



Protection Orders During COVID-19

Frequently asked questions relating to applications, hearings, and available resources during the ongoing public health emergency.

Protection orders include the following: emergency abuse prevention orders (also called restraining orders), harassment prevention orders, and extreme risk protection orders.

How do I obtain a protection order during court business hours?

During court hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., persons in need of a protection order should contact their local court by telephone (telephone contact information for the courts that serve your city or town can be found through the [courthouse locator](#) on Mass.gov). The court will obtain all necessary information from you and arrange an immediate hearing with a judge by videoconference or by telephone. Courts are also open to accept applications in person. If circumstances warrant, you should not hesitate to contact the police directly.

How do I obtain a protection order when the court is closed?

If you need to obtain a protection order outside of court hours, you should contact your police department directly and may do so by phone. If an order is issued, the court will notify you of the date and time for a follow up hearing after notice to the defendant.

What information will I need to provide to the court during the application process for a protection order?

You will be asked to provide information to complete the application package for the type of protection order you are requesting. This may include, but is not limited to information such as: the nature of your relationship with the defendant; contact information for both you and the defendant; the nature of the abuse or harassment that occurred; whether or not either you or the defendant are under the age of 18; whether or not the defendant possesses any guns, ammunition, firearms identification cards, and/or a license to carry; and, what relief you are requesting from the court, meaning what are you asking the judge to order.

I have a protection order that has a two-party hearing scheduled. How do I know if I should appear in person or virtually?

Hearings may be in person or virtual (by phone or by videoconference). The court will let you know if you should appear in person or virtually. They may contact you by U.S. mail, email, or phone. They will also let the other parties in your case know if the hearing will take place in person or virtually.

Do I have to participate in follow up hearings about my protection order?

If you want the current protection order to continue you must participate in the hearing on the date and time listed in the notice. All protection orders that are due to expire will remain in effect until the matter is heard by a judge on the scheduled hearing date. You will be notified of any future hearing dates by the court for any in person or virtual hearings.

If my hearing is in person, am I allowed to bring my cellphone?

Yes. During the public health crisis, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts has instructed that parties will be allowed to bring their cellphones with them into courthouses.

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What do I need to bring or have with me for the hearing?

Whether you are told to appear in person or virtually, you should share anything you believe to be relevant that will enable the judge to make a decision. This could include, but is not limited to, text messages, voicemails, or photos. Contact the court if you would like to present evidence through a witness, with documents, or with photos. At the hearing, the judge or judicial officer will decide if any witnesses will be allowed to testify.

I need an interpreter. What do I do?

To request an interpreter, contact the court or call the Trial Court Helpline at 1-833-91COURT (1-833-912-6878). You can also let court staff know that you will need an interpreter during your initial application.

Who is allowed to be in the courtroom for protection order hearings during the public health emergency?

Court personnel, attorneys, parties, witnesses, advocates, and other necessary persons as determined by the judge can be physically present in a courtroom for in person proceedings. Additionally, the judge may permit members of the public, including the “news media” as defined in Supreme Judicial Court Rule 1:19(2), to access the proceeding, which may include allowing them to sit in the courtroom, provided there is sufficient space for them to maintain appropriate physical distance.

My protection order hearing will take place virtually, who else will be on the telephone or video call?

All individuals typically physically present in a courtroom will also participate in virtual hearings. Unless prohibited by statute, rule, or order, members of the public can virtually attend court hearings by videoconference or telephonic conference call. Persons interested in accessing a court hearing should contact the District Court presiding over the hearing for instructions on how to virtually attend the hearing.

My protection order hearing is scheduled to take place in person, but I have COVID-19 related concerns.

How do I request to appear virtually?

Judges may, upon request, authorize a participant (attorney, party, or witness) to appear virtually while other participants appear in person, so long as it is consistent with the protection of constitutional rights. To request to appear for your hearing virtually, please call the court to ask how you should make this request. You may need to make your request to the clerk or register or file a motion with the judge.

Where can I find more information about available resources and assistance?

There are various agencies that can provide support. [Community based advocacy or crisis agencies](#) can connect you with advocates who offer free and confidential services. [SAFEPLAN Advocates](#) are court-based and can assist with restraining order applications. **Victim Witness Advocates** work for the local District Attorney’s Office and can answer questions about any pending criminal matters involving violence against you. [Child Witness to Violence programs](#) can help if you are concerned about your child(ren)’s behavior at related to the impact of violence or stress in the home. [Intimate Partner Abuse Education Programs](#) can help people who are committed to changing their pattern of abusive behavior find the support they need to get their lives back on track. Please visit the Court System Response to COVID [Domestic and Sexual Violence webpage](#) for more information.

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