

BLANK PETITION

(Packet #37)

CAUTION:

**USE THIS PACKET ONLY IF THERE IS NO OTHER PACKET
THAT APPLIES TO YOUR SITUATION.**

**YOU SHOULD SEEK THE ADVICE OF AN ATTORNEY
BEFORE FILING YOUR CASE.**

**THE JUDGE IS NOT REQUIRED TO GRANT WHAT YOU
ARE REQUESTING.**

If you choose to represent yourself (*pro se*) in your case, you should be aware that you will be required to follow the same rules that are required in cases filed by persons represented by attorneys. The judge assigned to your case is not necessarily required to grant what you request in a form. If you do not like the outcome of your case, you may not be able to change it. If you have any questions or concerns about your case, you should consult with an attorney.

If you do not know an attorney, you may call the Lawyer Referral Service at 221-7780. If you do not have the money to hire an attorney, you may apply to Bay Area Legal Services by calling 232-1343. You may also obtain legal information at the Legal Information Center at the George Edgecomb Courthouse (call 864-2280 for hours and information).

All instructions and forms distributed by the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit are provided merely as a public service to persons seeking to represent themselves in court without the assistance of an attorney. These documents are meant to serve as a guide only, and to assist *pro se* (self-represented) litigants with their cases. The Thirteenth Judicial Circuit does not guarantee that either the instructions or the forms will achieve the result desired by the parties or ensure that any individual judge will follow the procedures exactly or accept each and every form as drafted. Any person using these instructions and/or forms does so at his or her own risk, and the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit shall not be responsible for any losses incurred by any person in reliance on the instructions and/or forms.

In no event will the Florida Supreme Court, The Florida Bar, or anyone contributing to the production of these forms, commentary, instructions, and appendices be liable for any direct, indirect, or consequential damages from their use.

| <u>FORMS CONTAINED IN THIS PACKET</u> | <u>FORM #</u> | <u>WHEN TO USE</u> |
|--|----------------------|---|
| <u>General Information for Self-Represented Litigants</u> | Appendix C | For your information only |
| <u>12 Rules of Courtroom Civility</u> | 12 Rules | Required to start case |
| <u>Nonlawyer Disclosure</u> | 12.900(a) | Required if someone who is not a lawyer helps you with the forms |
| <u>Civil Cover Sheet</u> | 12.928 | Required to start case |
| <u>Blank Family Law Petition</u> | Blank | Required to start case |
| <u>Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act Affidavit (UCCJEA)</u> | 12.902(d) | Required to start case |
| <u>Summons: Personal Service on an Individual</u> | 12.910(a) | Required to start case |
| <u>Process Service Memorandum</u> | 12.910(b) | Required to start case |
| <u>Notice of Related Cases</u> | 12.900(h) | Required |
| <u>Nonmilitary Affidavit</u> | 12.912(b) | Use only if the other party is NOT in the military and they do not file an answer |
| <u>Motion for Default</u> | 12.922(a) | Use if no answer is filed within 20 days after service |
| <u>Default</u> | 12.922(b) | Use if no answer is filed within 20 days after service |
| <u>Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate</u> | 12.920(a) | Required for post-judgment cases |
| <u>General Magistrate / Hearing Officer Division Referral Assignment Table</u> | Table | To determine the General Magistrate / Hearing Officer assigned to your case |
| <u>Notice of Hearing</u> | 12.923 | Use when a hearing date has been set |
| <u>Fee Schedule for Family Law Cases</u> | Fee | A schedule of fees for Family Law related cases |
| <u>Notice of Confidential Information Within Court Filing</u> | 2.40(d)(2) | Use to notify the clerk of documents containing confidential information |

STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS

STEP ONE - Complete the forms to start the case and have them notarized

- 1) **FORMS MUST BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED IN BLACK INK AND MOST MUST BE NOTARIZED.** The clerk's office will notarize documents and charge a fee (see attached schedule). Please bring a valid ID.
- 2) **Names must be written the same way on all documents (no full names on one document and initials on another).**
- 3) **Complete the following forms and notarize the ones with a notary signature line:**
 - A) Civil cover sheet - (only use if you are starting a new case – with a new case number)
 - B) 12 Rules of Courtroom Civility - (does not need to be notarized)
 - C) Blank Family Law Petition
 - D) Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) Affidavit, Form 12.902(d) (only if the petition involves children)
 - E) Summons, Form 12.910(a) - (needs to be signed by the clerk, not by you)
 - F) Process Service Memorandum, Form 12.910(b) - (does not need to be notarized)
 - G) Notice of Related Cases, Form 12.900(h)
 - H) Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate, Form 12.920(a) (only use if you are using an existing case number)

