



RECOMMENDED FIRST STEPS IN YOUR THIRD PARTY CUSTODY CASE

- Contact the client by phone to set up an initial meeting (in lieu of or in addition to sending a letter or email). (Keep in mind that you may need to call more than once. Sometimes clients' phones are unable to accept messages or are temporarily disconnected.) If you are unable to reach the client within two weeks, please let CLC know. We may be able to assist you.
- During your first client meeting, in addition to learning your client's objectives, goals, and the case history, we suggest that you ask the client about any recent developments in the case (e.g., recent court filings, correspondence from other parties or the Court, changes in the child's, parents' or client's status). Ask your client to bring any documents related to the case or the child's care and well-being.
- If the client has already filed a complaint for custody or motion to intervene in an existing case:
 - We suggest that you enter your Praecipe of appearance promptly. (A sample is attached to your case placement e-mail and also available on [CLC's model pleadings page](#).)
 - Assess whether it is necessary to file a motion to amend your client's pro se complaint or motion to intervene.
- If the client has not filed any pleadings:
 - You may initiate the case by filing for custody or to intervene in an existing custody case. ([CLC's model pleadings page](#) has sample custody complaints (consent and contested) and a sample motion to intervene.)
 - You may also need to promptly file an opposition to a party's motion to intervene or motion to modify custody.
 - Think strategically about the timing of your filing. [CLC's mentors](#) are happy to discuss case strategy with you at any time.

- Obtain a copy of the court records, if any. You or a legal assistant may go to the Family Court Clerk's office, room JM-300, to request a copy of the case file and a printout of the case "docket." Review the docket for any upcoming court or mediation dates, filings or lack thereof of any responsive pleadings, whether any other party has counsel, or other pertinent information.
- Although CLC does preliminary checks as part of intake process, in preparation for your work on the case, run criminal, civil and domestic violence checks on all parties in all pertinent (or potentially pertinent) jurisdictions (e.g., DC, Maryland, Virginia, other states of residence).
- Before any filings, determine whether your client has filed for and been approved for In Forma Pauperis (IFP) status from DC Superior Court's Judge in Chambers. IFP status waives court filing fees. If your client has not obtained IFP status, determine whether s/he is eligible. If so, you may wish to file a motion for IFP status along with the initial complaint or next filing. ([CLC's model pleadings page](#) has a sample IFP motion.)
- As the case proceeds, [CLC's training resources](#) for pro bono attorneys and [mentors](#) can provide you any assistance you need.
- When it comes time for case closure, please be sure to provide your client with a copy of the final order issued.
- Please let a [CLC mentor](#) know if a notice of appeal is filed by any party (including you). CLC may be available to assist with appellate strategy.
- Please notify CLC when your case closes by completing our short case closure form, available on CLC's pro bono page.

REMINDER: eFiling is mandatory in most DC Family Court cases, including custody cases. However, all initial filings (including custody complaints) must be filed at the Family Court Central Intake Center. There is an [Administrative Order](#) outlining the eFiling requirements and procedures for Family Court. If you have an active case, in order to receive orders and participate in eFiling you must [REGISTER](#) with the CaseFileXpress system. A few additional reminders: (1) if a party is not required to and not participating in eFiling (e.g. pro se litigants) you must serve that party traditionally by paper consistent with Domestic Relations Rule 4; (2) filing and eFiling fees are waived for parties with in forma pauperis (IFP) status by using the "dccourtapprovedifp" code; and (3) pro bono attorneys who are not DC-barred and are practicing under Rule 49 should use "999999" in place of the required bar number. If you are new to eFiling, we strongly suggest that you access the [CaseFileXpress training materials](#). The eFiling Support Team is available to assist you by phone at 877-433-4533, by email at info@casefileexpress.com, or by live [chat](#) online.