

Q&A

Pre-Hearing Conferences at Dependency Court

Q. Are dependency cases being handled differently at Family Court at 1801 Vine Street?

A. All new dependency cases will be given a time certain pre-hearing conference immediately preceding the first scheduled adjudicatory hearing in the matter. “New cases” have been defined as those cases in which there has been no previous dependency court involvement with the family, or any of the siblings.

Q. What is a pre-hearing conference?

A. A pre-hearing conference is a court-ordered meeting of all of the parties and their attorneys on a case. This may include interested family members, agency representatives, and behavioral health assessors. The meeting, which is scheduled for thirty minutes, is facilitated by a trained mediator. The pre-hearing conferences are being held in Room 330A on the third floor at 1801 Vine Street.

Q. What happens at a pre-hearing conference?

A. The purpose of the pre-hearing conference is to encourage the parties to come together to discuss the issues that have brought the family to court, and try to resolve the issues in an agreeable manner. Areas of discussion will include the allegations in the petition, placement of the child(ren) and visitation schedule, if applicable, and services needed by the family. For more information on how services will be provided to families in Dependency Court through the new collaborative partnership between the Department of Human Services, the Behavioral Health System, and Family Court, see the box on this page, entitled “Behavioral Health Services.”

conference?

A. At the conclusion of the conference, the facilitator will record the agreement reached by the parties on a form entitled “Recommendations to the Court”. If there is no agreement, the form will reflect “No Agreement”. It will not be uncommon for there to be some areas in which the parties agree, and some in which they do not, and the Recommendations to the Court form will reflect this as well. The presiding judge and all parties will be given a copy of the Recommendations to the Court. After the pre-hearing conference, all parties will proceed immediately to the assigned courtroom, and their case will be heard as soon as possible.

Behavioral Health Services

Family Court has joined with the City of Philadelphia’s Behavioral Health System and the Department of Human Services to “front-load” services in all new dependency cases, ensuring timely delivery of services to families that come before the Court. A behavioral health services clinician will be present at the pre-hearing conference to assist in identifying the clinical needs of the family and making assessment and treatment recommendations. If agreed upon by those participating in the pre-hearing conference, or later ordered by the Court, on-site clinical evaluation staff will conduct a behavioral health assessment to identify the needs of the individual family members and link children, adults, and families to the appropriate treatment and support. Family assessments will also be available. Securing timely appointments for treatment of mental health issues, addictions, and other problems is an important goal of this initiative. For further information about the pre-hearing conference process and/or the behavioral health services initiative, contact Marguerite C. Gualtieri, Staff Attorney at *Child Advocates*, 215-925-1913, ext. 135; mcg@advokid.org.

Q. What happens after the pre-hearing