

Q & As ABOUT BERKS COUNTY DRS OPERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Berks County Domestic Relations Section has modified its operations to comply with local judicial emergency orders and to minimize person-to-person contact. We are now open for some limited in-person services as described below. We hope the following Q&As* are helpful. Thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

- 1. How may I contact DRS with questions about my case or to report changes in information?** Our Client Services Unit is available to answer questions about your case by e-mail at support.berks@pacses.com and by phone at (610) 478-2900 from 8 AM – 5PM. *Parties to a support order are required to report changes in employment, mailing address and contact information to the DRS within 7 days. Please make sure DRS has your current contact information. If anything has changed, we may be unable to contact you and the matter may proceed in your absence.* You may update your address/contact and employment information by phone at 610-478-2900 or by fax to (610) 478-6585 or e-mail to support.berks@pacses.com Please include your case ID, case member number and/or SSN in your e-mail, fax or voicemail so we may locate your case information.
- 2. How do I file a complaint for support, a petition to modify an existing order, or other legal paper?** *Effective September 1, 2020, you may file a new complaint for support, a petition to modify, or other legal papers as follows: 1) in person at the DRS Docketing Unit, 6th Floor, Services Center; 2) by mail; or 3) by E-Services (a link is available on our DRS webpage). Complaints, petitions, motions, etc., may be mailed to Berks County Domestic Relations Section, 633 Court Street, Services Center - 6th Floor, Reading, PA 19601. The date on which the document is time-stamped in DRS Docketing will be the effective date of filing. For electronically-filed complaints or petitions, the date of successful electronic submission on E-Services is the date of filing when the submission is reviewed/accepted by DRS. Please consult the table at the end of these Q&As for acceptable methods of filing/submitting documents to DRS.*
- 3. Where will my conference, hearing or other matter be held?** At this time, all DRS support conferences and hearings before support hearing officers are conducted remotely unless parties are specifically directed to appear in person. For

hearings before a Judge on exceptions to a hearing officer's report and recommendation or other matters, please read your order to determine where/how the hearing will be conducted. Parties who require genetic testing to establish paternity of a child will be given a specific date and time to appear in DRS.

4. **How will a remote establishment conference or hearing be held?** *A DRS conference officer or support hearing officer will initiate and conduct the conference or hearing via telephone conference call on the scheduled date and time. Each party and attorney will be added to the call separately. The conference officer will run support guideline calculations based upon income and other information provided. Record evidentiary hearings may be conducted by a hearing officer. Parties or counsel must submit required documents (the ones listed on the original order to appear for a conference) and other documentation you would like the conference or hearing officer to consider by e-mail prior to the remote conference or hearing. An e-mail address is provided in the Addendum to the order to appear. **Please make sure the documents are readable.** * E-mails must contain your PACSES Case ID and the date and time of the remote conference or hearing. DRS will not provide copies of your submitted documents to the other party, but will read the relevant information contained in the documents to the other party. Parties wishing to exchange documents may do so directly with each other. In some cases, DRS may also have information obtained from a party's employer in response to an earnings subpoena. Because we are in a time of great and frequent change, especially regarding income, receipt of UC and FPUC (Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation), etc., parties need to gather and submit all relevant information to ensure accurate calculations.*

** Note: If you do not have access to a scanner, there are free scanning apps available. Your Apple or Android smartphone also has the ability to "scan" documents. See the manufacturer's guides to access instructions:*

- [iOS \(Apple Devices\)](#)
- [Android Devices](#)

5. **What happens at the end of a remote establishment conference?** *Similar to an in-person conference, there are 3 possible outcomes: 1) the parties are able to reach an agreement and the DRS prepares an order by verbal consent; 2) the parties are unable to reach an agreement, the conference officer prepares an interim order as appropriate, and the case will be scheduled for a hearing before a support hearing officer; or 3) the conference is rescheduled to a future date with no interim order if appropriate. Consent or interim orders and conference summaries will be mailed to parties and counsel of record after the conference.*

