recommendation, you have 21 days to request a review hearing before a judge. The referee or FOC office will provide you with information on how to do that. If you disagree with a judge's decision, you may appeal to a higher court or file a motion to have the matter reconsidered by the same judge

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Here are some terms and definitions you should know that may come up during your case:

Complaint A written claim filed with the court to start a case.

Consent When both parties agree that the court may grant a motion without conducting a hearing.

Defendant The person the original case is filed against.

Enter How an order becomes effective. The process includes getting the judge to sign the order and filing the signed order with the county clerk.

Evidence Information presented to the court to show why the court should agree with a party's position. Evidence includes written documents, pictures, or live testimony by people who have first-hand knowledge of important facts.

First-Class The "regular U.S. mail" by which most people send letters. You may use first-class mail to deliver motions and orders to the other party in your case.

Hearing A court session conducted by a judge or referee when both parties explain why a motion should be granted or denied.

Motion A request that the court take some specific action in a pending case. A motion may be filed by the plaintiff or the defendant.

Order A decision signed by a judge and requiring certain action.

Party The case's plaintiff or defendant (usually the two parents). The term may also include someone other than a parent (a "third party") if the court grants that person's request to participate in a case.

Plaintiff The person who started the original case.

Referee A court officer with authority to hear motions and recommend orders.

Service How one party delivers legal papers to the other party. (See "First-Class Mail.")

Legal Resources for Self- Represented Litigants

State Bar of Michigan Lawyer Referral Service:
1-800-968-0738, or
http://www.michbar.org/programs/lawyerreferral

Michigan Legal Help website:
http://michiganlegalhelp.org

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WHAT IT MEANS TO REPRESENT YOURSELF IN A CHILD CUSTODY, PARENTING TIME, OR CHILD SUPPORT MATTER



State Court Administrative Office
Friend of the Court Bureau
Michigan Supreme Court
http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/OfficesPrograms/FOC

Many people do not know the laws and procedures that govern court proceedings. It is usually recommended that the parties hire attorneys to represent them. But sometimes people decide to represent themselves in child custody, parenting time, and child support matters.

Michigan law requires the friend of the court (FOC) offices to distribute "do-it-yourself" forms to people who are interested in representing themselves in a child support, parenting time, or custody matter. These forms are often called "pro se" or "in pro per" packets.

This brochure answers some common questions about self-representation in child custody, parenting time, or child support matters after a court orders custody, parenting time, or support. Please look into other sources to find information about how to start a new case by filing a complaint, and how to answer someone else's complaint.

Information about child custody, child support, parenting time, paternity, and other domestic relations issues is available at the website for Michigan Legal Help:

http://ww.michiganlegalhelp.org. Michigan Legal Help was created to help people who have simple civil legal problems without a lawyer. The website does not provide legal advice and is not a substitute for a lawyer, but it does contain links to legal resources in your area.

Where do I get "do-it-yourself" motion forms?

You can find forms for domestic relations cases that involve children at the FOC office responsible for your case. The FOC office can also give you instructions to help you ask the court to change a child support, parenting time, or custody order. You also can obtain these forms online at https://courts.michigan.gov/administration/scao/forms/pages/search-for-a-form.aspx.

Once I have the "do-it-yourself" motion forms packet, may I ask the FOC or the court clerk for help or advice?

Court staff cannot give legal advice, nor can court staff tell you how to fill out your forms. The FOC staff can give you information about your current order and tell you who to contact to set up a court hearing. The court clerk will give you basic information about how to schedule a hearing and where the hearing will be held.

Do courts charge a fee for filing a motion?

Yes. For most domestic relations matters, the court clerk will charge a $20 motion fee. The clerk then charges an additional $40 for actions that only involve child support or $80 for actions about custody or parenting time for minor children, or actions for both custody or parenting time and support. If you cannot pay this fee, you may ask the clerk for "Form MC20," which allows you to ask the court to waive or reduce the fees. This form also is available online at:
https://courts.michigan.gov/Administration/SCAO/Forms/courtforms/mc20.pdf

Once I file my motion, who serves the required documents on the other party?

If you use the "do-it-yourself" forms, you must send the other party a copy of the form containing the motion and hearing date. There are many ways to deliver the documents to the other party, and the cheapest way is by U.S. Mail. You cannot email or fax the form to the other party.

Who represents me at the motion hearing? Can the referee or judge help me?

You may hire an attorney or you may represent yourself. If you decide to represent yourself, you must come prepared to explain what you are asking the court to change and the reasons why the court should decide in your favor. This may also require that you understand court rules and procedures. You may need to present evidence to the court to prove your case. Neither a referee nor a judge may help you present your case. Information about going to court is available at: http://michiganlegalhelp.org/self-help-tools/miscellaneous/going-court-extra-tips-and-forms-toolkit.

What if the other party has an attorney? Can I get someone to help me?

The fact that the other party has an attorney does not mean you will be given one. The court might reschedule the hearing to a later date if you say that you have changed your mind and would like to hire an attorney because the other party has one. However, the court is not required to delay the hearing for that reason.

After the referee or judge has ruled on a motion, who prepares the written order that makes that ruling an official order of the court?

If you use the "do-it-yourself" forms and appear before a judge, **you** are responsible and must prepare the order for the judge to sign unless the judge orders otherwise. It is recommended and helpful to take notes during the hearing and ask questions if you do not understand something. After the judge signs the order, you must send a copy of the order to the other party. If a referee (in place of a judge) hears the case, the referee might offer to prepare the order for the judge to sign, but referees are not required to do that.

What if I do not agree with the referee's or judge's decision?

A referee makes a recommendation; only a judge can sign a court order. If you disagree with the referee's