STEP TWO – Make copies

After you have completed the forms and have signed and notarized them, make 2 complete copies of everything you have signed (one copy is for your records). If you are filing a Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate, make 1 extra copy of that and 1 extra copy of the Petition. Copies can be obtained for a fee in the Court Business Center, on the 6th floor of the George Edgecomb Courthouse. You may also purchase copies for \$0.15 per page, before filing your case, from the Family Law Intake staff in room 101.

STEP THREE - Filing your case

1. Take the *original* set of completed and signed forms to the clerk on the 1st floor of the main courthouse and pay the filing fee. If you are starting a new case, the clerk will assign a case number and division.
2. Summons: The clerk will sign the Summons and give it back to you. There is a charge for this.

STEP FOUR – Notifying the other party

SUMMONS – Attach the Summons and the Process Service Memorandum to one complete copy of your documents and take them to the sheriff or process server in the county where the other party is going to be served (where he/she lives or works). The other party will have 20 days after the date the sheriff or process server delivers the papers to file a written response (answer). **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY:** Hillsborough County Sheriff's Civil Process is located at 700 Twiggs Street on the 3rd floor (across the street from the main courthouse). A non-refundable fee is required (only cash, cashier's checks or money orders -- no personal checks). This fee will be waived if you have filed an Application for Civil Indigency and the clerk has marked that you are indigent.

STEP FIVE – Process the Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate, if used

1. If you are filing a “Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate,” mail the following to the Judge assigned to your case:
 - a. 1 copy of the Petition,
 - b. 1 copy of the Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate,
 - c. 2 stamped envelopes, one addressed to each party (envelopes can be purchased in the Court Business Center on the 6th floor of the Edgecomb courthouse)
2. If your case is assigned to a judge in Tampa, mail your documents and envelopes to:
Judge of Division _____, George Edgecomb Courthouse, 800 E. Twiggs Street, 4th Floor, Tampa, Florida 33602.
3. If your case is assigned to a judge in Plant City (Division R, S or T), mail your documents and envelopes to:
Judge of Division _____, Plant City Courthouse, 301 N. Michigan Avenue, Plant City, Florida 33563.
4. The Division of your case can be found next to your case number.
5. If the Motion for Referral to the General Magistrate is not accompanied by 2 stamped addressed envelopes, your Referral will not be processed and your case will be delayed.

STEP SIX – Obtain proof of service

SUMMONS – When the other party is served, the sheriff or process server should send you a form indicating the date and time he/she was served. File this with the clerk.

STEP SEVEN – Check for answer / default

1. Call the Clerk of the Circuit Court (276-8100) 21 days after the other party was served to see if the other party filed an answer.
2. If no answer was filed and the other party is not in the military, complete the following forms: Nonmilitary Affidavit - Form 12.912(b), Motion for Default - Form 12.922(a), and a Default - Form 12.922(b). Take the Nonmilitary Affidavit, Motion for Default, Default, and your proof of service to the clerk.
3. If no answer was filed and the other party is in the military STOP HERE and consult an attorney.
4. If an answer was filed, obtain a copy in Room 101 of the courthouse (if the other party did not send you a copy).
5. If the other party filed a counterpetition, you have 20 days to file a written answer to the counterpetition. You can use Form 12.903(d) – Answer to Counterpetition. File the original with the clerk, send a copy to the other party, and keep a copy for your records.

STEP EIGHT – Mediation (only if the other party files an answer denying any allegations or files a counterpetition)

If the other party filed an answer and disputes any of the allegations in your petition, you and the other party will need to go to mediation to see if the disputed issue(s) can be resolved. Call the Mediation and Diversion office at 813-272-5642 and ask them to schedule a mediation date. If the other party does not contact the mediation department or the issue(s) cannot be resolved in mediation, the final hearing will be set.

STEP NINE – Preparing your case / gathering evidence (if you and the other party do not agree and your case is contested)

If the other party is contesting issues in your case, you will need to be prepared to present evidence to the judge or general magistrate which supports your position(s). Gathering evidence is called “discovery.” Discovery is governed by Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure 12.280 – 12.410 and Florida Rules of Civil Procedure 1.280 – 1.410.

