

**SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DOMESTIC RELATIONS PROCEDURAL RULES COMMITTEE**

**ADOPTION REPORT**

**Amendment of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.4-4,  
Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.15, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.25,  
and Adoption of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 and Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-4**

On April 25, 2025, the Supreme Court amended Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure 1915.3-2, 1915.4-4, 1915.10, 1915.15, 1915.25 and adopted Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure 1915.3-3 and 1915.3-4 governing custody proceedings. The Domestic Relations Procedural Rules Committee has prepared this Adoption Report describing the rulemaking process. An Adoption Report should not be confused with Comments to the rules. See Pa.R.J.A. 103, cmt. The statements contained herein are those of the Committee, not the Court.

These amendments are intended to update and provide procedures to implement the statutory requirement that custody courts consider criminal records, abuse history, and county agency involvement with the parties and their household members. The primary sources of this information are the parties and the county agencies. The information is most probative when it is timely and current. While information may impel further investigation by a party or inquiry by a court, it is only when that information becomes evidence that it can weighed in a custody proceeding.

**Background**

Since 2011, custody courts have been required to conduct an initial evaluation of a party or household member who committed an enumerated offense to determine whether that person poses a threat to the child. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329(a), (c). In 2013, the Court adopted Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2 to require parties to complete a criminal record or abuse history verification for the enumerated offenses and to provide for the initial evaluation. The rule was amended in 2014 to include disclosure of involvement with a county agency. The Act of June 5, 2020, P.L. 246, No. 32 amended 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329(a) to add 18 Pa.C.S. § 2718 (strangulation) to the list of enumerated offenses. The Act of June 30, 2021, P.L. 197, No. 38 amended 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329(a) to add 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 30 (human trafficking) and 18 Pa.C.S. § 5902(b.1) (prostitution and related offenses) to the list of enumerated offenses.

Since 2014, custody courts have been required to consider child abuse and the involvement of a party, household member, or child with a child protective services agency when determining child custody under 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 5321 - 5340. See 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 5328(a)(2.1) and 5329.1(a). Further the Department of Public Welfare, now the Department

of Human Services (DHS), the local county children and youth social services agencies (“county agencies”), and the courts of common pleas were required to cooperate with the exchange of information that is necessary for the court’s determination of a child custody order. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329.1(b).

The Child Protective Services Law, 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 6301 - 6375, and the Juvenile Act, 42 Pa. C.S. §§ 6301 – 6375, were also amended to enhance the accessing and sharing of information. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 6340(a)(5.1) (permitting the release of information in confidential agency reports to a court of common pleas in connection with a matter involving custody of a child); 42 Pa.C.S. § 6307(a)(4.1) (opening juvenile court records to “a court in determining custody, as provided in 23 Pa.C.S. §§ 5328 (relating to factors to consider when awarding custody) and 5329.1 (relating to consideration of child abuse and involvement with protective services)”). Additionally, juvenile court files and records were made available to the DHS for use in determining whether an individual named as the perpetrator of an indicated report of child abuse should be expunged from the statewide database. See 42 Pa.C.S. § 6307(a)(6.5).

## **Rulemaking Proposal**

The Committee proposed comprehensive amendments to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2 (Criminal Record or Abuse History) governing the parties’ criminal record/abuse history, including the Verification form. To protect the parties, their household members, and the children against the disclosure of potentially confidential information, subdivision (a)(1) would require that the verification form remain confidential.

Regarding the timing of the filing, the Committee proposed modest revision of the requirements for the responding party. Currently, the defendant or respondent must file and serve the completed verification form “on or before the initial in-person contact with the court ... but not later than 30 days after service of the complaint or petition.” Subdivision (a)(3) would require, in pertinent part, that the verification form be filed with the prothonotary “before” the initial in-person contact or within 30 days of service of the initiating pleading, whichever occurs first. This amendment would ensure that the court has the responding party’s information before the initial in-person proceeding. The Committee believed it was necessary for the court to have the most current information about the parties’ and household members’ criminal record/abuse history to properly determine the best interest of the child.