- 6. I am not receiving child support payments. What action will the DRS take to make sure I receive my payments?** *DRS continues to monitor cases for payments/compliance and appropriate action is taken. Many parties on both sides of cases have changes in employment status due to the pandemic. If a party who is required to pay support qualifies for Unemployment Compensation, the ePACSES system will interface with the Department of Labor and Industry and an income withholding order will issue so that support payments will continue. At this time, no in-court contempt hearings are being held except for bail hearings and related contempt matters for parties with bench warrants. Contempt conferences will be conducted remotely by telephone conference call initiated by the Compliance officer.*
- 7. We have reached an agreement in our support case (an amount, suspension or termination). How do we let DRS know?** *If you do not have a signed written agreement, please send an e-mail to support.berks@pacses.com with your PACSES Case ID, details about the agreement (a monthly support amount or suspension or termination of a charging order, etc.) and your current contact information. Someone from DRS will contact you and the other party to assist in preparation of the agreement. If you have a signed written agreement/consent order, you may submit the agreement in person at the DRS Docketing Unit or mail the agreement to the DRS by U.S. regular mail, postage prepaid, at 633 Court Street, Services Center - 6th Floor, Reading, PA 19601.*
- 8. How do I make a payment?** *Parties who do not currently have an income withholding (wage or benefit attachment) order in effect should make support payments by check or money order, payable to PA SCDU, P.O. Box 69110, Harrisburg, PA 17106-9110 or by other payment methods described in <https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Courts/DRS/Documents/payment%20methods%201.14.pdf> If you have been directed by the Compliance Unit to make a payment as a result of contempt proceedings or ordered as a condition for bail, you may make a **cash** payment in person at the DRS Docketing Unit from 8AM-4:30 PM, Monday through Friday.*
- View all available payment option details at [SUPPORT PAYMENT OPTIONS](#)
- 9. Are CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act stimulus checks subject to intercept for child support arrears?** *In short, if the arrears qualify for federal tax refund intercept, the obligor/non-custodial parent's economic impact payment or "stimulus check" will be offset by the amount of past-due child support.*

- 10. When will the DRS reopen for normal operations?** *At this time, we have not established a date to resume normal operations with full public access and in-person proceedings in our office. Effective September 1, 2020, DRS will accept in-person filing of documents in our Docketing Unit. We will continue to conduct other matters (e.g., conferences and hearings before a hearing officer) remotely by telephone conference call until such time as there is a determination, based upon state and local guidance and assessment of risk to our staff, court personnel, and our clients, that it is safe to resume in person proceedings. For more information on the judicial emergency and emergency orders entered statewide and in Berks County, please visit the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania website at [UJS Coronavirus Information | Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania](#) For current information and updates on Berks County DRS operations, please visit our website at [Welcome to The Office of Domestic Relations](#)*
- 11. How does the ongoing local Berks County judicial emergency affect filing and other time deadlines?** *Pursuant to the Emergency Judicial Order for Family Court of July 30, 2020, normal filing deadlines and time calculations in support cases resumed on August 14, 2020. Requests for extension of a filing date may be made by a motion seeking such relief.*

Please note that this information is subject to change as new judicial emergency or administration orders are issued or other guidance is received in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please visit our Berks DRS webpage at <https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Courts/DRS/Pages/default.aspx>.

Contact DRS by e-mail at support.berks@pacses.com or by phone at 610-478-2900 or by FAX at 610-478-6585.

If you have a support case in Pennsylvania, you may visit the PACSES Portal at [Pennsylvania Child Support Program](#) to view your case information and update address, etc.

See chart below for information on filing/submitting documents to DRS.

ACCEPTABLE FILING OR SUBMISSION METHODS FOR LEGAL PAPERS BY PARTIES/COUNSEL

Document	In Person	U.S. Mail (FedEx, UPS)	e-Services	E-mail	FAX* * must be clear/readable to be accepted	Notes
Intake Questionnaire	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y	*if walk-in party chooses to fill out in waiting area
Complaint	Y	Y	Y*	N	N	*child + spousal only
Petition to Modify	Y	Y	Y	N	N	
Entry of Appearance	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Withdrawal of Appearance	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Request/Demand for Hearing <i>de novo</i>	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Exceptions to H.O. Recommendation	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	
Conference/Hearing Documents	Y*	Y	N/A	Y	Y	*may drop off in person if unable to otherwise provide
Briefs, Memoranda of Law	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	
Motions/Petitions/RTSC and Answers thereto (various)	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	
Praecipes	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	

09/02/2020

Document	In Person	U.S. Mail (FedEx, UPS)	e-Services	E-Mail	Fax	Notes
Petition for recovery of overpayment	Y	Y	Y	N	N	
Agreement to terminate/suspend	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Signed Orders (presented by attorney or party for filing)	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	
Proposed Consent Order (signed) to be submitted to Judge for signing	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Continuance Application	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Phone Application	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Unreimbursed medical expense documents	Y*	Y	N	Y	Y	*may drop off in person if otherwise unable to provide
Audit Request	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Hold Request	Y	Y	N/A	Y	Y	
Notice of Appeal	Y	Y	N/A	N	N	