Essential information for nonprofits navigating COVID-19

pittsburghfoundation.org/covidwebinar

NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

PRESSING LEGAL ISSUES IN A COVID ENVIRONMENT

SW PA Legal Aid
Justice for All

NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

WHO WE ARE

SW PA Legal Aid
Justice for All

Civil legal aid provided by Neighborhood Legal Services and Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services assures fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of how much money you have.

We provide access to legal help for people to protect their livelihoods, their health, and their families. Civil legal aid makes it easier to access information — whether through easy-to-understand forms, including online forms; legal assistance or representation; and legal self-help centers — so people can know their rights

NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

COVID-19 & CIVIL JUSTICE

SW PA Legal Aid

Justice for All

- **The economic hardship caused by business closures and illness will create conflicts only the civil justice system can resolve, like:**
  - **Missed rent payments leading to eviction notices**
  - **Disputes over medical and consumer debt**
  - **People being wrongly denied public benefits that can keep their families afloat**
- **Civil legal problems will spike in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, especially for those already struggling to make ends meet.**
- **Civil legal aid is a vital component of the public response to and recovery from the current public health crisis**

Disclaimer: The information in this presentation is accurate and up to date as of the time of creation. Information and policy is rapidly changing, and things may differ in the future

Southwestern PA Legal Aid

Our Mission:

- **To improve and stabilize the families, housing and finances of low-income and other vulnerable southwestern Pennsylvania residents with legal advice and assistance.**

Serving:

Fayette County

Greene County

Somerset County

Washington County

Contact us at legalservices@splas.org

or 800-846-0871

Christopher J. Hega, Esq.

- Washington and Jefferson College
- Duquesne University School of Law
- Southwestern PA Legal Services
  - 2016-September 2018: Staff Attorney
  - September 2018-present: Director of Economic Services/Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

During his time at Washington and Jefferson College, Christopher interned at a local law firm and decided to pursue a J.D. at Duquesne University School of Law. While in law school, he participated in a low income tax practicum whereby students would take on clients and provide them with tax services, including exploring offers in compromise. Christopher would continue with his clients even after the practicum ended s the timing of such offers would exceed the semester. In law school, he interned and subsequently was hired as a full-time employee of Deloitte & Touche. At Deloitte, Christopher was heavily involved in tax compliance with both corporate and individual taxes. He would continue to allot time for low income taxpayers which included providing tax advice.

Moving forward, Christopher accepted a position at Mellon Financial Corporation which became The Bank of New York Mellon. He would continue to deal with tax matters albeit through mergers and acquisition and employee payroll and compensation matters. He would then work for a large law firm as he searched for something more. That brought Christopher to private practice with the creation of Hega & Associates, LLC. The focus went from corporate, tax, mergers & acquisitions, executive compensation to a more individualized focus on family matters. That path brought him to Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services, Inc. where it has been a privilege to work. Because of his employment at SPLAS, he has been able to come full circle and can now provide more services to those in need.

Southwestern PA Legal Aid and The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic at Southwestern PA Legal Aid

Director of Economic Services: Chris Hega, Esq.

Pennsylvania Unemployment Compensation

- **Over 1 Million residents have filed for UC benefits, over half of eligible claimants have been paid out since the COVID19 crisis began**
- **Many Claimants however, are still waiting on their PIN numbers in order to file biweekly claims.**
- **The Department has stated they will make sure workers are able to file for all available weeks, no matter when they receive their PIN.**
- **No one will be denied benefits because of delayed PIN**
- **Claimants are encouraged NOT to contact the Department asking about their PIN numbers or status of claims**

Expanded Unemployment

- **Waivers in response to Gov. Wolf Emergency Declaration.**
  - **Waiting Week: Temporarily suspended! Eligible claimants can now receive benefits for the first week they are unemployed**
  - **Work Search and Work Registration Requirement: Temporarily Suspended! Claimants not required to search for new jobs or register with Careerlink to maintain benefits**

  - **FIND MORE INFORMATION: https://www.uc.pa.gov/Pages/covid19.aspx**

Federal CARES Act
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & DO

The Federal CARES Act was signed into law March 27, 2020. The Act provides enhanced Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefits and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) for Pennsylvanians.

PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENTASSISTANCE (PUA)

Expanded eligibility for individuals who have traditionally been ineligible for UC benefits (e.g., self-employed workers, independent contractors)

Not traditionally eligible for UC Benefits? Here's what you should do:

Do NOT submit an application through the regular UC system. PUA has a separate application process. If you believe you are eligible, instructions on how to apply for PUA benefits will be posted on www.uc.pa.gov.

