

NOTICE TO DEFENDANT* REGARDING ABUSE PREVENTION (RESTRAINING) ORDER.

THIS IS INFORMATION ABOUT THE ABUSE PREVENTION ORDER THAT MAY HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE TERMS OF THE ORDER. PLEASE READ THE ORDER CAREFULLY.

A restraining order is a court order. This means that ONLY a judge can change the order. The person who requested the order CANNOT change or end the order without returning to court. Even if the plaintiff** requests, agrees to, or allows you to do things forbidden by the order, you will be in violation of the restraining order unless a judge has changed it to permit the conduct.

A restraining order is a civil order but a violation of the order is a criminal offense. If you are found guilty of violating a restraining order, you can go to jail for up to 2 ½ years and / or be placed on probation. A criminal conviction (even a continuance without a finding) can (among other things) affect your ability to obtain employment, public housing, or citizenship, or subject you to deportation. If the police observe a violation of a restraining order or have probable cause to believe that you have violated the restraining order, the police are required to arrest you. If you are on probation, violation of a restraining order could also be a violation of your probation.

If you are ordered not to abuse the plaintiff, this means that:

- You cannot physically assault or threaten the plaintiff.
- You cannot do anything that gives the plaintiff reason to fear that you might cause the plaintiff physical harm.
- You must not use force or a threat of any kind to make the plaintiff have sex unwillingly.

If you are ordered to have no contact with the plaintiff, this means that:

- You cannot live with the plaintiff.
- You must stay away from the plaintiff at the distance indicated on the order, usually a stated number of feet or yards.
- You cannot contact the plaintiff in any way. This includes, but is not limited to, phone calls, text messages, emails, cards, and gifts. You may not contact the plaintiff through friends, relatives (including children), neighbors, or anyone else, or by sending or posting messages on Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, LinkedIn, or any other social network site, unless specifically allowed in the restraining order.
- If you are somewhere and the plaintiff comes to that same location, you must leave that place as quickly as possible, even if you were there first.

If you are ordered to leave a residence, this means that:

- You must leave the residence immediately and stay away from that address while the order is in effect. You must stay away from the address even if the plaintiff is not there. If the residence is an apartment, you may be ordered to stay away from the entire building, even if the lease is in your name.
- You cannot damage the residence in any way.
- You cannot shut off any utilities or interrupt mail delivery to the plaintiff. These orders apply even if the lease and / or utilities are in your name.

If you are ordered to stay away from the plaintiff's work, this means:

- You must stay away from the place where the plaintiff works as long as the order is in effect. You must stay away from that address even if the plaintiff is not there at the time.

* The defendant is the person the order is issued against.

** The plaintiff is the person who asked the court to issue the order.

If you are ordered to surrender firearms, this means:

- You must immediately transfer possession of any firearms, ammunition, license to carry firearms, or firearms identification card that you have to the police department listed on the order.
- You may not purchase any firearms or ammunition while the order is in effect.

If the plaintiff has been given custody of children, this means:

- The children will live with the plaintiff unless or until a judge changes that order.

If you are ordered to have no contact with the children, this means that:

- You must stay so many feet or yards away from the children (the distance is listed on the order). You cannot have contact with the children while the order is in effect, unless and until the Probate & Family Court permits such contact.
- The order may say that you must stay so many feet or yards away from a child's school or daycare.
- If you are permitted to have contact with the children but not the plaintiff, and the children live with the plaintiff, you must be careful to speak only to the children. You cannot speak to or have any contact with the plaintiff. You must follow the rules permitting contact with the children closely, including how and when you may contact the children. You should not call the home telephone unless the order specifically allows you to call that number.
- If after the District, Boston Municipal, or Superior Court has issued a restraining order, you and the plaintiff are in Probate & Family Court on a family case, a Probate & Family Court judge has the authority to change or even end the restraining order if necessary to eliminate any conflict between the restraining order and the order issued in the Probate & Family Court matter. For example, if a Probate & Family Court judge grants a parenting schedule, then the Probate & Family Court judge can change the "no contact" provision in the restraining order to allow the parenting schedule, and can also change the "stay away" provision in the restraining order to allow for specific times for pickup and return. All of the other parts of the restraining order that do not conflict with the Probate & Family Court order shall remain in effect.

How do I get my things?

If you have been ordered to stay away from your home, the order may permit you to go with the police to pick up your personal belongings at a time agreed to by the plaintiff. You must contact the local police to arrange a time that they can go with you to get your clothes and other things you may need.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW:

The date for the next court hearing is listed on the second page of the restraining order. The name and location of the court that issued the order is listed at the top left hand corner of the order. During the hearing the judge will listen to evidence presented by both sides and decide if the restraining order should continue in its present form, be changed in some way(s), or be terminated (ended). If you do not appear at this hearing after receiving notice and the plaintiff appears, the order may be extended for one year.

If you want to change or end the restraining order after it has been issued, you can go to the court that issued the restraining order to file a request that the judge make changes or end the order. The courts are generally open Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Once the order has issued after a hearing, a judge will only change the restraining order if you show that there has been a change in circumstances. To ask to end an order before the termination date, you have to prove to a judge that there has been a significant change in circumstances. Court staff in the Clerk's or Register's Office can assist you in filing the necessary documents to make this request. After you file your request, a hearing may be scheduled and the plaintiff will be given notice of the hearing. The court staff will let you know if they will notify the plaintiff of the hearing or if you need to send the plaintiff notice of the hearing date by mail.