Subdivision (a)(4) would require the parties to update the form when there are any changes to the household membership since the previous filing either five days after a change in circumstances or no less than one day before any proceeding, whichever occurs first. This requirement was intended to provide the parties and the court with current and accurate information so they can understand any potential threats of harm to the child. Subdivision (a)(5) would address sanctions for a party’s failure to comply with the requirement of filing their updated verification form.

The Committee proposed several changes to the verification form in subdivision (c). First, the parties would be required to complete the information on the form. Therefore, the form was revised to confirm that only a party, and not their attorney, must sign the form. The first page of the verification form, which was to include the names of all children and parties involved with the matter, may be used by the court to submit a request to the county agency regarding any involvement by the parties with the county agency, as provided in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3.

Next, the form was expanded to include any pending charges, as well any offenses that have been resolved by Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition or another diversionary program but have not been expunged. This addition would provide the court with the most relevant and recent information to ensure the best interest of the child, while being cognizant of the limitations associated with requesting information regarding expunged crimes or offenses having limited access or subject to “Clean Slate” programs.

To reflect recent statutory requirements, 18 Pa.C.S. § 2718 (related to strangulation), 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 30 (related to human trafficking), and 18 Pa.C.S. § 5902(b.1) (relating to prostitution) was added to the enumerated crimes on the verification form. To provide a more complete history of violent or abusive conduct, the Committee proposed adding contempt of Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence and Intimidation order or agreement to the list of offenses included on the form. A “catch-all” category of “other” is also proposed to be included for other forms of abuse or violent conduct that may not be specifically enumerated.

The Committee proposed a new rule, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 (Report of Child Abuse and Protective Services), to provide a procedure for a custody court to request information from the local county agency, as well as the return and dissemination of that information. This rule, as well as Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-4 (Form for Report of Child Abuse and Protective Services), which provides the form for the request of information, were intended to establish a uniform statewide procedure.

Subdivision (a) of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 would confirm the purpose for the rule, which is in accordance with 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329.1(a). Subdivision (b) provided definitions for both Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 and 1915.3-4. Subdivision (c) outlined the minimum circumstances under which the court should request information from the local county agency. The Committee wanted to provide a general guideline for submission of the court’s request, while allowing each court discretion in deciding whether to request a report in other circumstances.

Subdivision (d) provided a timeline for the county agency to return the report to the court. The decision to specify “no later than five days” for the return of the completed form was selected considering the court’s need for information as quickly as possible, while being mindful of the administrative burden on county agencies. The proposed

subdivision provided the court with the option of designating a different timing if there is a pressing need for the information to be returned sooner.

Subdivision (e) required that the court file the completed form on the docket and disseminate it to the parties. Subdivision (f) deemed the completed form to be confidential and warned recipients against further dissemination to maintain the confidentiality associated with county agency investigations, for the protection of the subject children, parties, and any interested third parties.

Subdivision (g) established the right of the parties and the court to subpoena the county agency to provide witnesses to attend and testify at a custody proceeding. The Committee believed that this subdivision was necessary due to the elimination of requests for any narrative explanation from the county agency in the report.

Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-4 provided a form to be used for the court to request information from county agencies. The Committee took note that there is no statute “relaxing” the admissibility of caseworker statements and opinions in custody proceedings under the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence. *Cf.* 23 Pa.C.S. § 6381 (admissibility of certain evidence in child abuse proceedings). Informed by recent rulemaking involving Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.11-2 (*Guardian Ad Litem*), the Committee believed the returned form should be filed, shared with the parties, deemed confidential, and subject to the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence.

The first page of the form would be the same as the first page of the Criminal Record or Abuse History Verification in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2. Each party’s verification form will be filed with the court after being completed. In appropriate circumstances, the court or its designee could take the first page of each party’s verification form and submit it to the county agency to request information directly from the county agency.

