

**LEBANON COUNTY DOMESTIC RELATIONS SECTION
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
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POLICIES AND PROCEDURES OF LEBANON COUNTY DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section (DRS) is a section of the Court of Common Pleas. Its services are available to all residents of Lebanon County who need assistance in obtaining child support, spousal support, medical support and establishment of paternity.

Since the Domestic Relations Section is a part of the court system, all actions are handled through the legal process. Plaintiff is the word used to describe the person seeking support or to whom support is paid. Defendant is the person who pays the support or from whom support is requested.

No application or filing fees are charged for these services. Local tax dollars as well as income from state and federal child support programs finance these services. Some specific collections programs do have fees as described in the following pages.

Any person appearing in the DRS to conduct business must present picture I.D.

Domestic Relations files are confidential and information contained in them will only be released under limited circumstances.

The following pages further describe the rights and responsibilities of parties using these services.

Visit the Web Site: www.childsupport.state.pa.us

THE SUPPORT PROCESS: IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Everyone involved in a support action needs to understand how the process works in order to make informed decisions about whether and how to pursue support.

BENEFITS OF RECEIVING SUPPORT

- Support payments may increase the family's total income.
- A support order may include health care coverage or payment toward medical expenses.
- When paternity is established for any children of unmarried parents, a legal relationship will be established that may result in any children being eligible for future benefits from the other parent, such as inheritance, veteran's benefits, social security benefits or life insurance.

THE SUPPORT PROCESS

- The parent with custody of the child, also called the custodial parent, or the caretaker, will be asked to provide information to locate the non-custodial parent(s). If the parents are not married, paternity must be established.
- A party will be asked to provide information to locate the other party.
- It is necessary to go to the Domestic Relations Section (DRS) or Family Court to determine if the non-custodial parent or spouse will be ordered to pay support and, if so, how much.
- Parties involved in the support action will receive court papers, which may include the address of each party.
- A party involved in the support action will be required to attend conferences and hearings and provide required documents.

THESE REQUIREMENTS MAY PRESENT SAFETY RISKS

ADDRESSING SAFETY RISKS

Pursuing support may present safety risks for some individuals or families.

The support process provides the following:

- If domestic violence is reported, the DRS or Family Court can place a Family Violence indicator on the file so that addresses and other confidential information will not be given out or printed on any papers that are sent to others.
- The DRS or Family Court may provide safeguards if domestic violence is reported. Each county has different safety options and procedures available.
- Individuals applying for or receiving cash assistance may be excused by the County Assistance office from the requirement to pursue support based on domestic violence or other good cause.
- Victims or potential victims of domestic violence may include: children, custodial parents, non-custodial parents, caretakers, and spouses. Any individual with safety concerns should try to talk to the DRS or Family Court staff at least one (1) week before a scheduled conference or hearing.

TO PROCESS SUPPORT, THE DRS NEEDS INFORMATION ABOUT ALL ADULTS AND CHILD/REN WHO ARE PARTIES TO THE SUPPORT ACTION. PLEASE REFER TO ATTACHMENT #1 FOR A LISTING OF NECESSARY INFORMATION.

CHARGING ACCOUNTS

Orders established on a weekly basis are charged weekly beginning with the effective date of the order: for example, if the effective date of the order falls on a Tuesday, the order will charge every Tuesday thereafter.

Orders established on a monthly basis are charged on the effective date of the order for the month beginning that date, and on the same date each month thereafter. For example, if the effective date is November 15, the order will charge the 15th of every month.

MODIFICATIONS

All orders for support are subject to review three years after the date of entry of the order of last review. Orders payable to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare will be automatically reviewed by the Domestic Relations Section. All other orders will be reviewed upon request from either of the parties involved.

Child support may be terminated when the child reaches the age of eighteen (18) and has graduated from high school, whichever occurs last. The plaintiff in such a case may come into the Domestic Relations Office to sign the appropriate termination forms if there is only one child on the support order or the defendant may request termination in writing. For those support orders with more than one child, either the defendant or the plaintiff may submit a written request to remove a child from the support order and to recalculate support for the remaining children.

Support orders are modified only by an order of court. An order of court can come directly from the court or as the result of an agreement between the parties which is approved by a judge.

If there is a material change in circumstances, any petition for a modification of the support order should be filed promptly. The court will only change the order effective the date the petition is filed, unless a physical or mental disability or not knowing of the change prevented an earlier filing.

PAYMENTS

You must begin making your support payments immediately upon entry of a support order. **CREDIT WILL NOT BE GIVEN FOR PAYMENTS PAID DIRECTLY TO THE PLAINTIFF.** If your wages are to be attached, you are responsible to make the support payments until you see that they are being deducted from your paycheck. **YOU CANNOT PAY YOUR SUPPORT IN CASH.** All payments must be made by check or money order. Each payment must be identified with your social security number and/or your PACSES Member ID. All checks and money orders must be made payable to PA SCDU and mailed to:

PA SCDU
P.O. BOX 69110
HARRISBURG, PA 17106-9110

If your wages will not be attached, you will receive a billing statement and coupon(s) from PA SCDU. However, until you receive them, you must begin making support payments as indicated above.

