

SPOKANE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT



HAROLD D. CLARKE, III

JUDGE
DEPARTMENT 8

SPOKANE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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May 8, 2020

To: Family Law Stakeholders

Greetings,

We hope this letter finds you and your families healthy and thriving. We know it has been a particularly difficult time both personally and professionally and we appreciate your patience over the past several weeks.

We wanted to reach out and let you know our plans for reopening Court Commissioner Dockets related to the family law bar. Beginning May 25, 2020, we will be slowly expanding the types of family law motions heard. Ideally the expansion will occur every two to three weeks, but we will be guided by orders issued by the Governor and the Supreme Court as well as our ability to provide a safe environment for the parties, attorneys, court staff, the public, and ourselves. We, like you, are eager to get back to doing what we love to do and we are hopeful that a phased approach will allow us to adjust to these different times and get us back something resembling “normal.”

As a part of reopening, we will be conducting all hearings by Zoom (except for Ex Parte). Zoom allows parties and attorneys to appear by video or telephone, if they do not have video capability. Parties and attorneys will need to download Zoom and open a free account. There is no expense to parties or attorneys. To ensure equity, we are asking all parties and attorneys to appear by Zoom, whether the party or attorney chooses to do so from the courtroom, home, or office. For those individuals who cannot participate by Zoom, accommodations can be made by the court to ensure an ability to fully and meaningfully participate. Requests for those accommodations should be made through Amanda Peterson, the Family Law Coordinator.

We anticipate that hearings by Zoom will continue throughout the Stay at Home Order and social distancing restrictions but will reassess as our state moves through its own reopening plan. We believe that moving to Zoom hearings during this time not only protects the health of our community while allowing meaningful access to the courts, but also will allow us to seamlessly continue court operations if a Stay at Home Order or social distancing protocols are imposed in the future. No one wants to experience that level of disruption again.

In addition, social distancing protocols do not allow us to hold traditional docket calls for Family Law and Protection Orders. Family law cases will need to continue to follow the two-day call in procedure for all cases. The Family Law staff will then set time specific hearings and provide parties and attorneys with this information. Hearings will be set for 45 minutes each starting at 9:00 a.m. Protection orders will continue to receive a specific hearing date and time when the petition is filed. We have expanded the protection order docket to include Monday mornings to accommodate these time specific hearings.

PHASE 2: 5/25/2020 items in **red** indicate expanded areas

	Motions Heard	Hearing Mode
Ex Parte Monday – Friday 1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Emergency Temporary Restraining Orders Writ for Habeas Corpus Protection Orders Emergency Relocation Motion to Quash Temporary Restraining Order Motion to Modify or Terminate Protection Order Joel’s Law or Ricky’s Law Petitions Motion and Order to Show Cause re: Contempt related to Withholding Children	In person or telephonic To submit by email: CommissionersOrders@spokanecounty.org
Family Law Tuesday: High-Edward, Pelc Wednesday: Rugel, Chavez Thursday: Swennumson Friday: Ressa, Stewart	Return on Temporary Restraining Orders Temporary Orders in a New Case Relocation Contempt Motions related to Withholding Children	Zoom
Protection Orders Monday: all day Thursday: 1:30-4:00 p.m.	All	Zoom
Paternity	None	NA
Child Support Mods	None	NA

PHASE 3: TBD items in **red** indicate expanded areas

<p>Ex Parte Monday - Friday 1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.</p> <p>*Hours expansion discussion ongoing</p>	<p>Emergency Temporary Restraining Orders Writ for Habeas Corpus Protection Orders Emergency Relocation Motion to Quash Temporary Restraining Order Motion to Modify or Terminate Protection Order Joel’s Law or Ricky’s Law Petitions Contempt related to withholding children</p> <p>Bench conferences Motion hearings</p>	<p>In person or telephonic</p> <p>To submit by email: CommissionersOrders@spokanecounty.org</p>
<p>Family Law Tuesday: High-Edward, Pelc Wednesday: Rugel, Chavez Thursday: Swennumson Friday: Ressa, Stewart</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Zoom</p>
<p>Paternity (Monday and Wednesday morning)</p>	<p>All *no contempt motions unless stay at home order lifted</p>	<p>Docket: telephonic Hearing: Zoom</p>
<p>Child Support Mods (Monday and Tuesday morning)</p>	<p>For COVID-related job loss and petitions already pending prior to stay at home</p>	<p>Zoom</p>

PHASE 4: TBD items in **red** indicate expanded areas

<p>Ex Parte Monday – Friday: 1:30 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.</p> <p>*Hours expansion discussion on going</p>	<p>All – except agreed orders will be submitted to a box to be signed in chambers</p>	<p>In person or telephonic</p> <p>To submit by email: CommissionersOrders@spokanecounty.org</p>
<p>Protection Orders Monday: all day Thursday: 1:30-4:00 p.m.</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Zoom</p>

Family Law Tuesday: High-Edward, Pelc Wednesday: Rugel, Chavez Thursday: Swenumson Friday: Ressa, Stewart	All	Zoom
Paternity (Monday and Wednesday Morning)	All *no contempt motion unless stay at home lifted	Docket call: telephonic Hearings: Zoom
Child Support Mods (Monday and Tuesday Morning)	For COVID-related job loss – through June 30, 2020 then ALL	Zoom

Phases may expand slower or quicker as we see how things work in Phase 2. Our goal is to get back to business while ensuring the safety of everyone involved. There will surely be hiccups and mistakes, frustration and annoyance. We ask that you show patience and grace. We are hopeful that we will be able to iron issues out with the help of your patience and feedback.

We look forward to seeing you all soon, even if it is by video.

Sincerely,



Harold D. Clarke
 Presiding Judge