What you may qualify to receive: 26 weeks of PUA benefits plus

An additional $600/week until July 31, 2020 (beginning April 5, 2020)

An additional 13 weeks of benefits if you are still unemployed after 26 weeks

Federal CARES Act
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & DO

Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC): An additional $600 per week, on top of regular benefits, to all UC and PUA recipients.

Already approved for UC Benefits? Here's what you should do:

Do nothing – your benefits will automatically be updated. DO NOT CALL, it will only make it difficult for others to reach an agent.

What you may qualify for: 26 weeks of UC benefits

An additional $600/week until July 31, 2020 (beginning April 5, 2020)

An additional 13 weeks of benefits if you are still unemployed after 26 weeks

Federal CARES Act
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & DO

Eligible for UC Benefits but haven't filed a claim?

Here's what you should do:

Check Eligibility at www.uc.pa.gov, "Am I Eligible" page.

File online at www.uc.pa.gov, "File an Initial Claim" page.

You can also file a claim through the Pennsylvania Teleclaims System, 888-255-4728, if you do not have access to a computer.

What you may qualify to receive: 26 weeks of UC benefits, An additional $600/week until July 31, 2020 (beginning April 5, 2020),An additional 13 weeks of benefits if you are still unemployed after 26 weeks

Federal CARES Act

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & DO

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PAUC): An additional 13 weeks of UC benefits, beyond the regular 26 weeks already provided, for a total of 39 weeks of benefits.

Exhausted your 26 weeks of UC Benefits? Here's what you should do: Instructions on how to apply will be posted shortly. We are awaiting guidance from the United States Department of Labor.

What you may qualify for:

13 weeks of UC benefits

An additional $600/week until July 31, 2020 (beginning April 5, 2020).

Economic Impact Payment a.k.a. Stimulus Check

2020 refundable tax credit. Technically, under the terms of the CARES Act, the advance refunds are treated as refunds of overpayments of 2018 or 2019 tax years.

Advanced payment on the refundable credit based on 2019 or 2018 Federal tax return calculations.

Will provide up to $1,200 for eligible adult individuals ($2,400 for couples) and an additional $500 for each eligible child under 17yrs old.

Payment will either be by direct deposit or check based on tax refund options. Direct Deposit payments have begun, checks are slated to begin mailing the week of April 27th.

Economic Impact Payment a.k.a. Stimulus Check

As most Americans know by now, the CARES Act instructs the IRS to send every non-dependent with a social security number a payment of $1,200 for an individual ($2,400 for a married couple), with an additional $500 for each child. The payments phase out for people with income over $75,000 for an individual or $150,000 for a married couple.

In order to get the money to you as soon as possible, the IRS will direct deposit the stimulus payment if the IRS knows your bank account. The IRS will rely on the bank account information reported on a taxpayer's 2018 or 2019 income tax return in order to quickly deliver the checks to intended recipients. For taxpayers who have not yet filed an income tax return for 2019 or for whom the filed 2019 return has not yet been processed, the IRS will use the information from the 2018 tax return, if filed.

The IRS is rolling out a "Get My Payment" application for taxpayers to enter direct deposit information if it's not already on file, but reportedly this app cannot be used to update existing bank account information. The IRS's description of Get Your Payment states that it will allow taxpayers who have not provided direct deposit information to provide bank information, but does not indicate that it will allow taxpayers to change information the IRS already has on file.

I’m not required to file a tax return, how will I get my check?

Eligible retirees, recipients of Social Security, Railroad Retirement, disability or veterans' benefits and taxpayers who do not make enough money to normally file a tax return will receive a payment.

Individuals who receive SSD and SS Retirement will automatically receive the stimulus check in the same manner.

Supplemental Security Income Recipients will receive automatic COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments

SSI recipients with dependent children should still use the “Non-Filers Enter Info Here” portal on IRS.Gov to provide their information

Others (low-income, certain veterans, receive only public assistance→ fill out IRS payment portal.

If the IRS will come up with a way to automatically disburse the funds to VA benefits recipients, for now the quickest way is probably to use the porta. Efforts are ongoing to determine if automatic payments can be made to recipients of VA benefits.

We continue to explore the feasibility of automatic payments for other nonfilers, such as those receiving SNAP and other benefits.

IRS Portal

What to Expect

Clicking "Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info Here" above will take you from the IRS site to Free File Fillable Forms, a certified IRS partner. This site is safe and secure.