When support payments are made, SCDU will remit them to the plaintiff through direct deposit, the EPPICard, or in special cases, by check. (See attachments #3 and #4)

If you have questions about your current account balance and dates of most recent payments posted, this information is available through the web site (address listed previously); the SCDU Customer Service Unit at 1-877-PAS-SCDU (or 1-877-727-7238); or the Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section Automated Voice Response (AVR), 717-228-4480, option number 4. For any other payment information, questions or problems, or if you are not sure whom to call, contact the Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section at 717-228-4480.

All orders will be paid by way of wage attachment. A wage attachment can be avoided if:

- (1) Arrears are **NOT** equal to or greater than one month's support and one of the parties shows, and the court finds, that there is good cause not to require an immediate attachment, or
- (2) Arrears are **NOT** equal to or greater than one month's support and a written agreement is reached between the parties which provides for another arrangement.

ENFORCEMENT

Any complaints or questions concerning non-payment of support should be directed to the enforcement officers.

Grievances will be accepted by telephone, but payment information and personal information, such as addresses and phone numbers, will not be released by phone. Addresses, phone numbers, or other personal information and case specific information will not be released to individuals who are not a party to the support action.

Any arrears owed are due and payable in full as soon as the order is set.

If the court order does not designate an amount to be paid on arrears, 10% of the support order will be added for payment on arrears.

A custodial parent has no legal right to withhold visitation because support payments are not current. A non-custodial parent has no legal right to withhold support payments because visitation is denied.

Any inability to comply with a support order should be reported to the office immediately. Inability due to medical problems must be verified by a medical statement.

If arrears on a case accumulate to certain set levels, the case will be submitted to the Internal Revenue Service and PA Department of Revenue for the interception of federal and state income tax refunds of the person owing a duty of support. Specific federal requirements must be met for this program. This submission will be done without further notice to the parties. Fees charged for this program by federal regulation will be assessed to the plaintiff.

If support becomes overdue, upon identification of a defendant's assets held by a financial institution an order will be issued to the institution prohibiting release of those assets. Notice of this action will be sent to the defendant. If no objection is made within thirty (30) days, the asset will be seized and applied to the overdue support.

Any support payment not made when due or any medical expense obligation not paid when due becomes a judgment by operation of law. This judgment will be given full faith and credit by other states. The records of the Domestic Relations Section shall be the source of determining the amount of the judgment.

In addition to child support, provision for payment of health insurance and/or payment of medical bills may be requested and included in support orders. If included, the Domestic Relations Section can assist in enforcement of such orders. (See attachment #2)

Social security numbers may be released upon written request and proof that they are needed to provide court ordered medical coverage.

State lottery winnings are subject to intercept for payment of delinquent support obligations.

If the defendant fails to comply with an order of support, the defendant may be listed to appear before the court for a contempt hearing. The defendant is responsible for court costs and fees if this happens.

Any defendant owing support in an amount equal to or greater than three months of the monthly support obligation and without a wage attachment in place may face the suspension, denial or non-renewal of a Pennsylvania driver's license: this includes commercial driver's licenses, and other professional and/or recreational licenses.

CHANGES

Both the plaintiff and the defendant must inform the Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section and the other parties **IN WRITING** within seven (7) days of any material change in circumstances relevant to the amount of support or the handling of the support order. This includes, but is not limited to, loss or change of employment, loss or change of income, loss or change of insurance coverage, change of personal address or change of address for any child receiving support. If a party fails to inform the Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section of the required information, the court may find the party in contempt of court and may order the party to be punished by jail or fine.

LEGAL COUNSEL

The plaintiff in any support action will receive legal representation by the staff attorney upon request for support hearings.

Indigent defendants may apply for free representation when scheduled for a contempt hearing before a Judge or when paternity is at issue. Assignment of counsel will be based on financial eligibility.

Plaintiffs and defendants may hire legal counsel to appear with them at hearings or conferences in the Domestic Relations Section. All counsel is required to file an entry of appearance.

DISABILITIES

The Court of Common Pleas of Lebanon County is required by law to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. All Domestic Relations meetings, hearings and conferences are held in the Lebanon County Municipal Building which is handicapped accessible. For information about accessible facilities and reasonable accommodations available to disabled individuals having business before the court, please contact our office. All arrangements for assisting a disabled person must be made at least 72 hours prior to any hearing or business before the court. A disability will not be considered a reason for not attending the scheduled conference or hearing.

Please feel free to contact the Domestic Relations Section at phone (717) 228-4480 with any questions or concerns about your support matters. Your inquiry will receive more prompt attention if you can be specific about your request.

NOTICE: IN THE EVENT OF ANY THREATS, TERRORISTIC OR OTHERWISE, MADE TO THE LEBANON COUNTY MUNICIPAL BUILDING, ALL SCHEDULED COURT APPEARANCES AND HEARINGS FOR THAT DAY WILL PROCEED UNTIL COMPLETED.