The contents of the proposed form were similar to DHS’s form in the Office of Children, Youth and Families’ Bulletin No. 3490-19-30 (November 1, 2019). The proposed form was intended to solicit many of the statutory factors but eschewed those related to the “circumstances” of child abuse or provision of services. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329.1(a)(1)(iii), (a)(2)(iii). To address concerns that some of the items on the DHS form invited open-ended statements and possibly opinions, questions soliciting potential hearsay were eliminated. The open-ended requests for “any pertinent information” in Questions (I)(G) and (II)(I) from the DHS form were eliminated. The Committee acknowledges this may result in the increased need for a county agency representative

to testify in custody proceedings but believed that any such statements should be made subject to the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence.<sup>1</sup>

To preserve confidentiality, the Committee also omitted the requests for dates of referrals in the DHS form at Questions (I)(A) and (II)(A). The general timing of the alleged abuse will be evident, but specifically indicating the date of any referral might pinpoint the referral source, which is to remain confidential.

Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.25 (Suspension of Acts of Assembly) was proposed to be amended to suspend 23 Pa.C.S. § 6339, insofar as it is inconsistent with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 and 1915.3-4. This amendment was intended to permit the court to share the completed forms provided by the county agency without risk of criminal prosecution.

Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.4-4(f) (Pre-Trial Procedures) was proposed to be amended to require that the court address the parties' criminal record or abuse history; the admissibility of any county agency documents and information; and other related evidentiary issues at the pre-trial conference. This requirement appears in subdivision (f)(6).

A portion of the Note in current Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.7 (Consent Order) referencing Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10(b) regarding written custody order requirements, was proposed to be eliminated. The Committee believed that Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10(b) related only to a court's decision in custody, not to an agreement by the parties. Therefore, it was irrelevant to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.7.

Regarding Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10, subdivision (c) would be amended to require the court's custody order to include a notice outlining the parties' ongoing obligation to update the verification form post-final order. This amendment was intended to inform the other party of any changes that may have a significant impact on the child and the child's best interest. By requiring a party to update the verification form when his or her circumstances, or those of a household member, warrant it, the other party can obtain information and assess whether a modification of the order is necessary. This requirement was fashioned after the current relocation notice requirement. Subdivision (c) would be subdivided so that both requirements, relocation and updating verification forms, are in separate subdivisions.

Commentary was added to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10 to state that the filing of an updated verification form does not impose a duty on the court to review, respond, or react

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee observes there is no statute governing the admissibility of caseworker statements and opinions in custody proceedings. Cf. 23 Pa.C.S. § 6381 (admissibility of certain evidence in child abuse proceedings).

unless a party petitions the court for relief. While such a statement may seem harsh, it is intended to inform the parties that they must act to bring the matter to the court's attention through the adversarial process. The courts do not have the resources to actively monitor the filing of updated forms and to order the parties to appear.

Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.15(c) would set forth the form of the order of court that must be attached to the front of the complaint or petition for modification that is served on the defendant or respondent. The proposed change in this rule reflected the same timing as Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2(a)(3).

### **Publication and Comments**

The proposal was published for comment. See 53 Pa.B. 2560 (May 13, 2023). Six comments were received.

#### **Rule 1915.3-2. Criminal Record or Abuse History.**

The Committee received several comments regarding the timing for the completion, service, and filing of the verification forms. Revisions were made to subdivisions (a)(3) and (a)(4) to clarify the service and filing requirements for the defendant/respondent's verification and updated verifications. Subdivision (a)(4)(ii) was revised to specify that parties must file with the court an updated verification within 14 days of any change in circumstances, or within 5 days of any court proceeding, depending on whichever date occurs first. Prompt reporting of any change in circumstances was believed to be consistent with the intent of Kayden's Law, which is to maximize the protection of children from abusive relationships.

A commenter expressed concern that Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2(a)(4) does not explicitly state that there is an ongoing requirement to update the criminal record verification when there is no pending litigation. The Committee observed that subdivision (a)(4) would require an updated verification form either five days after any change in circumstances or no less than one day before any proceeding, whichever occurs first. Implicit in this requirement is that, if there is no pending proceeding, the five-day deadline applies. To clarify, the Committee revised subdivision (a)(4)(i) to add: "If there is no pending proceeding, the party shall complete, sign, and serve on the other parties an updated Criminal Record/Abuse History Verification form five days after any change in circumstances."

Relatedly, a commenter recommended that the updated verification requirement extend past the final order, "provided the child remains under the court's jurisdiction." To clarify, the Committee revised subdivision (a)(4)(i) to require updating "for as long as a child is subject to the court's jurisdiction."