Some discovery methods are:

1. Interrogatories – written questions you send to the other party. See Forms 12.930(a), Notice of Service of Standard Family Law Interrogatories, and 12.930(b), Standard Family Law Interrogatories for Original Proceedings, and their instructions.
2. Notice of Production from Non-Party/Subpoena – a request to someone who is not a party in the case (not the other party) to provide copies of documents to you or to produce documents to be copied by you. See Forms 12.931(a), Notice of Production from Non-Party, and 12.931(b), Subpoena for Production of Documents, and their instructions.
3. Depositions – taking someone’s testimony (a party or non-party) under oath before a court reporter.
4. Request for Production of Documents and Things – a written request that the other party provide specified documents or things for you to copy or examine. See Florida Rule of Civil Procedure 1.350.

Not all evidence can be considered by the judge or general magistrate. Evidence must conform to the Rules of Evidence in Chapter 90 of the Florida Statutes to be admissible in court. The duty of establishing the facts that you want to present to the court, or the burden of proof, is on YOU. You should provide the judge or general magistrate with admissible evidence to support the claims in your petition and your statements in court.

STEP TEN – Scheduling the final hearing

IF YOU HAVE STARTED A **NEW CASE** AND WERE GIVEN A NEW CASE NUMBER AND THE OTHER PARTY DOES NOT HAVE AN ATTORNEY

1. Contact the Case Management Unit (813-272-5173) to schedule the final hearing.
2. You will be contacted by mail regarding a court date.

IF YOU HAVE STARTED A **NEW CASE** AND THE OTHER PARTY IS REPRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY

1. Contact the judicial assistant (J.A.) for the judge to whom your case is assigned and ask the J.A. for 3 possible hearing dates and times.
2. Call the opposing attorney and ask which of those dates and times is best for him/her.
3. Call the J.A. and tell her which date and time you have chosen.
4. Complete a Notice of Hearing, Form 12.923 (not included), with the place, date, and time of the hearing.
5. Sign the Notice of Hearing and complete the Certificate of Service part of the notice which states the date you are filing the notice and how you are providing a copy to the opposing attorney.
6. Make 3 copies of the Notice of Hearing.
7. File the original Notice of Hearing with the clerk.
8. Give a copy of the Notice of Hearing to the J.A., send a copy of the notice to the other party’s attorney, and keep a copy of the notice for your records.

IF YOU HAVE USED **AN EXISTING CASE** NUMBER AND THE OTHER PARTY DOES NOT HAVE AN ATTORNEY

1. Once you have received 1) a close-out letter from mediation (showing that you attempted mediation) and, 2) your signed Order of Referral to the General Magistrate, call the administrative assistant for the general magistrate assigned to your case and request a hearing date. The general magistrate/hearing officer assigned is determined by **the last two digits of your case number (see attached table)**.

If assigned to GM-1, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Cuellar-Stilo** (Phone: 272-5351)

If assigned to GM-2, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Johnson** (Phone: 276-2335)

If assigned to GM-3, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Montagno** (Phone: 276-2337)

If assigned to GM-4, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Sarmiento** (Phone: 272-6435)

2. Once a hearing date has been scheduled, complete a Notice of Hearing, Form 12.923, with the place, date, and time of the hearing.
3. Sign the Notice of Hearing and complete the Certificate of Service part of the notice which states the date you are filing the notice and how you are providing a copy to the other party.

4. Make 2 copies of the Notice of Hearing.
5. File the original Notice of Hearing with the clerk, send a copy of the notice to the other party, and keep a copy for your records.

IF YOU HAVE USED AN EXISTING CASE NUMBER AND THE OTHER PARTY IS REPRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY

1. Once you have received 1) a close-out letter from mediation (showing that you attempted mediation) and, 2) your signed Order of Referral to the General Magistrate, call the administrative assistant for the general magistrate assigned to your case and request a hearing date. The general magistrate/hearing officer assigned is determined by **the last two digits of your case number (see attached table)**.