Follow these steps in order to provide your information:

Create an account by providing your email address and phone number; and establishing a user ID and password.

You will be directed to a screen where you will input your filing status (Single or Married filing jointly) and personal information.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EAMcDyUpmw

IRS Portal

Information regarding payment portal and payment tracking can be found at:

www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments

The IRS is in the process of launching a payment tracking tool which should be available next week.

This is not to be confused with the Turbo Tax Stimulus Registration Page

Economic Impact Payments

- Topics in the News
  - Coronavirus Tax Relief
    - Economic Impact Payments
- News Releases
- Multimedia Center
- Tax Relief in Disaster Situations
- Tax Reform
- Taxpayer First Act
- Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts
- The Tax Gap
- Fact Sheets
- IRS Tax Tips
- e-News Subscriptions
- IRS Guidance
- Media Contacts
- IRS Statements and Announcements

The IRS is committed to helping you get your Economic Impact Payment as soon as possible. The payments, also referred to by some as stimulus payments, are automatic for most taxpayers. No further action is needed by taxpayers who filed tax returns in 2018 and 2019 and most seniors and retirees.

See if you are eligible for an Economic Impact Payment.

Non-Filers: Enter Your Payment Info Here

If you don't file taxes, use the "Non-Filers: Enter Your Payment Info Here" application to provide simple information so you can get your payment.

You should use this application if:

- You **did not file** a 2018 or 2019 federal income tax return because your gross income was under $12,200 ($24,400 for married couples). This includes people who had no income. Or
- You **weren't required to file** a 2018 or 2019 federal income tax return for other reasons

If you receive these benefits, we already have your information and you will receive $1,200. Do **not** use this application if you receive:

- Social Security retirement, disability (SSDI), or survivor benefits
- Railroad Retirement and Survivor Benefits

Special note: People in these groups who have qualifying children under age 17 can use this application to claim the $500 payment per child.

Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info Here

Filers: Get Your Payment

Use the "Get My Payment" application (coming mid-April) to:

- Check your payment status
- Confirm your payment type: direct deposit or check
- Enter your bank account information for direct deposit if we don't have your direct deposit information and we haven't sent your payment yet

Get My Payment (coming mid-April)

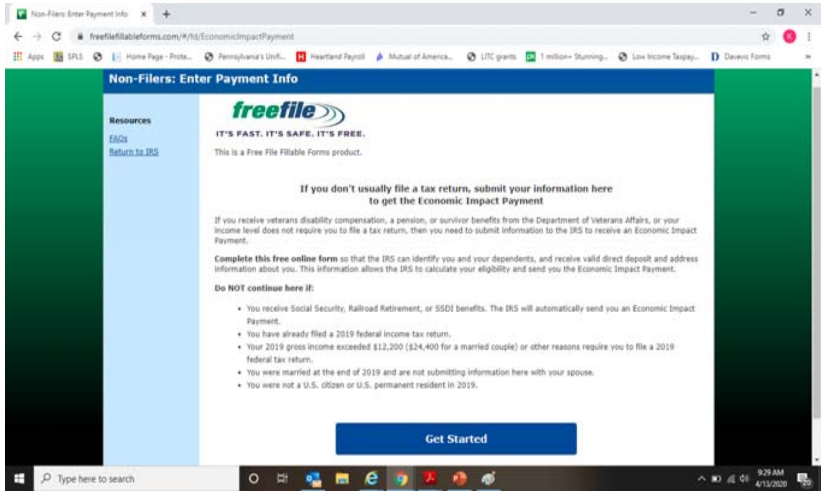
Update your information

Direct deposit: Use the Get My Payment application (coming mid-April) to let us know your bank account information if we don't have your direct deposit information and we haven't sent your payment.