Several commenters suggested that the nature of the sanctions to be imposed pursuant to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2(a)(5) should be clarified. Further, it should be clarified if

sanctions apply to “willful” disregard for the rule, as opposed to just negligence. Finally, it should be clarified whether the “willful failure” to file the form should be a part of the custody decision or if it should be a financial sanction.

The Committee intended for subdivision (a)(5) to provide the court with flexibility in determining whether to impose a sanction. There may be good cause for not filing a verification form or not timely filing a verification form. This flexibility also provides leeway for the untimely filing of a verification form. As for the type of sanction, the Committee did not wish to delineate sanctions, leaving that matter for judicial discretion based on individual circumstances. Additionally, an incomplete or inaccurate form could also be used for impeachment purposes, which may be a sufficient “sanction,” *e.g., falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*.

A commenter believed the box on the criminal record/abuse history form in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2(c) regarding an adjudication of dependency should be separate from that regarding delinquency because the delinquency inquiry is conditioned on the record being publicly available. Dependency records are not publicly available, so the public availability condition is inapplicable.

The Committee agreed that information concerning a delinquency adjudication, publicly available pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 6307, should not be solicited under the topic of “Abuse or Agency Involvement” on the form in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2. Additionally, soliciting such information under that topic is duplicative of what is solicited under the “Criminal Offenses” topic. Accordingly, the Committee removed publicly available delinquency adjudications from the “Abuse and Agency Involvement” topic. What remains of that inquiry is “An adjudication of dependency under Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Act, or a similar law in another jurisdiction.” The inquiry further prompts for the jurisdiction of the dependency case and whether the case remains active. The Committee observed this inquiry may overlap, to some degree, with a preceding inquiry concerning “involvement with a children and youth social service agency.” However, not all encounters with a county agency result in a dependency petition being filed so the inquiries are not redundant.

A commenter sought to limit the “involvement with a county agency” question on the form to only adults. Thus, the question would cover a person who was a caregiver but not when the person was a child. The Committee did not make a responsive revision because it believed the judge should have this information and then determine whether that information is relevant.

Another commenter suggested adding a checkbox to the form to affirmatively indicate whether each enumerated offense and agency involvement is “not applicable.” This approach struck the Committee as “belt and suspenders” because the form already instructs that the box should be checked for any applicable crime or offense. There appeared to be marginal informational benefit to adding the box.

A commenter also sought clarification whether only PFA litigants seeking custody must complete the form. Ostensibly, the current rule could be read as requiring all PFA litigants to complete the form, regardless of whether there is a custody matter. The Committee agreed to clarify Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2 so that only PFA litigants seeking custody are required to complete the verification form because the requirement is custody related. Accordingly, the third paragraph of the Comment to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2 was revised to instruct that the form is required for a PFA where custody is sought, and it is not required if custody is not sought.

Another commenter thought that a household member might refuse to provide information necessary for a party to complete the form. In that circumstance, the party may be precluded from filing a custody action. The Committee believed that, if a party's household member refuses to provide that information, the party can explain to the court why they should not be sanctioned for filing an incomplete verification form, but this refusal should not preclude the filing of a custody action.

### **Rule 1915.3-3. Report of Child Abuse and Protective Services.**

A commenter suggested that Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3(c) should clarify that the court transmits the form to the county agency and that the transmission should be immediate. Further, the deadline for the local agency to respond in subdivision (d) should be seven days prior to the scheduled hearing rather than five days after transmission to the county agency or the time specified by the court. Additionally, subdivision (g) should be revised to permit the county agency to testify via advanced communication technology (ACT), e.g., Zoom.

The Committee observed that subdivision (3)(c), proposed, stated: "the court shall ... transmit the form for completion to the county agency." The Committee did not believe the rule needed further clarification. In response to the requested extended deadline, the Committee changed it to 14 days and noted the proposed rule permits the court to specify when the completed form should be returned. Regarding the use of ACT, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1930.4 already permits the use of ACT with approval of the court for good cause shown.