If assigned to GM-1, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Cuellar-Stilo** (Phone: 272-5351)

If assigned to GM-2, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Johnson** (Phone: 276-2335)

If assigned to GM-3, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Montagno** (Phone: 276-2337)

If assigned to GM-4, call General Magistrate/Hearing Officer **Sarmiento** (Phone: 272-6435)

2. Call the opposing attorney and ask which of those 3 dates and times is best for him/her.
3. Call the administrative assistant and tell her which date and time you have chosen.
4. Complete a Notice of Hearing, Form 12.923 (not included), with the place, date, and time of the hearing.
5. Sign the Notice of Hearing and complete the Certificate of Service part of the notice which states the date you are filing the notice and how you are providing a copy to the opposing attorney.
6. Make 3 copies of the Notice of Hearing.
7. File the original Notice of Hearing with the clerk.
8. Give a copy of the Notice of Hearing to the administrative assistant, send a copy of the notice to the other party's attorney, and keep a copy of the notice for your records.

COURT REPORTER?

If you want a court reporter for the hearing, you must arrange for this in advance and you must pay the court reporter's fee. If there is no record of the hearing and the judge rules against you, you may not be able to appeal the decision.

STEP ELEVEN – The final hearing

Normally the final hearing is when the petition (and counterpetition, if one was filed) will be considered and all issues will be decided. If you do not go to the final hearing your case may be dismissed.

HOW TO DRESS - Dress appropriately. No shorts, tank tops, or sandals. Do not chew gum.

WHAT TO BRING - All evidence you want the court to consider in deciding your case, if your case is contested

WHAT TO EXPECT

The hearing will take place in a hearing room or a courtroom. You will not be in front of a jury, just the general magistrate or judge. Do not interrupt the magistrate or judge when he or she speaks. When speaking to the magistrate or judge, address him or her as "Your Honor" or "Judge."

Each court has at least one bailiff who is a deputy sheriff and is there to maintain order. When you arrive for your hearing, let the bailiff know that you are present and ready. He or she will announce your case when it is time for your hearing, and will tell you where to sit and where to place your belongings as you enter the hearing room. A bailiff will usually remain inside the room during your hearing. If witnesses are called, the bailiff will step out to bring the witness into the hearing room.

At your hearing, be prepared to discuss any issues covered in the petition (and the counterpetition, if one was filed) and be able to provide proof of any disputed facts by presenting evidence. Evidence is proof presented at a hearing in the form of witnesses (people), exhibits (documents), and objects (things). Not all evidence can be considered by the general magistrate or judge, however. Evidence must conform to the Rules of Evidence in Chapter 90 of the Florida Statutes to be admissible in court. Remember, the duty of establishing the facts that you want to present to the court is on YOU. You should provide the judge with admissible evidence to support the claims in your petition and your statements in court. Telling your story may not be enough to win your case.

Once both sides have presented their evidence, the general magistrate or judge will make a decision and an order will be prepared. The order will contain all the details of the court's decision. You will receive a copy of the order in the mail. The original order will go to the clerk's office to be filed in your court file.

Family Forms and Packets - available for purchase at the Court Business Center

Form Packets with Instructions:

- 1) Complete packets with all forms and self-help instructions are priced individually and available at the Court Business Center (CBC), in Room 630 (6th Floor) of the George Edgecomb Courthouse, 800 E. Twiggs Street, Tampa, Florida.
- 2) Free online at:
 - a) www.fjud13.org/SelfHelp.aspx → Access Forms
 - b) www.hillsclerk.com/About-Us/Forms → Family Law

Individual Forms (may not include necessary instructions):

- 1) For \$.10 per page at the Court Business Center (CBC), in Room 630 (6th Floor) of the George Edgecomb Courthouse, 800 E. Twiggs Street, Tampa, Florida.
- 2) Free online at: www.flcourts.org → then click on "Family Law Forms"

YOU MAY FILE FORMS AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:

Tampa - George Edgecomb Courthouse – Main Location

Clerk of the Circuit Court, 800 E. Twiggs Street, Room 101, Tampa, FL 33602

Brandon – Brandon Regional Service Center

Clerk of the Circuit Court, 311 Pauls Drive, Suite 110, Brandon, FL 33511

Plant City – Plant City Courthouse

Clerk of the Circuit Court, 301 N. Michigan, Room 1071, Plant City, FL 33563

Ruskin/Sun City – SouthShore Regional Service Center

Clerk of the Circuit Court, 410 30th Street SE, Ruskin, FL 33570