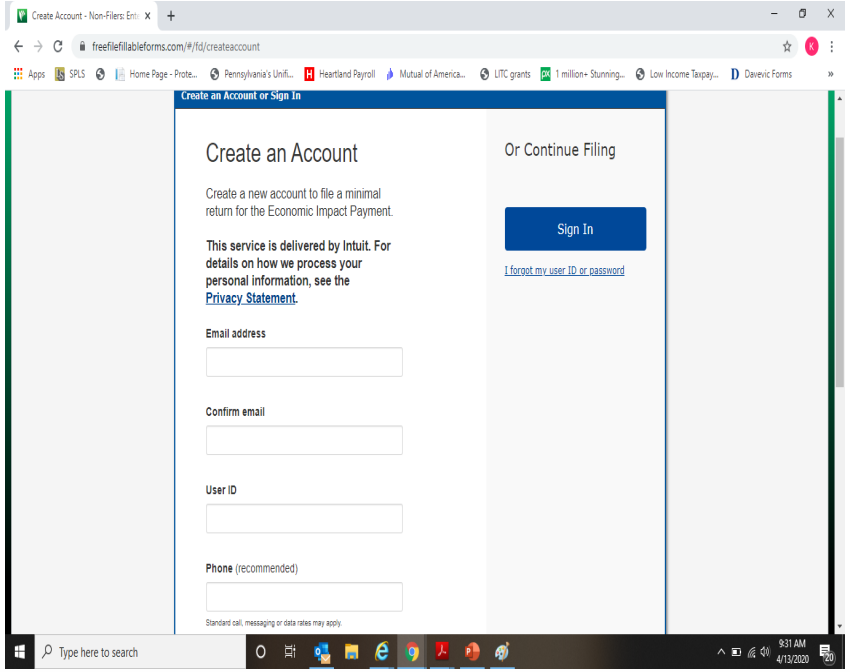
Check payment: If you moved since you last filed, let us know your new mailing address.

IRS Portal

Get started



Make an account



IRS Portal

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT USUALLY FILE INCOME TAX RETURNS: https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments

Information You will Need to Provide

Full name, current mailing address and an email address

Date of birth and valid Social Security number

Bank account number, type and routing number, if you have one

Identity Protection Personal Identification Number (IP PIN) you received from the IRS earlier this year, if you have one

Driver's license or state-issued ID, if you have one

For each qualifying child: name, Social Security number or Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number and their relationship to you or your spouse

Economic Payments Follow-ups

For security reasons, the IRS plans to mail a letter about the economic impact payment to the taxpayer's last known address within 15 days after the payment is paid. The letter will provide information on how the payment was made and how to report any failure to receive the payment.

Paid Preparer and receiving refund anticipation checks/refund transfers.

If a taxpayer is unsure they're receiving a legitimate letter, the IRS urges taxpayers to visit IRS.gov first to protect against scam artists.

An important point to make with our outreach and education is that people who *paid* electronically are going to have to input deposit account information. Many seem to think that providing their payment account information will suffice. The statute states it will use authorizations for deposits and depository accounts provided from January 1, 2018. This does not include authorizations to withdraw funds.

Who Can Take the Stimulus Check?

The CARES Act protects the Stimulus Check from Federal and State offsets

The only offset that will be applied will be for back child support that has been certified and submitted to the IRS through TROP

What about private creditors that obtain a court garnishment order and present it to my bank? You may have some protections under state law. Also payments have begun and most courts are closed to non-essential business

The Stimulus check will NOT be counted for income for Public Benefit Programs (MA, SNAP, TANF)- counted as resources with 12 months to spend down

Department of Education Student Loans

DOE (March 25) was ahead of the CARES Act (March 27): U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced that, due to the COVID-19 national emergency, the Department will halt collection actions and wage garnishments to provide additional assistance to borrowers. This flexibility will last for a period of at least 60 days from March 13, 2020. The date is now September 30, 2020.

Interest is being temporarily set at 0% on federal student loans through Sept. 30, 2020.

Any payment you made during the administrative forbearance period (March 13, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2020) can be refunded. Contact your loan servicer to request that your payment be refunded.

On March 25, 2020, ED announced that my federal tax refund would not be withheld to repay my defaulted federal student loan debt. My refund has already been taken. Will I get it back?

Yes, but only if your federal tax refund was in the process of being withheld—on or after March 13, 2020, and before Sept. 30, 2020—for the repayment of a defaulted federal student loan.

Your federal tax refund will not be returned to you if the process to withhold your refund was completed before March 13, 2020.

If you have questions about whether your federal tax refund was withheld, call ED's Default Resolution Group at 1-800-621-3115 (TTY for the deaf or hearing-impaired 1-877-825-9923).

Student Loans

On March 25, 2020, ED announced that a portion of my Social Security payment, including disability benefits, would not be withheld to repay my defaulted federal student loan debt. My Social Security payment has already been taken. Will I get it back?

Yes. The portion of your Social Security payment that was taken will be returned to you if your payment was in the process of being withheld—on or after March 13, 2020, and before Sept. 30, 2020—for the repayment of a defaulted federal student loan.

