

FAMILY COURT OPERATIONS DURING JUDICIAL EMERGENCY PERIOD

The Family Division of the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas will continue limited operations during the declared Judicial Emergency that currently extends through April 14, 2020. Set forth below are the general standards that will apply during this emergency period.

A. Essential operations

1. Protection from Abuse (PFA) proceedings, including emergency applications, hearings on Petitions for Relief and hearings on Petitions for Contempt of PFAs will continue subject to the following modifications:

a. In any case where a hearing is scheduled, agreements for continuances, for continued orders or similar things can be submitted by the attorney for one of the parties without the physical presence of the other attorney and parties, provided that the other attorney and parties are available by telephone.

b. The Court will be implementing measures to comply with social distancing protocols. Multiple judges and courtroom staff will be available to limit the number of people gathered in one place and to minimize the amount of time required for litigants and counsel to be present. While waiting to have their cases called, litigants will not be seated in the courtroom, but instead will utilize the hallways to maintain an appropriate social distance from others. Hand sanitizer will be available in each courtroom.

2. The Domestic Relations Section will continue to operate to ensure that support matters are processed, and appropriate enforcement actions are maintained. All parties subject to a Support Order are required to continue to make the required payments. All payments are to be made through the PACSES system. In person payments at the Domestic Relations Office will not be accepted during the emergency period. Domestic Relations proceedings will be modified as follows:

a. All conferences that are not continued will be conducted by telephone. All parties and attorneys shall be available for a telephone conference call from the Domestic Relations Office at the scheduled conference time. Any documents that are required to be submitted at a conference must be submitted at least 48 hours in advance. Specific instructions on how to submit the documents are posted on the Domestic Relations Section webpage or are available by emailing the Domestic Relations Office. CSBucks@PACSES.com

b. Except in situations that the Court determines are emergencies, all hearings for new cases, modifications and special listings will be continued to dates after the end of the emergency period. Notice of the continuance and new date will be sent by the Domestic Relations Office.

c. Contempt hearings will remain scheduled as needed. Any party notified of a contempt hearing is required to be physically present. They may be excused from attending the hearing **IF** at least forty-eight hours prior to the date of the scheduled hearing the full amount of any past due payments has been made **AND** are posted on the PACSES system.

3. Any custody conferences that are not continued will be conducted by telephone. All parties and attorneys shall place a telephone conference call to the Family Master's Office at the scheduled conference time. The telephone number to use is 215-340-8821. Any documents that are required to be submitted at a conference must be submitted at least 48 hours in advance. Submissions may be done via fax to 215-348-6792.

4. Emergencies for other Family Court matters will be handled on a case by case basis. Any emergency filing will be forwarded by the Prothonotary's Office to the Family Master's Office. After it is initially reviewed by the Family Master on duty, it will be reviewed by the on-duty Family Court Judge. That judge will determine what needs to be done. That may include doing a telephone conference, scheduling an emergency hearing or otherwise disposing of the matter.

B. Non-essential operations

Except for the essential operations set forth above, all Family Court matters previously scheduled during the emergency period are being continued. The Domestic Relations Office is notifying parties and attorneys of support related matters that are continued and will notify everyone of new dates when they are scheduled. Attorneys and unrepresented parties in cases scheduled before a particular Family Court Judge will be notified by the assigned Judge's staff of the continuance. Where at least one party is represented by an attorney, the attorneys will be responsible for filing a Motion for a new hearing date and one will be scheduled by further Order in due course. In cases where there are no attorneys, the Family Master's Office will arrange for new hearing dates to be scheduled and once that is done further Orders will be sent in due course. The attorneys and any unrepresented parties for conferences or other matters scheduled in the Family Master's Office that are being continued will receive appropriate notice from the Family Master's Office.

C. Questions

Questions regarding Support matters should be directed to the Domestic Relations Office. Questions regarding other Family Court matters should be sent via email to the assigned Judge's office.