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***WHAT IF MY ABUSER  
VIOLATES THE PFA?***

In most cases you should call the police immediately. While the police cannot arrest the abuser for violating financial provisions, they can and should arrest the abuser for violating other terms of your order (for instance, stay-away or no-contact provisions.)

Be aware that the abuser may be released shortly after arrest for a violation and you should consider talking to a domestic violence advocate or counselor about the steps you need to take to maintain your safety.

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***HOW CAN A DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE ADVOCATE  
HELP ME?***

What you say to a domestic violence program advocate stays between you and the advocate. Except for mandatory child abuse reporting, all information exchanged in the course of your relationship with the advocate is confidential. This is so you can speak freely about your circumstances and plan for your future safety. This service is free. You can reach a domestic violence advocate anywhere in the country by calling 1(800) 799-7233. Local and toll free numbers of Pennsylvania programs are listed in this brochure.

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**TOLL FREE 24-HOUR HELP  
National Domestic Violence  
Hotline**

**1-800-799-7233**

**1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**

**or**

**[www.pcadv.org/Find-Help/](http://www.pcadv.org/Find-Help/)**

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The Pennsylvania  
Protection From  
Abuse Act

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A Guide for  
Victims of  
Domestic Violence

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Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
3605 Vartan Way, Suite 101  
Harrisburg, PA 17110  
Phone: 1(800) 537-2238  
[www.pcadv.org](http://www.pcadv.org)

Pennsylvania Coalition  
Against Domestic Violence

## **WHAT IS A PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDER (PFA)?**

A PFA is an order that protects you and your children from your abuser. It is a civil order that you file on your own behalf against a family or household member who is abusing you.

## **WHO CAN OBTAIN A PFA?**

A victim of abuse may file a PFA against an intimate partner or a family member. Here are some examples of relationships that qualify as family and household members for the purposes of the PFA Act:

- Spouses and ex-spouses
- Persons who have lived as spouses
- Parents and children
- Persons related by blood or marriage, including siblings
- Current or former sexual or intimate partners, which may include dating relationships
- Same sex couples

The PFA Act does not cover abuse by a stranger or a roommate.

## **HOW DO I GET A PFA?**

Every county has a different process for a victim to get a PFA. Please call your local domestic violence program for information about your county process and the rights you may have as a victim of crime or abuse. What follows is a general description of the process for securing a PFA in most Pennsylvania counties.

The PFA Order process usually starts by filing a paper called a petition at the local county court house. The petition is how you tell the court why you feel you need protection. The petition describes the abuse you have suffered and the protection you want from the court. The courthouse has people who must help you fill out the petition, and give you information in English and Spanish about where you can get more legal help. After you complete your petition, the court will read it and may ask you questions. The abuser is not present during this proceeding.

The judge will either grant you a temporary PFA and set a hearing date or will deny the temporary PFA and schedule a hearing within 10 business days. The defendant will get a copy of the papers you filed. At the 10-day hearing you may receive a Final PFA. You may be required to testify about the things you wrote in your petition. The PFA granted at this hearing may be effective for up to 36 months.

## **WHAT CAN I ASK FOR IN THE PFA?**

The judge will consider your requests and may grant or deny all or some of them.

- ◆ You can ask the judge to order the abuser to stop threatening, abusing, harassing or stalking you and your children.
- ◆ You can ask the judge to have the abuser evicted from your joint home or excluded from your residence.
- ◆ You can request your new address or location be held as confidential and not released.
- ◆ You can ask the judge for temporary custody of your children.
- ◆ You can ask for temporary child or spousal support as well as other reimbursements of out of pocket expenses that were caused by the abusive acts of the abuser.
- ◆ You can ask the judge to order the abuser not to have contact with you or your children, or family members.
- ◆ You can also ask that the abuser not contact you at work or school.
- ◆ You can ask the court to order the abuser to turn over weapons to the sheriff.
- ◆ You can ask the judge to order any other appropriate relief, for instance, requesting the return of your pet, car keys, important papers, etc.

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