The portion of your Social Security payment that was withheld will not be returned to you if the process to withhold it was completed before March 13, 2020.

If you have questions about whether your Social Security payment was withheld, call ED's Default Resolution Group at 1-800-621-3115 (TTY for the deaf or hearing-impaired 1-877-825-9923).

Where to Find More Information

www.irs.gov/coronavirus

www.ssa.gov/coronavirus

Philadelphia Legal Assistance UC FAQs: https://docs.google.com/document/d/18rSI6EbPRjpmC3zqD1Ikh7ASDf79O1Jf0La1EokERMg

https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus

https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/coronavirus

https://www.uc.pa.gov/unemployment-benefits/file/Pages/File%20an%20Initial%20Claim.aspx

FIND US ON THE WEB

SW PA Legal Aid
Justice for All

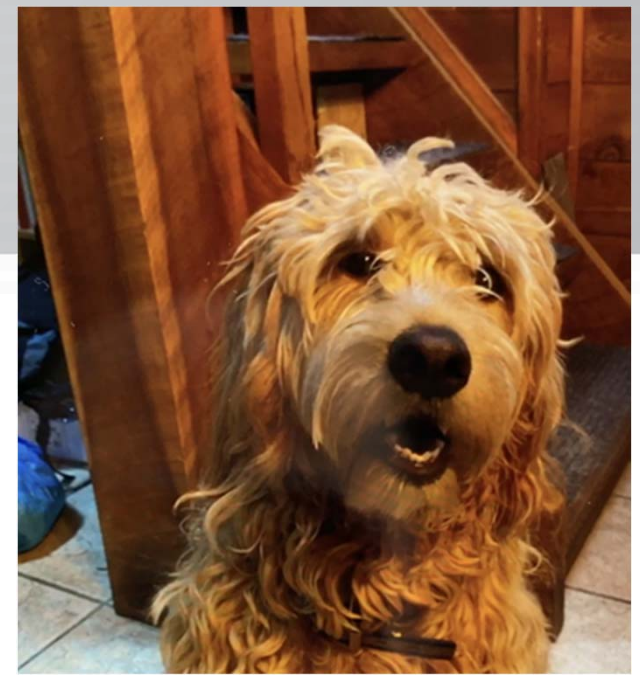
Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

www.pataxhelp.org

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

@westernpalitc

724-225-6170 to reach Washington Office



Neighborhood Legal Services

Our Mission

To meet the civil legal needs of the poor and vulnerable in our community through effective legal representation and education

NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

Serving:

Allegheny County

Beaver County

Butler County

Lawrence County

You can reach us at www.nlsa.us or 1-866-761-6572

Catherine T. Martin, Esq.

- Recipient of the 2009 Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network Excellence Award
- Recipient of the 2006 Edwin O'Connor Allegheny County Bar Foundation Fellows Award

Catherine T. Martin graduated from Pitt Law School in 1978, and she has worked for Neighborhood Legal Services Association since beginning her career as a volunteer with NLSA the summer after her first year of law school.

Immediately after graduation from law school, Martin worked in the Lawrenceville office as a staff attorney. From 1981-1984, she served as the managing attorney of the hill district neighborhood office. From 1984-1987, Catherine moved to the Litigation Unit in the South Side. When Neighborhood offices were consolidated in 1987, she worked as a Unit Chief in the Pittsburgh Office.

Since 1995, Catherine has been a managing attorney in the central Pittsburgh office. At all times she has maintained an active legal practice, in Consumer law, focusing on foreclosure issues and bankruptcy law.

Martin is a contributing author for "Pennsylvania Consumer Law," most notably for her writings on Judgment Execution.

Martin has been involved with legal education, helping to teach law school clinic classes at both Duquesne and Pitt, and also acting as a trainer for the Pennsylvania Bar Institute and other organizations on Consumer Law and Bankruptcy. She also organizes NLSA's summer intern program and supervises the bankruptcy law students throughout the year. She has extensive management and supervisory experience at NLSA. She has also written several grant proposals which were funded and helped to develop pro bono projects.

NEIGHBORHOOD
LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

Legal Issues during the pandemic

Catherine T. Martin, Esq.

- Utility Service
- Evictions
- Mortgages
- Bankruptcy

Utility Service

Two big categories of utility providers:

1. **Regulated: i.e. by the PUC—mostly private companies**

2. **Non-Regulated: Mostly municipal authorities providing water and sewer services;**

Locally, PWSA is a municipal authority but is now subject to PUC regulation.

