

What you will need for a Family Law Trial

1. Attendance at a settlement conference or alternative dispute resolution required

Pierce County Superior Court requires parties to either attend alternative dispute resolution or a settlement conference with the assigned pierce county superior court judge prior to your trial date.

Your assigned settlement conference judge is: _____

Phone Number _____ **Judicial Assistant** _____

2. Completed proposed final documents

For divorce/dissolution of marriage:

- Findings and Conclusions About a Marriage (FL Divorce 231)
- Final Divorce Order/Legal Separation Order (FL Divorce 241)

If there are children:

- Parenting Plan – Final (FL All Family 140)
- Residential Time Summary Report (FL Divorce 243)
- Order of Child Support (FL All Family 130)
- Washington State Child Support Schedule Worksheets (WSCSS – Schedule & Worksheets)

For a parentage action:

- Findings and Conclusions About Parentage (FL Parentage 315)
- Final Parentage Order (FL Parentage 316)
- Parenting Plan (FL All Family 140) or Residential Schedule (FL Parentage 304)
- Order of Child Support (FL All Family 130)
- Child Support Worksheets (and recent paystubs and tax returns) (WSCSS – Schedule & Worksheets)

For a residential schedule/parenting plan:

- Final Order and Findings for a Parenting Plan, Residential Schedule and/or Child Support (FL Parentage 333)
- Parenting Plan or Residential Schedule – Final Order (FL All Family 140 or FL Parentage 304)
- Order of Child Support (FL All Family 130)
- Washington State Child Support Schedule Worksheets (WSCSS – Schedule & Worksheets)

For non-parent custody action:

- Findings and Conclusions on Non-Parent Custody Petition (FL Non-Parent 430)
- Final Non Parent Custody Decree (FL Non-Parent 431)
- Residential Schedule (Non Parent Custody) – Final Order (FL Non-Parent 405)
- Order of Child Support (FL All Family 130)
- Washington State Child Support Schedule Worksheets (WSCSS – Schedule & Worksheets)

For an action to change a parenting plan, residential schedule or custody order (modification):

- Final Order and Findings on Petition to Change a Parenting Plan, Residential Schedule or Custody Order (FL Modify 610)
- Parenting Plan or Residential Schedule – Final Order (FL All Family 140 or FL Parentage 304)
- Order of Child Support (FL All Family 130)
- Washington State Child Support Schedule Worksheets (WSCSS – Schedule & Worksheets)

3. An outline of what you plan to tell the judge

Each party will have an opportunity to tell the judge about the case. It is a good idea to make a written outline of the things you want to tell the judge so you don't forget anything. The judge will want to know exactly what you want and why.

4. Witnesses (optional)

Generally, all information from people who know something about the case must be presented under oath in the courtroom. Written statements do not provide the other side an opportunity to ask questions or cross-examine witnesses and will generally not be considered by the judge at the trial. If you are calling a witness, you will need to ask the witness questions in order for the witness to provide the information you want the judge to know. It is a good idea to write down the questions you plan to ask the witness.

5. Exhibits (optional)

You may want the judge to view some written documents, records, or photographs. There are important rules that the judge uses to decide whether to allow the exhibit to be viewed. At a minimum, these exhibits must relate to the issues in your case.

If your case has property division or valuation issues, some examples of documentation that would help determine the value include:

- If you own a house: an appraisal & a mortgage statement showing the balance owing
- If you have a pension, IRA or 401K: a statement from the program showing contributions or value
- If there are debts: a monthly billing statement from the time of separation and now.

6. Resolution prior to trial

If your case resolves prior to trial, please go to the Pierce County Superior Court Clerk's Office in the County City Building Room 110, to set an **Uncontested Dissolution or Show Cause** proceeding before a commissioner to finalize your case. You must have all of the final orders ready to present to the commissioner (see section 2. above). **Please call the judicial assistant to advise the court that the case is resolved.**

Trial Information

How the trial works:

- The judge opens court.
- Each party or attorney makes an opening statement, outlining what the trial is about and what is requested.
- The petitioner calls witnesses (including the petitioner) and introduces evidence.
- The respondent has an opportunity to cross-examine each witness by asking questions.
- The respondent calls witnesses (including the respondent) and introduces evidence.
- The petitioner has an opportunity to cross-examine each witness by asking questions.
- Either party or attorney makes a closing argument, summarizing the requests specifically and presenting reasons for the judge's decision.
- The judge announces a decision.

After the judge announces the decision, the parties or their attorney's must prepare final orders reflecting the judge's decision for the judge to sign.

The judicial assistant, who sits in front of the judge, manages the exhibits during the trial. Each exhibit must have an exhibit number assigned by the judicial assistant before it may be introduced into evidence. The exhibits may be marked before the trial begins.

The court reporter, who also sits in front of the judge, makes a record of everything that is said in court. It is important to speak loudly and clearly so that an accurate record can be made and so that everyone can hear.

Generally court will begin by 9:00 a.m. and end by 4:30 p.m. There is usually a 15 minute recess in the morning and in the afternoon, and a lunch break from Noon until 1:30 p.m. **Please check with the judicial assistant for the department's specific schedule.**

Forms can be obtained at www.courts.wa.gov/forms/ or www.washingtonlawhelp.org. Additional information for those representing themselves in a family case in Pierce County can be found at www.tacomaprobono.org in the Family Law Help section or by contacting the **Domestic Relations Facilitators appointment line at (253)798.3627**. These and other resources can be found in the Family Court Section at www.co.pierce.wa.us/superior.