Another commenter recommended that Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3(e) (dissemination) include language about the potential consequence to a party who has disseminated confidential information in violation of the rule. The Committee did not adopt this recommendation because the CPSL already provides the sanction for an unauthorized release of information. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 6349(b) (misdemeanor of the second degree); *cf. Schrader v. District Attorney of York County*, 74 F.4<sup>th</sup> 120, 126 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 2023) (opining the statute may violate the First Amendment as applied if information was lawfully obtained). The rule does not criminalize further dissemination; the statute does. The present reference in subdivision (f) (confidentiality) to 23 Pa.C.S. Chapter 63 was deemed sufficient.



#### **Rule 1915.3-4. Form for Report of Child Abuse and Protective Services.**

Concerning the form for the report of child abuse and protective services, a commenter suggested adding a box indicating that the child is currently adjudicated dependent and including a prompt for the date of the order and the docket number, together with a statement that the court may take judicial notice of its records. Additionally, the commenter suggested eliminating the following from Question 2 because it is repetitive:

Has a party or member of the party's household been identified as the perpetrator in a founded report of child abuse?

Yes          No.          If yes, indicate date(s) of incident(s) and name(s):

The Committee agreed with adding a box indicating whether the child is currently an adjudicated dependent and, if "yes," including the adjudication date and docket number. This appears as Question 4 on the Form for Report of Child Abuse and Protective Services in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-4.

The Committee did not add a provision for judicial notice because that is governed by Pa.R.E. 201 (Judicial Notice of Adjudicative Facts). Additionally, given that dependency court records are not publicly available, it is uncertain whether those records are capable of judicial notice if a party to a custody action was not also a party to the dependency action. See Pa.R.E. 201(b)(1) (Kind of Facts that may be Judicially Noticed).

Regarding the form's request for information about only founded reports, the Committee agreed that it was unnecessary because another question requests information about indicated *or* founded reports. Ultimately, the Committee abandoned the compound question by removing "or founded" in favor of separate inquiries regarding indicated reports and founded reports on the form.

A commenter suggested eliminating the response that the concerns in a GPS referral were "invalid" in Question (3)(A). The commenter did not believe that invalid concerns were relevant and might promote the filing of false reports. The Committee believed that the relevancy determination should be made by a judge rather than the rule. Indeed, the reporting of invalid concerns may be relevant to a best interest determination if the reporter is also a party to the custody action.

A commenter recommended deleting the portion of the form identifying the county agency caseworker and supervisor. Instead, the county agency could name a "Family Court Liaison" who would respond to the court notwithstanding any staffing changes. A liaison could be the county administrator, deputy administrator, case manager, or whoever else the county agency may so name. Relatedly, another commenter believed that requiring the testimony of county agency workers would place a burden on county agencies.

The Committee was not inclined to make this change because Pa.R.E. 602 requires a witness to have personal knowledge of the matter for which they are testifying. The caseworker would be that person. The Committee did not wish to endorse a practice whereby anyone from the local agency could appear as a witness to simply read from someone else's report. Further, while it is speculative whether the new form will increase the frequency that caseworkers are called to testify, the Committee did not disagree that testifying is typically more burdensome than submitting a written statement. However, the caseworker may be required to testify pursuant to by the rules of evidence.

A commenter commended the proposed changes regarding the request for, and dissemination of, information from DHS and suggested adding a section allowing the agency to provide information about the circumstances of the abuse by sharing the category of abuse.

The Committee previously discussed the merits of using the completed form, which could be a conduit for hearsay. As was discussed in the Publication Report, the Committee specifically did not wish to solicit hearsay vis-à-vis the report of child abuse and protective services form. The circumstances are to be provided by the caseworker through sworn testimony subject to cross-examination.

A commenter asserted that dissemination of the report to all parties would conflict with the confidentiality requirement of 23 Pa.C.S. § 6340. The commenter recommended that the statement in subdivision (g) concerning confidentiality be placed on the form so that all parties are aware of the confidentiality of the information.

