

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

---

The Berks County Domestic Relations Section has been closed to the general public since March 19, 2020. In an effort to maintain essential DRS operations, to manage and address the growing backlog until resumption of normal operations, to comply with various statewide judicial emergency orders and local judicial emergency orders, and to minimize person-to-person contact during the current pandemic, we are operating with a small number of staff, some working remotely and some in the office. Thank you for your continued patience and understanding. We hope the following Q&As\* are helpful.

- 1. Do I have to wait until DRS reopens to the public to file a complaint for support, a petition to modify an existing order, or other legal paper?** *Even though the DRS is closed to the public, you may file a new complaint for support or a petition to modify an existing support order by United States mail, postage prepaid or by e-Services. Complaints or petitions submitted by fax or e-mail will not be accepted. For documents that are mailed, the U.S. postmark on the mailing envelope will be deemed the date of filing. For electronically-filed complaints or petitions, the date of successful electronic submission is the date of filing. New complaints or petitions will be docketed, and later processed and scheduled for a conference by the DRS or other appropriate action taken once the office reopens for normal operations. Forms are available on the DRS website at [Welcome to The Office of Domestic Relations](#) .*
- 2. My support conference/hearing/appointment was already scheduled before the courts and DRS were closed. Will it still be held? What do I need to do?** *By emergency judicial Family Court order of March 17, 2020, all on-site proceedings for support are postponed until further notice. You do not need to take further action at this time; the DRS will automatically reschedule your conference or hearing. To address the 500 + on-site conferences which have been postponed by judicial order to date, we have begun reaching out to parties or their attorneys of record, beginning with the oldest scheduled cases, to determine if the parties will agree or are able to have the postponed conference held remotely. **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 (mailing address, phone number, e-mail). If anything has changed, we may be unable to contact you.** Changes may be sent to DRS fax at (610) 478-6585 or e-mail to [support.berks@pacses.com](mailto:support.berks@pacses.com) Please include your Case ID, case member number or SSN.*
- 3. How would a remote conference be held?** *If all parties and any attorneys for the parties agree to participate remotely, a DRS conference officer will initiate and conduct*

*the conference via telephone conference call at a pre-arranged 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 or other information provided. Parties or counsel should submit required documents (the ones listed on the original order to appear for a conference) and other documentation you would like the conference officer to consider by e-mail as directed by DRS (including Case ID in the subject line) as soon as possible prior to the remote conference. E-mails must contain your PACSES Case ID and the date and time of the remote conference. 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.*

4. **What happens at the end of a remote conference?** *Similar to a regular 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.*
  
5. **What happens if the parties do not agree to a remote conference or are unable to participate remotely?** *If parties do not agree to a remote conference or are unable to participate remotely, your case will be rescheduled for a conference or hearing in the DRS after the DRS reopens for regular business operations. We anticipate that rescheduled conferences will be held several (approximately 4-6) months later than the original postponed date once DRS reopens for normal operations. Support orders or modifications will be retroactive to the original filing date.*
  
6. **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](mailto: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 mail the*

agreement to the DRS by U.S. regular mail, postage prepaid, at 633 Court Street, Services Center - 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Reading, PA 19601.

- 7. I am not receiving child support payments. What action will the DRS take to make sure I receive my payments?** *A great number of parties on both sides of cases have been laid off or furloughed from their jobs 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. Due to the high level of UC benefits claims, there will likely be a delay in this income attachment. DRS continues to monitor cases for payments/compliance on a very limited basis and appropriate action is taken. Due to the high number of individuals currently out of work, and limited staff, we ask for your patience in addressing this. At this time, no in-court or in-office contempt proceedings are being held. Cases which were scheduled for in-office contempt conferences or in-court hearings on or after March 19, 2020 are postponed and will be rescheduled as necessary by the DRS.*
- 8. I am not working due to the current pandemic. What action do I need to take?** *Please notify DRS of the change in your employment status by DRS fax at (610) 478-6585 or e-mail to [support.berks@pacses.com](mailto:support.berks@pacses.com) within 7 days. Faxes or e-mails must contain your PACSES Case ID, Member ID or SSN. Parties seeking to modify orders of support based upon changes in their circumstances should see the response to Q1, above. Parties who do not currently have a wage attachment 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>*
- 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 do not have a reopening date. When the statewide judicial emergency declared by the PA Supreme Court and our local Berks County Court of Common Pleas determine that the PA courts in general or Berks County courts in particular are able to reopen, DRS will reopen. 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 on Berks County DRS operations, please visit our website at [Welcome to The Office of Domestic Relations](#)*

11. **How does the judicial emergency affect filing deadlines?** Pursuant to PA Supreme Court Second Supplemental Order of April 1, 2020, all time calculations for purposes of time computation relevant to court cases or other judicial business, as well as time deadlines, are now suspended through April 30, 2020, subject to additional orders. All legal papers or pleadings required to be filed between March 19, 2020 and April 30, 2020 shall be deemed to have been timely filed if they are filed by May 1, 2020 or on a later date as permitted by local court in question.
12. **Does the statewide closure of PA schools affect DRS handling of emancipation dates for seniors?** In general, DRS uses the child's high school graduation date for emancipation purposes if the child has already turned 18. Please look for information on the individual school district's website regarding the child's high school graduation date this academic year. For more information about PA school closure due to the pandemic, school calendars and graduation requirements, please visit the PA Department of Education's website at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance and Resources for School Communities](#)

\* Please note that the above information is subject to change as the pandemic situation develops and new judicial emergency orders are issued or other guidance is received.