

**LEBANON COUNTY DOMESTIC RELATIONS SECTION
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
ROOM 202
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LEBANON, PA 17042**

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Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8:30 am – 4:30 pm

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

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.

A JCS (Judicial Computer System) fee of \$35.50 will be charged for all initial filings. This fee will be collected from either the plaintiff or defendant as part of the court order. An annual fee of \$25.00, payable from support collection, will be collected from cases meeting certain criteria, per a law passed by the United States Congress. Some specific collections programs also have fees as described in the following pages.

Any person appearing in the DRS to conduct business must present a valid picture I.D. We will not accept social security numbers as a form of identification on the telephone. Please provide our office with either your member number or case number when calling the office. This information is contained on the ID card provided to you by the office.

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.

For additional information, please refer to the *Pennsylvania Child Support Handbook* published by the PA Department of Public Welfare, which is provided by the Domestic Relations office at the initial conference to all parties.

CHANGES

Both the plaintiff and the defendant must inform the Lebanon County Domestic Relations Section *and the other party* **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 establish paternity, may enter a support order and/or may find the party in contempt of court and may order the party to be punished by jail or fine.

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

- A support order will address health care coverage and 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 party with whom the child resides will be asked to provide information to locate the non-custodial parent(s). If the parents were not married at the time of the birth of the child, paternity must be established.
- 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.
- Please note that children under the age of 15 are not permitted in courtrooms. Please do not bring the children with you when scheduled for a court hearing through our office.

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

ADDRESSING SAFETY RISKS

The support process provides the following:

- If domestic violence is reported, the DRS or Family Court will place a Family Violence indicator on the file so that staff is aware of the issue. Confidential information will not be printed on any papers that are sent to others.
- The DRS or Family Court will 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.

CHARGING ACCOUNTS

All orders will be established on a monthly basis and accrue (charge) on the effective date of the order for the month beginning that date, and the first of every month thereafter. For example, if the effective date is November 15, the order will accrue November 15 – 30 and then accrue the first of December and the first of every month thereafter.

MODIFICATIONS

All orders for support are subject to review three years after the date of entry of the last order. 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.

Unless the child is disabled and is not self-supporting, child support will be terminated when the child reaches the age of eighteen (18) and has graduated from high school, whichever occurs last. If there is only one child on the order, this order will be done administratively. For those support orders with more than one child, a review conference will be scheduled to recalculate support for the remaining child(ren). Verification of the child's status will be requested prior to the 18th birthday.

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

Defendants are to be prepared to make the initial support payment at the initial support conference. The initial payment may be in the form of cash, money order, or certified check made payable to Lebanon County DRS. **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 the payments are being deducted from your paycheck.* CASH PAYMENTS MAY NOT BE MAILED TO PA SCDU. Defendants should refer to the website or the payment options sheet included in their folder for payment options. 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 from PA SCDU. The DRS will provide an initial set of payment coupons. However, you must begin making support payments as indicated above.

SCDU will post all payments by defendant's member ID and not by case number. Payments will remit to the plaintiff through direct deposit, the EPPICard, or in special cases, by check. An explanation of EPPICard is attached. To select EPPICard, no action is necessary.

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 Interactive Voice Response (IVR), 717-228-4480. 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. **The Domestic Relations Office will not provide payment**

information over the phone. After a limited number of inquiries each month, EPPICard will charge fees for account balance inquiries. Please refer to EPPICard information for specifics.

ENFORCEMENT

Any complaints or questions concerning non-payment of support will be directed to the support staff.

Grievances will be accepted by telephone; payment information will *not* be released by phone. 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 you fail to pay the full amount of the support order, the following enforcement actions may be taken:

- Submission to the IRS and PA Department of Revenue for interception of federal and state income tax refunds.
- Seizure of assets you have in a financial institution for application to your overdue support.
- Submission of your name and arrears to the major credit bureaus.
- Suspension of your PA Driver's License and other professional/ recreational licenses.
- Interception of state lottery winnings.
- Denial of obtaining or renewing a passport
- Contempt action which could lead to your incarceration.
- Delinquent support automatically becomes a lien against real estate.

In addition to child support, a provision for payment of health insurance and/or payment of medical bills will be included in support orders. The Domestic Relations Section can assist in enforcement of such orders. A copy of the medical policy and the necessary form to include with bills submitted to our office is attached. Parties will be required to provide each other with contact information. Failure to do so may negatively impact collection of reimbursement of payments for medical bills or may lead to possible contempt action.

Social security numbers may be released upon written request and proof that they are needed to provide court ordered medical coverage. However, this information will only be provided to the employer or insurer.

IF YOUR SUPPORT ORDER INCLUDES PAYMENT ON BIRTHING EXPENSES, THE BALANCE OWED FOR THIS OBLIGATION IS CONSIDERED AN OVERDUE SUPPORT OBLIGATION. THEREFORE, EVEN IF REGULAR PAYMENTS ARE MADE TO PAY OFF THIS DEBT, THE AMOUNT OWED IS STILL SUBJECT TO ALL ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS INCLUDING CREDIT BUREAU REPORTING, TAX REFUND OFFSET CERTIFICATION, DRIVER'S LICENSE REVOCATION, PASSPORT DENIAL AND THE FREEZE AND SEIZE OF FINANCIAL ASSETS.

LEGAL COUNSEL

Unless the plaintiff is represented by private counsel, the plaintiff in any support action may have their case presented by the staff attorney for support hearings.

Indigent defendants may apply for free representation when scheduled for a contempt hearing before a Judge or when paternity is an 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 legal 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.