

HOW TO FILE FOR CUSTODY

- 1) Retain an attorney
- 2) Purchase the Children's Court Manual (\$7.00 at the Custody Department window)
- 3) City County Building, 9th Floor
Law Library – make copies from the Children's Court Manual
- 4) Access court website for general information, forms and court manual:
www.alleghenycourts.us

FEES

The fees for each party to file a custody action and proceed through the Generations program are as follows:

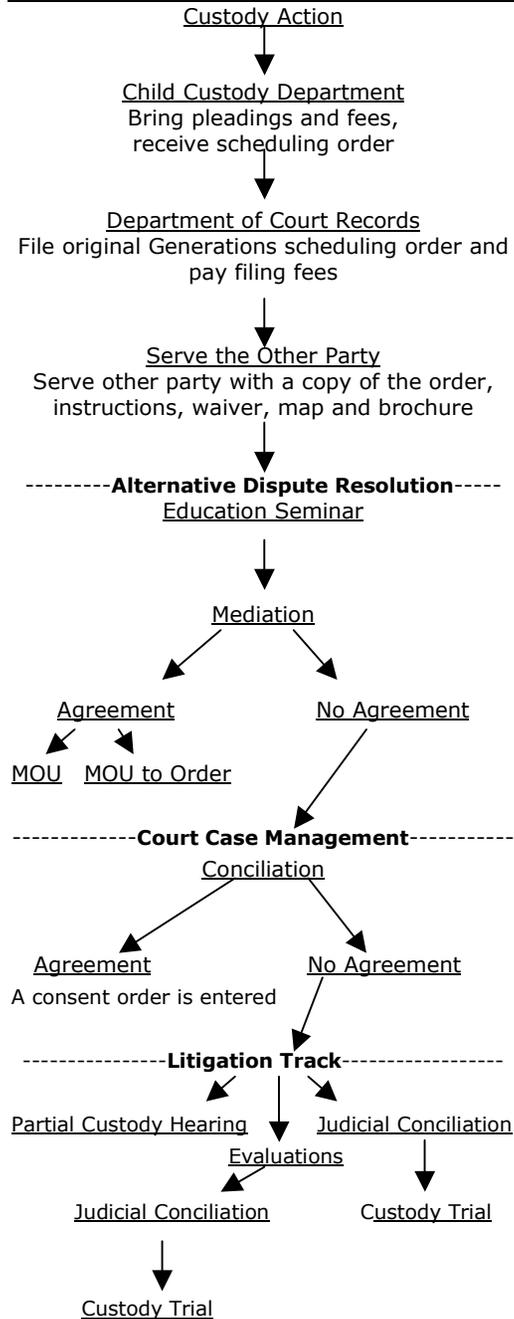
- 1) Education - \$40 and \$15 per child ages 6-15
- 2) Mediation - \$100 per party
- 3) Prothonotary – Check with the prothonotary's office to obtain the most up to date information on filing fees
www.allegheny.county.us/protho

Fees must be paid in the exact amount in the form of money order, cashier's check or attorney check. **No personal checks are accepted.**

Any individual who meets the financial eligibility guidelines, is not represented by an attorney and is unable to pay the fees associated with filing for custody, may be eligible for assistance through the Pro-Se motions program. The program is located on the 1st Floor, Family Law Facility. Parties must bring proof of income to be considered for this program.



CHILD CUSTODY ACTION: BASIC STEPS IN THE PROCESS



Child Custody Department



Allegheny County Children's Court
Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania
Child Custody Department
440 Ross Street, Suite 1030
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Phone: (412) 350-4311
Fax: (412) 350-4370
www.alleghenycourts.us

The Honorable David N. Wecht
Administrative Judge
Cynthia K. Stoltz, Esq.
Administrator

OUR MISSION

The mission of Child Custody Department is to handle custody disputes with the goal of ensuring resolutions in children's best interests. It embraces a progressive philosophy that encourages caregivers who are best equipped to make parenting decisions to do so. The Child Custody Department ensures timely management and resolution of custody cases, oversees the Generations program, and designs substantive programs that enhance daily operations and streamline services to clients.

What We Do

I. Alternative Dispute Resolution

Generations Program – This two-part program provides an **education** session, which includes a seminar for adults and an interactive group for children between the ages of 6-15. Following education, parents are scheduled for a **mediation** session which gives them an opportunity to meet with a mediator to formulate a parenting arrangement. Neither children nor attorneys participate in the mediation session.

II. Court Case Management

Assistance to Pro- Se Litigants – The Custody Department offers same day screening of fee waiver requests as well as review of pro-se motions to coordinate judicial response, Children, Youth and Families or other services.

Conciliation – Parties and attorneys, if retained, meet with a child custody officer to negotiate and resolve their custody case. The conciliator makes recommendations, enters a court order if all parties agree, or moves the case forward on the litigation track if no agreement is reached.

And more....

- **Greenbook Initiative** – A model project of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to address the co-occurrence of domestic violence, child abuse and custody disputes. Goals of the program are to prevent further abuse, create community resources for batterers and families to improve existing means for holding batterers accountable, and improve outcomes for children.
- **Child Custody Guardian Project** – This program, established in partnership with the Allegheny County Bar Association Pro Bono Partnership, provides free attorneys to qualifying clients to serve as guardians to represent the best interests of at-risk children.
- **Pro Bono Custody Conciliation Project** – Also in partnership with the ACBA Pro Bono Partnership, this program offers free legal representation of qualifying clients for custody conciliations.
- **Safe Visits/Safe Families** – A supervised visit/safe exchange program developed in partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Parental Stress Center to enhance safety for adults and children at risk for family violence.



ABOUT THE GENERATIONS PROGRAM

All parties filing a custody action in Allegheny County participate in Generations. This two-part program includes education and mediation components.

Education:

The **adult education** seminar of the Generations program addresses the following:

- How to build a co-parenting relationship, communicate, and problem solve
- How to help children cope effectively with their changing family
- How parent/caregiver conflict can affect the behavior of children

The **children's session** is for children between the ages of 6 and 15 years old. Children are appropriately grouped by age so that they can identify and share with peers similar experiences in their families. These interactive groups are facilitated with activities, discussions, art, music, and play.

Mediation:

Parties meet with a mediator for up to 2 ½ hours to discuss approaches to a successful parenting plan. The goal of mediation is for parents to create their own parenting plan, called a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). If the parties are able to reach an agreement and create an MOU, they may request that their MOU be incorporated into a legally binding consent order of court that same day.