PA American Water is a private company so has always been regulated by the PUC

Utility Service

Why does it matter if a utility is regulated by the PUC or not?

- **It determines what remedies the consumer has.**
- **Governor Wolf issued a Proclamation of Disaster on 3/6/20, and no regulated utility service may be terminated while that is in effect**
- **Municipal authorities were asked to stop any terminations, but are not subject to the state imposed moratorium.**
- **Wilkinsburg-Penn Joint Water Authority has voluntarily stopped terminations of water service**

Utility Service

What can a customer do to get help now?

- **If not on CAP, apply**
- **If on CAP but income went down, ask for an adjustment in the CAP payment**

- **If service is off, call the utility to request restoration**
- **If the utility refuses to restore service, file an informal complaint with the PUC**

PUC number: 1-800-692-7380

Utility Service

Financial help:

LIHEAP ended April 10

The Crisis program will open, no date yet. The regular pool of funds available will be supplemented by federal CARES money

Good source of current information:

https://www.rhls.org/coronavirus-information/

Evictions

Legal Status:

Statewide: PA Supreme Court order stays any legal action in connection with an eviction through April 30

Allegheny County: Hold on evictions through May 8

Links to PA court orders:

http://www.pacourts.us/ujs-coronavirus-information

Evictions

What does a stay on eviction cases mean?

Statewide: Through April 30: hearings already scheduled will be postponed; deadlines to file pleadings are postponed; appeal deadlines are postponed; no physical evictions can take place; no new court cases can be filed

Allegheny County: Same except extensions run through May 8

Exception: if an eviction is not based on failure to pay rent, then a lawsuit can be started but no physical eviction may occur until after the April 30/May 8 deadlines

Evictions

Federal CARES Act has some effect on state court evictions:

If a landlord has a federally backed mortgage loan then they cannot evict a tenant or charge late fees through July 25. After that, must give a 30-day notice to evict before filing suit.

A landlord receiving forbearance under the CARES Act may not evict or charge late fees.

Complication: tenant isn't going to know if the landlord has this kind of loan

BIG NEWS:

If the tenant lives in subsidized housing, evictions and late fees banned until July 25

Examples of subsidized housing: Public housing; Section 8; HUD senior housing

After July 25, a 30-day notice is required before eviction

Evictions

PA CARE Package—effective March 30:

For participating financial institutions, no evictions for 60 days

To check participation: https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/covid19/

Limited effect on residential evictions—most landlords are not a financial institution

Evictions

Important: Rent is still due

Financial help: City of Pittsburgh tenants can apply for financial help through the URA administered HSP (Housing Stabilization Program)

Call 211 United Way for referral to a participating agency

No new sources of financial help specific to tenants yet

Mortgages

Legal Status:

Statewide: There is a hold on foreclosure and ejectment cases through April 30

Allegheny County: Hold through May 8

Except for emergencies

PHFA has suspended foreclosures indefinitely

Mortgages

Federal CARES Act:

Applies only to "federally backed" mortgages–- loans insured or subsidized by the federal government

Examples: FHA, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, VA, USDA loans

How to find out if you have that kind of loan? Fannie and Freddie have look up sites

Fannie: https://www.knowyouroptions.com/loanlookup

Freddie: https://ww3.freddiemac.com/loanlookup/

The loan servicer should be able to tell the borrower what kind of loan they have

Mortgages

For these federally backed loans:

Lender cannot file a new foreclosure lawsuit until 5/18/20

If a foreclosure case was filed prior to 3/27/20, no action on that case can take place until 5/18/20 at the earliest

Lender can suspend payments UPON REQUEST OF THE BORROWER

No adverse credit reports for late or missed payments

Good source of information: https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/guide-coronavirus-mortgage-relief-options/

Mortgages

PA CARE Package:

Participating financial institutions will provide the following in addition to any assistance provided in the CARES Act:

- **90-day grace period for mortgages NOT covered by CARES**
- **No new foreclosures for 60 days—through May 29**
- **No adverse credit reports**

- **Homeowners should contact their lenders to ask for help**

- **Homeowners should still make their payments if they can**

Bankruptcy

Bankruptcy is an underutilized tool for low-income people to deal with debt.

Can wipe out many unsecured debts in a Chapter 7 case; Chapter 13 provides a way to spread out secured debts to catch up on an arrearage and save a house, a car or other important assets

Bankruptcy

COVID-19-related changes to the consumer bankruptcy law are fairly minimal.

