

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania
Family Court Division
Domestic Relations

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

1) *What is the Domestic Violence Unit?*

The Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) is a pro se (on one's own behalf) filing unit for unrepresented victims of domestic violence. We are located in Family Court at 34 South 11th Street, Room 242. The function of the DVU is to provide assistance to victims in the preparation of Protection from Abuse (PFA) Petitions.

The DVU is open from 8:00AM to 5:00PM, Monday through Friday. Clients are interviewed on a first come, first served basis. Due to the length of time it takes to process a case, we strongly suggest that you arrive as close to 8:00AM as possible to ensure that you will be able to file your petition the same day

NOTE: In an emergency, during non-business hours, you may go to the Criminal Justice Center, 1301 Filbert Street, Room B-03, to request an emergency order. This unit is open from 5:00PM to 8:00AM Monday through Friday, and 24 hours a day on weekends and holidays. Please remember that this unit does NOT open until 5:00PM on weekdays

2) *Who can the Domestic Violence Unit help?*

We can help victims of domestic violence not represented by attorneys to prepare and file Protection from Abuse Petitions. If you have an attorney representing you in this matter, your attorney must prepare the petition and have it brought to Room 242 in Family Court. An original petition and two (2) copies are required for filing. There are no filing fees.

3) *What forms must I fill out?*

When you arrive, you will be asked to fill out an Intake Form. To speed the filing process, we request that you have the following information, if possible:

- a) All parties names, addresses, dates of birth and social security numbers (including children).
- b) Information regarding the deed or lease to the property at which you will be residing during the time the Order is in effect.

Our staff will input this information into our computer system while you wait to be called for your interview.

4) *What happens at the interview?*

After a case has been initiated in the computer, you will be interviewed in the order in which you arrived in the unit. A case interviewer will question you about the actual incidents of domestic violence. Again, all information will be entered into the computer and becomes part of your petition. Please think about the reasons you want a protection order. Be clear and precise with the interviewer. Please remember that the faster the interview goes, the more people we will be able to help. At the end of your interview, the interviewer will inform you of the date for your Court hearing that, if approved by the Judge, will be held within ten (10) business days from the date you file your petition.

5) *What happens AFTER the interview?*

After the interview, your petition will be printed out for your review and signature. Your petition will be taken promptly to a Judge. The Judge will review your petition to decide if a temporary order will be issued. NOTE: This part of the process may take anywhere from one hour to several hours.

The Judge will return your petition to the DVU and you will be called up to the window. At that time, you will be given two copies of a packet, which includes the following:

- Notice to appear at a hearing within 10 business days. **NOTE: Take notice of your hearing date. You must appear in court.**
- Your petition
- The Temporary Order if issued by the Judge
- An Affidavit of Service

One copy is for you to keep with you at all times. The other copy is to serve on the defendant.

If the Judge grants a Temporary Protection Order, it will remain in effect until your Court date and should be kept with you at all times until a Final Order is issued. If the Judge denies your Temporary Order, you **MUST STILL APPEAR** for your scheduled Court date as a Final Order may be entered at that time. Final Orders may remain in effect for up to 3 years.

6) How do I serve the Petition on the Defendant?

The copy of the petition that you receive for the defendant must be served on the defendant before the Court date. While any competent adult may serve the petition, we suggest that you have the Philadelphia Police make service. Please read the instructions contained in the packet you receive.

The last page of your packet contains an **AFFIDAVIT OF SERVICE** form. This form must be filled in by the person who hands the petition to the defendant and the form returned to you. Bring this completed form with you to the Court hearing. This completed form is your proof for the Judge that the defendant was notified to appear in Court. If the Defendant fails to appear at the Court hearing, after having been served, the Judge may grant you a Final Protection Order for up to 3 years by default.

7) What happens at the Court Hearing?

The Court hearing will be held within 10 business days of the date you filed your petition. All Court hearings are conducted at 34 S. 11th Street on the 2nd floor. The date will be noted on the first page of your printed petition. Please make note of the date, time and Courtroom in which your hearing will be held. Be prompt, dress appropriately and be prepared to spend the better part of the day at Court. After taking testimony, the Judge may grant you a Final Protection Order, which may remain in effect for up to 3 years. If you are unable to serve the defendant before the Court hearing, you must still go to Court. You may be given a new Court date with time to serve the defendant during which time your temporary order will remain in effect. **If you miss your Court hearing your petition will be dismissed and any Temporary order vacated.**

8) What happens now that I have a PFA Order?

If you have been granted a Temporary or Final Protection Order, the defendant must obey all portions of the Order. If the defendant fails to obey this Order of the Court, he/she may be arrested. You should report any violation of the Order by calling 911. If an arrest is made, the defendant will be charged with Contempt of Court, which is punishable by a jail term of up to six months and/or a fine of up to \$1000.00.

9) How can I change an existing Order?

Final Orders can be vacated or changed only by a Judge. Any such request must be in the form of a written petition. The petition needs to be prepared by you or your attorney and filed at the Domestic Violence Unit. Completed forms should be brought to the DVU in Room 242 for processing. You will be given a Court date for a hearing on your request before a Judge.

If you have a Temporary Order and wish to change or vacate it, you need only to appear in Court on your scheduled hearing date and tell the Judge.

10) What about confidentiality?

In order to protect the confidentiality of your case, the DVU is unable to answer any questions regarding your case over the telephone. You may come in person, with picture identification, to the Domestic Violence Unit at the address listed below. At that time, we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about your case.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT
FAMILY COURT – ROOM 242
34 SOUTH 11TH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107**

**PHONE: 215-686-3512
FAX: 215-686-7931
24 hour information line: 215-686-3511**