Instructions for a Complaint for Custody

Use these instructions if you do not have a custody order and want to ask the Court for one. If you already have an order and want to change it, use the modification instructions.

1 Getting started

Before filing, consider whether you have standing (legal permission to ask for custody) and if Allegheny County is the proper place to file. If you are not a biological parent, or the child has lived in another county or state, you may need legal advice. The Court may dismiss a case if these requirements are not met.

Custody eligibility information — scan the QR code or open this link

Court staff can explain procedures and provide forms but cannot give legal advice or decide what you should file. These instructions are not legal advice and do not guarantee a result.

2 Complete the required forms

- Complaint for Custody.
- Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification. Complete this for yourself and the members of your household.
- Entry of Appearance as a Self-Represented Party, if you do not have an attorney.

Complete, sign, and date the required forms. Keep a copy of everything you submit.

Provide a complete, accurate address for yourself and each respondent, as well as any known telephone number and email address. This is very important to receive notifications from the Court on your case.

3 Protect confidential information

Follow the Case Records Public Access Policy. Use a Confidential Information Form or Confidential Document Form when required, and complete the Certificate of Compliance included on your filed forms. Do not put protected information in a public filing.

The filed Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification is confidential under Rule 1915.3-2. Follow its filing instructions. If an address is protected or you need to request address confidentiality, contact the Custody Department before submitting it.

4 File with the Department of Court Records



File here
Pittsburgh City-County Building
Department of Court Records (DCR)
414 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

For fees, hours, and payment information, visit dcr.alleghenycounty.us.

File your completed pleading and required filing documents with DCR.

5 Initial Intake Conference

After filing, the Court will issue a scheduling order for an Initial Intake Conference with a Domestic Relations Officer (DRO) and will serve you and the Respondent by regular mail, using the addresses provided in your petition.

6 Attend your Initial Intake Conference

Read your scheduling order for the date and time.

At Initial Intake, the DRO will determine if service has been completed and will explain the next step. If service is incomplete, the DRO will explain any additional steps and may schedule another intake conference, if needed. If you are the petitioner and fail to attend, your case may be dismissed. If you and the other party have reached a final consent custody order, the DRO can process it here.

Check your email, including spam and junk folders, voicemail, and regular mail. The Court may send scheduling orders, court documents or pleadings, and Microsoft Teams invitations by email in addition to regular mail or as permitted by applicable rules or court orders. Calls from the Court may appear as a call from an unknown, private, or blocked number.

7 Send your information and keep it current

Email remoteinfo@alleghenycourts.us at least five (5) days prior to the Initial Intake with your FD case number and name in the subject line. Provide your email address and phone number for the conference. A TEAMS invite will be sent to you by email prior to the scheduled date. If you do not have access to email, contact the Custody Department by phone or in person to provide a telephone number prior to the scheduled date.

Contact the Custody Department

custodydepartment@alleghenycourts.us

412-350-4311
Family Law Center, 440 Ross Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

For an interpreter or disability accommodation, please visit the Court's website at ADA and Interpreter Services - Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania or call 412-350-5419.