No new categories of debts can be wiped out, despite efforts of consumer advocates. A Chapter 13 repayment plan that was in effect as of the date the CARES Act became law (3/27/20) may be extended an additional two years but new cases filed after that remain limited to a maximum five-year repayment plan.

Bankruptcy

Bankruptcy courts are part of the federal court system and are not shut down as much as the state courts are.

The local bankruptcy court, Western District of Pennsylvania, has temporarily relaxed some rules about original signatures on documents.

Hearings are being held by phone; some Zoom meetings are coming up for Chapter 13 conciliations

Elizabeth K. Eisenhauer, Esq.

- Juris Doctorate degree from Duquesne University School of Law
- Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Edinboro University
- Member of the Allegheny County Bar Association Family Law Section

Elizabeth K. Eisenhauer is a Staff Attorney at Neighborhood Legal Services. NLSA is dedicated to meeting the civil legal needs of vulnerable residents in the community through legal representation and education. In her position, Elizabeth provides representation to those who cannot afford an attorney in matters of family law. While also guiding families through the complex custody process, Elizabeth primarily focuses her time on assisting victims of crime in obtaining Protection From Abuse orders.

Prior to taking on her role at NLSA, Elizabeth gained experience in Family Law as a Law Clerk at the Divorce Law Project and by providing legal assistance to unrepresented parties through the Duquesne Family Law Clinic. Her dedication and passion in family law allows her to provide effective representation to her clients

Family Law in a COVID Environment

Elizabeth Eisenhauer, Esq.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & COVID

- Predicted increase in domestic violence
- Help is still available!

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCIES/SHELTERS:

- Hotlines that answer calls 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week
- Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, Crisis Center North, Center for Victims, and Alle-Kiski Area HOPE Center
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
  - **You can also log onto www.thehotline.org or text LOVEIS to 22522 if you're unable to speak safely**

PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDERS

Allegheny County:

- Temporary PFAs obtained at Municipal Court between 8am -2pm
  - Emergency Orders given at all other times
- Intake process done over the phone and via video conferencing with the Judge
- Orders being faxed to police stations
- No final dates given at this time. Orders to last through judicial emergency.
  - Judicial emergency set to end May 8th. Orders will last through May 23rd.
  - Dates always changing as the situation progresses!

PROTECTION FROM ABUSE ORDERS

Insight into other, smaller counties:

Butler County:

- Victims still file for Temporary Orders in person
- Final PFAS scheduled at certain times of the day to minimize crowding
- Only parties and counsel present

Beaver County:

- Victims still file for Temporary Orders in person
  - Judges review petitions in chambers
- Final hearings still being handled. Attempting to solve via phone/video conference. People spaced out in different rooms

CUSTODY DURING COVID

Allegheny County:

- Emergencies only basis. Courthouse is closed.
- Emergency Motion packet on website
  - Send to: emergencycustody@alleghenycourts.us
  - Notify the other side
  - Court evaluating this on an emergency basis
  - Include email address, mailing address, phone number

- **Law School Advice Hotline**
  - Duquesne Law School 412-396-4704
  - University of Pittsburgh Law School 412-648-1879

CUSTODY DURING COVID

Procedures are operating similarly in the outer counties as well:

Beaver County:

- Judge DeCostro accepting emergency motions and conducting telephone testimony
- Contact Rhonda Mull for additional information
  - 724-770-4684 or rmull@beavercountypa.gov.

Butler County:

- Emergency motions emailed to court and other side
  - familypetitions@co.butler.pa.us
- Courts scheduling telephone argument if needed
- Reviewing motions for emergent needs

ONGOING CUSTODY DURING COVID

- Custody seminars (generations, education, mediation) all cancelled
- Some Judges conducting conciliations via video conferences if both parties are represented
- Check with your local courthouse and specific Judge
  - Lots of good information on courthouse website's, especially in Allegheny County!

NEW CUSTODY AND COVID

- Some counties not accepting filings at this time. Differs everywhere:
  - Allegheny: hold all filings
  - Butler: Can fill out the pro se packet, email to prothonotary with certification you'll also be mailing the original, & serve the other party
- Best to prepare the paperwork with clients now
- Clients should still attempt to work out custody between the parties
  - Document all attempts, visits, phone calls, etc.
  - Good time to gather evidence

OTHER FAMILY LAW AREAS

SUPPORT:

- People still need to pay child support
- New filings and modifications are still being accepted
- www.humanservices.state.pa.us/CSWS

DIVORCE:

- No actions; no divorce decrees being sent
- Allegheny County Bar Association's Divorce Law Project
  - 412-402-6714

COMMON CUSTODY QUESTIONS

"Do I still need to follow my custody order?" YES!