The Committee deliberated as to whether the report should be shared with the parties and the Committee reconfirmed that it should be shared if the information was received by the trier-of-fact *ex parte*. The suggestion that the report form contain a statement about the confidentiality of the form was accepted by the Committee and the form was revised to state:

### **NOTICE**

The completed form shall be confidential and not publicly accessible.  
Further dissemination by the recipients of the form is in violation of 23 Pa.C.S. Ch. 63 (Child Protective Services Law).

A commenter also believed the form should provide for the confidentiality of an address when a party may be in hiding prior to seeking a PFA. The Committee confirmed that both the child abuse and protective services reporting form and the criminal record/abuse history form provide a check box for a confidential address.

Finally, a commenter contended that the required disclosure of services and referrals to outside providers for household members without the informed consent of non-parties

may lead to distrust among participants, the community, and county agencies. The Committee observed that the form requires disclosure of this information because 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329.1 requires the court to consider that information.

#### **Rule 1915.4-4. Pre-Trial Procedures.**

A commenter believed Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.4-4(c) should clarify that only exhibits to be used in a party's "case in chief" are expected to be produced because there may be other permissible rebuttal exhibits that could not be anticipated at that time. The Committee did not disagree but considered it outside the scope of the proposal. Whether rebuttal exhibits are included in a pretrial statement is more a matter of practice than procedure. See, e.g., Pa.R.Civ.P. 212.2(a)(4), note ("This rule does not contemplate that the pre-trial statement include a list of exhibits for use in rebuttal or for impeachment. These matters are governed by case law.").

#### **Rule 1915.10. Decision. Order.**

Regarding Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10, a commenter expressed concern that details, including "highly sensitive information," contained in an order may also put the child or parent's safety and well-being at risk. The Committee responded that the rule requires the court to state the reasons for its decision on the record or in a written opinion or order. Additionally, those reasons may also include whether the child is at risk of harm so that safety provisions are included in the order. Finally, the parties have a right to know the basis for the court decision. An alternative does not exist.

#### **Rule 1915.15. Form of Complaint. Caption. Order. Petition to Modify a Custody Order.**

A commenter suggested that the order in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.15(c) provide better contact information for bar association, legal aid, and ADA Act offices. The Committee believed this suggestion was outside the scope of the proposal.

#### **Rule 1915.25. Suspension of Acts of Assembly.**

A commenter disagreed with the proposed wording of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.25 suspending 23 Pa.C.S. § 6339, insofar as it is inconsistent with the rules. Instead, the commenter suggested: "The provision of 23 Pa.C.S. § 6339 is protected, insofar as it is not inconsistent with this rule." This suggested wording was intended to "preserve confidentiality."

The Committee observed that the proposed language is consistent with that used in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.25. Additionally, it is consistent with the language used in Pa.R.J.C.P. 1800(9), which also suspends 23 Pa.C.S. § 6339 insofar as it is inconsistent

with Pa.R.J.C.P. 1340(B)(1)(e). Accordingly, the Committee made no responsive revisions.

### **Post-Publication Revisions**

#### **Rule 1915.7. Consent Order.**

The Committee observed that the 2019 amendment of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.7 (Consent Order) added the reference to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10(b), regarding written order requirements, in the Comment. The intent of that amendment was for consent orders to be in writing. After further review, the Committee decided to retain that reference. Given that the removal of the reference was the only substantive proposed amendment of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.7, that rule was removed from the proposal.

#### **“Kayden’s Law”**

The Act of April 15, 2024, P.L. 24, No. 8, colloquially known as “Kayden’s Law,” was intended to strengthen the custody factors as they relate to abuse and to provide for additional safety conditions and restrictions to protect children and abused parties.

The Act amended the definition of “abuse” to include 18 Pa.C.S. § 2709.1 (stalking) and added exceptions for the justified use of force. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5322(a). Stalking is already one of the enumerated offenses on the criminal record/abuse history form. Additionally, the form references “abuse,” as defined by 23 Pa.C.S. § 6102. Therefore, the verification form presently collected sufficient information to meet the amended definition of “abuse.” Whether an exception for justified use of force is available should be a matter for the court to decide, not the party completing the form.

