

Pro Bono FAQs

for attorneys handling PFAs



NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Thank you for helping us with PFAs as a pro bono attorney. Things have changed due to COVID-19. The following will give you an overview of how the new PFA process is working in Allegheny County. We hope you will be able to start taking assignments after seeing the attached documents and reading the information below.



How are PFA cases being handled in Allegheny County?

Everything is now done remotely. Cases are handled through virtual hearings, telephone conferences, and negotiations with the opposing party or counsel ahead of time. Make sure you advise your client **NOT TO GO TO COURT ON THE DAY OF THEIR FINAL HEARING!** You do not need to appear in the courthouse either.

What does "remote" mean? What do I need to participate remotely?

Remote means that no one has to come to court! Everything is done online through email, telephone, and [Microsoft Teams](#).

Okay... so what is Microsoft Teams?

Microsoft Teams is an online videoconferencing application that is free to download and install.

When will I need to use Microsoft Teams?

Teams is only needed if you appear before a judge in a conciliation or a hearing. Otherwise, most of the casework can be done over the phone or via email with the court by contacting Doreen.Speer@alleghecourts.us.

How do we negotiate cases and try to settle if no one is coming to court?

There is now a Notice of Intent to Defend (NITD) process that defendants are required to follow. When a defendant is served, they are provided instructions to go to the court's website to submit a "Notice of Intent to Defend" (NITD). This form basically gives the court and plaintiff's counsel contact information for the defendant so negotiations can occur prior to the hearing date.

How will I know if a NITD was filed in my case?

NLS will monitor the NITD submissions on a daily basis and send any submitted NITD forms to our pro bono attorneys as they come in. The forms will be emailed to you in PDF format.

Explain a bit more about the NITD forms and how they are used.

If the defendant is served and does not submit NITD (or appear at the courthouse), plaintiff gets a default!

If the defendant is served and submits a NITD, engage in negotiations and prepare for a hearing, if necessary.

How long does a defendant have to submit the NITD?

Unfortunately, these timeframes have not been specifically defined other than if the defendant shows up at court on the date of the hearing and submits his NITD, the hearing may be continued to a new date. What will happen when it is submitted the day before....the night before...? Not sure yet. If the NITD is not filed within a "reasonable time," you should request a continuance to engage in negotiations and/or prepare for a hearing in the matter. We will keep you posted as this procedure evolves.

I have never used Teams before. Help!

Spend some time practicing with Teams getting used to its functions. You should also have your client use Teams so they can participate in any hearing. A good way to do this is to conduct your client interview using Teams.

<https://www.technology.pitt.edu/services/microsoft-teams>

Free Teams resources are also available on the alleghenycourts.us website and at the Allegheny County Bar Association website. Numerous free resources are also available on the internet via a simple search.

Will someone invite me to the Teams meeting with the Judge or what?

You will receive an invitation from the court. Instructions and remote hearing invitations are sent directly to counsel and self-represented parties via email. You just need to click the hyperlink that says "Join Microsoft Teams Meeting" in the invitation.

How will the court know that I am representing a plaintiff in a PFA case?

You should inform Dee in the PFA office when you are providing representation on PFA cases. Her email is Doreen.Speer@alleghenycourts.us. NLS is also providing the court with information regarding pro bono representation on cases each week. Please limit correspondence with Dee as she is very busy with the high volume of cases and virtual communications. When you do communicate with the court, include the case caption, docket number, and the date that the case is scheduled.

Yay! We settled our case through a PFA by Consent or a General Continuance or a Non PFA civil consent order! Do I just tell the court??

Let the court know by preparing the Order reflecting the parties' agreement and forward to Dee in the PFA Department at Doreen.Speer@alleghenycourts.us. All proposed orders must be sent to the court in Word format (not PDF!).

I need a continuance on my case.... Is there an order for that?

Yes. There is no longer a specific court order for "lack of service" so just use the "Continuance Order" (not the "General Continuance Order"). If the opposing party does not consent to your continuance request, you may need to see the judge to discuss. Just let Dee know if the Continuance Order is consented to or not when you submit it. Again, submit all proposed orders in Word format (not PDF).

If my case is continued for “lack of service,” do I need to provide paperwork to the client to try to effect service again??

Yes. All continuances for lack of service must be provided to the law enforcement agency or other individual who can effect service. Clients often have no means to access a printer so providing these docs is extremely helpful. A list of the FAX and contact numbers for all law enforcement agencies in Allegheny County is available from NLS. A lack of service continuance requires the original Petition and Temporary Order to be served as well as Continuance Order(s) and an Affidavit of Service. You may also consider sending a copy of any continuance orders to the Plaintiff’s police agency so they are made aware that a protective order is still in effect. If you need help with distributing these documents to the police stations, please contact NLS and we can assist.

The defendant was served, never submitted the NITD, and did not show up at court on the date of the hearing. Can I still get a default PFA for my client?

Yes! Just complete the Final PFA Order as a Default order and submit it to Dee in the PFA Department (Doreen.Speer@alleghenycourts.us) by 11 a.m. Remember to submit all proposed order to the court in Word format (not PDF).

So we have been unable to reach a settlement in my case, how do I let the court know we need to see the Judge?

On the day of your hearing, by 11 a.m., send any proposed orders (in Word format) to Dee at Doreen.Speer@alleghenycourts.us and let her know if you will need to see the judge. You will then be contacted by the court to participate in a Teams conciliation or a hearing.

How do I join the Teams meeting?

Just click the link that says "Join Microsoft Teams Meeting" and you should be connected. If you "accept" the invitation from the court, the meeting may be placed directly into your Microsoft Outlook calendar so be sure to check there if you can no longer find the invitation in your email. Sometimes it is helpful to forward the invitation to yourself before clicking "accept." This will save a copy of the invitation in your inbox as well in case the original "disappears" once you accept!

Ugh. I can't get the hang of Teams. It just won't work!

If you absolutely cannot use the Microsoft Teams app for some reason, there is also a phone number provided so you can call into hearings via telephone only (but this certainly is not as ideal as appearing visually before the judge.)

How are exhibits handled in remote Teams hearings?

Exhibits are shared with the court and opposing party or counsel prior to the hearing via email. Specific instructions are sent by the judge with the Teams invitation and in some of the judges' Standard Operating Procedures. You also can share exhibits on the screens during the hearings using the "share screen" function of Teams. Exhibits to be used for rebuttal or impeachment do not have to be shared in advance.

I still have some questions. Who can I call?

If you have any questions, feel free to email Susan Abramowich at abramowichs@nlsa.us. Questions regarding the process should come to NLS instead of the court, if possible, due to the volume of matters being juggled by court staff at this time.

If you would like us to do a Webinar or an individual consult to answer questions, we'd be happy to set that up. Please let Mary Ann Troper Malley know if that is of interest. You can contact her at troperma@nlsa.us.



We appreciate all of your patience and any help you can provide!