- All parties to follow order as is
- Technically still in the school year even if school is closed
- No contempt motions right now
  - Keep track of any contempt issues
  - Document everything & prepare filings now

Contact local child protective agency services or state childline.

- If you have concerns about the well-being of a child, please call 412-473-2000 or 1-800-932-0313. These numbers answer 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

CUSTODY TIPS DURING COVID

1. HEALTH

- Follow all CDC, state, and local guidelines
  - Handwashing, social distancing, disinfecting
- Notify the other party if anyone in your house or you become sick
  - Minimize spread of disease by leaving child with sick parent or non-infected parent
  - Keep in contact electronically
  - Keep track of missed time to be addressed later

2. MINDFULNESS

- Be calm and truthful with children
- Avoid discussing your fears
- Support your children: encourage questions and discussions about feelings
- If clients need help, reach out to community resources!

CUSTODY TIPS DURING COVID

3. COMPLIANT WITH COURT ORDERS

- Follow your order; don’t reinvent the wheel

4. CREATIVITY

- Incorporate technology
- Keep routines/establish schedules
- Resources for age appropriate activities and educational help

5. TRANSPARENCY

- Open and honest communication about symptoms/sickness
- Come up with a parenting plan

CUSTODY TIPS DURING COVID

6. GENEROSITY

- Be reasonable when co-parenting
- Allow makeup time, changes in schedules
- Judges expect reasonable accommodations during this unusual time; keep track off any denied requests

7. UNDERSTANDING

- When co-parenting & with child support payments
- Financial hardship could lead to inability to pay child support

RESOURCES FOR CLIENTS

PBS Kids – How to Talk to Your Kids about Coronavirus - https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR3KdttouZvPEq1s3-6fsiBfZ4OmZDhdVC0Y46B8BEBZO-PfZscJ7o69Pkw

Zero to Three - Tips for Families: Coronavirus for Kids Ages 0-3
https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus

Child Mind Institute – Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/

CDC – Talking to Kids
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html

CDC – Helping Kids Cope with Emergencies –
https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html

Child Mind Institute – Helping Parents Cope
https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/

RESOURCES, CONTINUED

Panorama Education – Self Care Resources during COVID-19
https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/sel-resources-for-educators-school-communities-and-parents-related-to-covid-19

Medium.com - "Family Stress Relief During the Coronavirus Outbreak"
https://medium.com/@mpulido_47600/family-stress-relief-during-the-corona-virus-outbreak-by-mary-l-pulido-ph-d-4ebfe639343e

Child Trends – Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic
https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic

Up worthy – How to Prepare for Extended School Closings and Not Lose Your Mind -
https://www.upworthy.com/tips-for-parents-coronavirus

Healthy Outcomes for Positive Experience – Love in the Time of the Coronavirus: A HOPE-informed Guide for Parents - https://positiveexperience.org/love-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-a-hope-informed-guide-for-parents/

End Violence Against Children - Positive Parenting in COVID-19
https://www.end-violence.org/articles/new-resource-pack-positive-parenting-covid-19-isolation

NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All

Online Legal Resources

SW PA Legal Aid

Justice for All

- www.PALawHelp.org
- www.palegalaid.net
- www.nlsa.us
- www.spla.org
- www.fhlaw.org

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network

PALawHelp.org

Disclaimer: The information in this presentation is accurate and up to date as of the time of creation. Information and policy is rapidly changing, and things may differ in the future

HOW TO APPLY FOR HELP

To find out if you qualify for legal assistance from NLS you can visit our website at **www.NLSA.us**. To apply online choose the "Get Legal Help" tab or you may call the office for your county (M-F 9am to 1pm).

ALLEGHENY COUNTY
412-255-6700

928 PENN AVENUE
PITTSBURGH, PA 15222-3799

BEAVER COUNTY
724-378-0595

STONE POINT LANDING, SUITE 204A
500 MARKET STREET
BRIDGEWATER, PA 15009-2998

BUTLER COUNTY
724-282-3888

HOLLY POINTE BUILDING, SUITE C PLAZA LEVEL
220 S. MAIN STREET
BUTLER, PA 16001

LAWRENCE COUNTY
724-658-2677

TEMPLE BUILDING, SUITE 329
125 EAST NORTH STREET
NEW CASTLE, PA 16101-3751

TOLL-FREE 866-761-6572

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