Kayden’s Law also contained several additional definitions, including “household member,” “nonprofessional supervised physical custody,” “professional supervised physical custody,” “safety of the child,” and “temporary housing instability.” See *id.* Regarding “household member,” it is defined as:

A spouse or an individual who has been a spouse, an individual living as a spouse or who lived as a spouse, a parent or child, another individual related by consanguinity or affinity, a current or former sexual or intimate partner, an individual who shares biological parenthood or any other person, who is currently sharing a household with the child or a party.

23 Pa.C.S. § 5322(a). Owing to the placement of the last comma before the overarching conditional clause of “who is currently sharing a household with the child or a party,” the antecedent description of definite classes, together with the indefinite class of “any other person,” seem to include anyone meeting the conditional clause. Stated differently, it

appears that a “household member” is anyone sharing a household with the child or a party. Rather than attempting to restate the definition in layperson terms or to repeat an arguably confusing definition, the Committee proposed adding a reference to the definition of “household member” and 23 Pa.C.S. § 5322(a) in the Comment to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2.

Regarding the other definitions, the Committee observed that Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.2(b) defines the various forms of legal and physical custody. “Supervised physical custody” is defined as “custodial time during which an agency or an adult designated by the court or agreed upon by the parties monitors the interaction between the child and the individual with those rights.” See *also* 23 Pa.C.S. § 5322(b). The Committee believed that the definition of “supervised physical custody” is sufficiently broad to encompass both professional and nonprofessional supervised physical custody without the need to specifically define those forms of supervised physical custody via rule. Indeed, those phrases seem self-defining. Further, the definitions in Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.2 track the types of custody that may be awarded, which do not include whether the supervision is professional or nonprofessional. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5323(a) (Award of Custody).

The other definitions added by Kayden’s Law are substantive rather than procedural. Accordingly, the Committee did not recommend their codification within the procedural rules governing child custody proceedings.

Kayden’s Law next enhanced the statutory requirements for safety conditions<sup>2</sup> when there is a history of abuse of the child or a household member by a party *or* a risk of harm to the child or an abused party. See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5323(e) (emphasis added). Notably, the requirement of safety conditions was expanded to include a history of abuse, including abuse of a household member by a party. If a safety condition is required, the court must include in the custody order the reason for imposing the safety condition, why it is in the best interest of the child or a party, and the reason why unsupervised physical custody is in the child’s best interest if there is a history of abuse committed by a party. See *id.* § 5323(e)(1)(ii)-(e)(1)(iii).

Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10(b)(2) requires the court to include safety provisions for the protection of an endangered party or the child if the court finds either of them to be at risk of harm. The commentary provides a non-exhaustive list of safety provisions. The Committee proposed further revising subdivision (b)(2) to state the statutory precondition in § 5323(e)(1) and to set forth the required findings in subdivision (b)(2)(i)-(b)(2)(iii).

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<sup>2</sup> The Act has added “restrictions or safeguards” to “safety conditions.” See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5323(e)(1)(i).

Further, the Committee proposed revising commentary to reference pertinent statutory authority. The existing phrase, “safety provisions,” was believed to be sufficient to cover “safety conditions, restrictions or safeguards as reasonably necessary.” See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5323(e)(1)(i). The phrase “reasonably necessary” was omitted because it is implicit that a court would only impose both reasonable and necessary safety provisions. The non-exhaustive list of examples of safety provisions would be revised to add “professional” to “supervised physical custody” consistent with the Act.

Within the same statute, “if supervised contact is ordered,” § 5323(e)(2) permits a party to petition for judicial review of the “risk of harm” and continued need for supervision.<sup>3</sup> See *id.* § 5323(e)(2). Presumably, this is “supervised contact” permitted pursuant to § 5323(e)(1) when safety conditions are imposed; however, the statute lacks prefatory language in § 5323(e) or internal references. “Contact” is undefined and ambiguous as to physical contact or verbal, written, or remote communications. The Committee construed “supervised contact” to be synonymous with “supervised physical custody.”

It was not apparent whether the petition practice permitted by § 5323(e)(2) was intended to permit a party for whom custody must be supervised to challenge the continued necessity of supervised physical custody. Alternatively, the provision could be intended to permit the other party to challenge the degree to which physical custody is supervised. Nonetheless, § 5323(e)(2) set forth several safety conditions available, including professional and nonprofessional supervised physical custody, as well as the qualification of a professional supervisor.

