
3. 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 Motionsschmidt@alleghenycourts.us as soon as possible.
4. **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.

5. 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.

1. **Attorneys** filing an emergency motion must email the motion directly to the Court at EmergencySchmidt@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include "Emergency Motion" in the subject line of the email along with the case names and caption.** Counsel *must* send a copy to the opposing party when submitting their motion.

2. **Attorneys** responding to an emergency motion shall promptly submit a response to EmergencySchmidt@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include “Emergency Motion” in the subject line of the email along with the case names and 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) 350-5502**
- 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 require submission of a completed chart of questions and responses, commonly referred to as the “discovery matrix”. Failure to submit the discovery matrix may result in the Court’s refusal to hear the matter. Motions regarding complex discovery matters will generally be referred to the appropriate Hearing Officer for a conciliation if they cannot 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 www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/divorce/hearing-officers/

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. 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.
- C. No ringing cellphones or other audible devices are permitted in the courtroom.
- D. All proceedings shall be conducted in a dignified and formal manner.
- E. 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.
- F. 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.
- G. Witnesses, including the opposing party, should be treated with fairness and consideration. Witnesses should not be shouted at, ridiculed, or disrespected in any manner.
- H. 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.
- I. Attorneys should cooperate in the scheduling of an expert's testimony. The Court will always consider taking expert testimony out of order.

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.**
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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 SchmidtChambers@alleghenycourts.us. **Please include "Order Approving Grounds" in the subject line of the email along with the case caption.**
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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.