

## CONTESTED DIVORCE WITHOUT CHILDREN and SIMPLE or COMPLEX PROPERTY ISSUES

**STEP 1** Complete the *Domestic Relations Information Sheet, Petition for Dissolution of Marriage, and Summons*. The Petition needs to be notarized. There are several notaries public located in the Courthouse.

Complete the CAPTION ONLY for the *Temporary Domestic Order and Order to Produce Discovery for Child Support and Interim Allocation Hearings*.

Hold on to the *Verified Marital Settlement Agreement* and the *Final Decree*. These documents will be completed and filed at a later time.

There is a **filing fee of \$137.00** which is required to open your divorce case. If you cannot afford to pay the filing fee you may ask for the filing fee to be waived by filing an *Application for Free Process and Affidavit of Indigency*. You can obtain this form from the Self Help Center.

**STEP 2** Go to the Self Help Center on the first floor of the Courthouse to obtain a hearing date for the *Order to Produce Discovery for Child Support and Interim Allocation Hearings*.

Go to a judge's office for a signature on this document. The judge will also sign the *Temporary Domestic Order*.

If you are also asking for a waiver of the filing fee, fill out the *Application for Free Process and Affidavit of Indigency* and take it to the judge now. The judge will either grant or deny your request for free process.

The Family Court judge, Judge Raymond Ortiz's office is located on the second floor.

**STEP 3** You will need the **Original and two copies** of all documents you have completed for filing. Copies will be made in the Court Clerk's Office for \$.35 per page. You must pay the copy fee even if your request for free process has been granted.

**STEP 4** File the *Petition, Summons, and signed Order to Produce Discovery for Child Support and Interim Allocation Hearings and Temporary Domestic Order* with the Court Clerk's Office on the first floor of the Courthouse. The Clerk's Office will keep the original documents for the court file. You will get the two copies back.

There is a **filing fee of \$137.00** which is required to open your divorce case, unless the judge has granted a waiver of the filing fee. The Court Clerk only accepts

**STEP 5** When you file your Petition, the Court Clerk's Office will assign your divorce case a judge and a case number.

The Clerk will write the case number on all the documents.

Two endorsed (stamped) copies of the documents which have been filed will be returned to you. You will keep one copy for your records and serve a copy on the other party.

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**STEP 6** You must legally notify the other party that you have filed for divorce by “serving” him or her. Someone over the age of 18 and not involved with the case, or a law enforcement officer, must **serve** the other party with a copy of all the endorsed documents you received from the Court Clerk. It is important that you **file** a Return of Service with the Court Clerk’s Office. This is **proof** that the other party has been served.

**STEP 7** Your property and debts must be divided before a *Final Decree* can be entered. You will automatically be referred to a Settlement Conference with a neutral attorney 60 days after the Petition is filed to help you work out a *Verified Marital Settlement Agreement*. If you do not need the help of a neutral attorney, you can file a Motion for Excusal from Settlement Conference. A *Verified Marital Settlement Agreement* form is in the packet. If you are able to agree on the division of property and debts, complete and **file a *Verified Marital Settlement Agreement***.

**STEP 8** If you are able to resolve all the issues on your own, with or without the help of mediators or settlement facilitators, you may complete and file the appropriate documents. If you cannot resolve the issues, the judge will hold a trial on the merits to decide them for you. You must file a *Request for Hearing* before the judge will schedule a hearing or trial.

**STEP 9** If you have been able to resolve all the issues between yourselves, you may **submit endorsed copies** of the *Petition* and *Verified Marital Settlement Agreement*, along with the *Final Decree to the judge* assigned to your case. The judge will then review your documents. If your documents have been completed properly, and the judge does not see a problem, the judge will sign your Final Decree. If there is a problem, the judge may schedule a hearing to resolve it.

**STEP 10** **File your *Final Decree*** with the Clerk’s Office. It is very important that you do not leave the building without filing the Final Decree. **Your divorce is NOT FINAL until you file your *Final Decree*!** This document will close your case.

In some cases a certified copy of your Final Decree may be needed. The Clerk’s Office will certify your documents for a fee of \$1.50 per certification.