Aside from reference to § 5323(e)(2) in the Comment to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10, no further responsive rulemaking was recommended for several reasons. First, the reach of § 5323(e)(2) was ambiguous. The courts should resolve this ambiguity rather than the rules. Second, and perhaps more importantly, rulemaking was unnecessary because the statutorily sanctioned petition practice was unnecessary. Pennsylvania has rejected the need to demonstrate a change in circumstances to seek modification of custody. See, e.g., *Karis v. Karis*, 544 A.2d 1328, 1332 (Pa. 1988) (“[A] petition for modification of a partial custody to shared custody order requires the court to inquire into the best interest of the child regardless of whether a ‘substantial’ change in circumstances has been shown.”). The statute explicitly permits a petition to seek review of the conditions of physical custody, but parties have been able to do so without such statutory permission.

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<sup>3</sup> Per the language of the statute, the judicial review is limited to the risk of harm and, consequently, not the history of abuse. Further, the statute does not address whether the risk of harm is toward the child or an abused party.

Kayden's Law also added § 5323(e.1), which created a rebuttable presumption for supervised physical custody if there is a finding of "an ongoing risk of abuse of the child." See 23 Pa.C.S. § 5323(e.1). This provision introduced a new condition of "risk of abuse," as opposed to "risk of harm," and limited the condition to the child. Given that § 5323(e.1) is an entirely separate subsection of § 5323, this presumption may arise when the court is awarding custody pursuant to § 5323(e)(1) and upon a party's petition pursuant to § 5323(e)(2).<sup>4</sup> If the court awards supervised physical custody because of the presumption, then § 5223(e.1) instructs the court to "favor" the condition of professional supervised custody unless it is unavailable or unaffordable.

Aside from reference to § 5323(e.1) in the Comment to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.10, no responsive rulemaking was recommended because rebuttable presumptions are substantive – the rules implement the law but do not restate the law. Further, the custody rules generally do not instruct the judges on how to apply the law. Finally, "favor" seemed to be an amorphous term intended to influence judicial discretion by an unquantifiable measure.

Kayden's Law also amended the custody factors in 23 Pa.C.S. § 5328 consistent with the Act. The current rules do not enumerate the factors so no responsive amendments were believed necessary.

The Act added seven offenses (18 Pa.C.S. §§ 2701, 2705, 2904, 5533, 5534, 5543, and 5544) to the list of offenses to be considered pursuant to 23 Pa.C.S. § 5329. Readers should note that, during this rulemaking, the Court amended Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2(c) to update the offenses to the criminal record/abuse history verification form. See Order No. 755 Civil Procedural Rules Docket (August 9, 2024); 54 Pa.B. 5353 (August 24, 2024). That amendment has been incorporated into Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-2.

Kayden's Law amended 23 Pa.C.S. § 5334(c) to make the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* for a child discretionary when there are substantial allegations of abuse. This amendment also broadens the condition of the statute's application from "child abuse" to "abuse." The two further conditions of the statute for the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* were changed from disjunctive to conjunctive. Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.11-2(a) permits the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* "when necessary for determining the child's best interest." That rule has no specific provision for the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* for alleged child abuse, and subdivision (a) is therefore sufficient to address the revised circumstances.

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<sup>4</sup> Within § 5323(e.1), there is a sentence addressing the use of an indicated report as a basis for a finding of abuse. However, the court may only make such a finding after a *de novo* "review" of the circumstances leading to the report. This provision supported the Committee's proposal that information about county agency involvement must be shared with the parties in a custody proceeding.

The Committee intends to continue to monitor the application of Kayden's Law for further rulemaking. See *a/so* 54 Pa.B. 6244 (October 5, 2024) (proposing a rule and forms for the use of non-professional custody supervisors).

As a matter of restyling, the following commentary was removed from Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.25: "*Note:* Rule 1915.6(b) provides that a person not a party who claims to have custody or visitation rights with respect to the child shall be given notice of the pendency of the proceedings and of the right to intervene."

These amendments and Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-3 and Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.3-4 become effective on July 1, 2025.