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PROTHONOTARY/CLERK  
HUNTINGDON CO. PA

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF HUNTINGDON COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA

IN RE: Divorce Master Process : CP-31-MD-161-2023  
: AO-7-2023

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER**

AND NOW, this 30th day of June, 2023, the Court issues the following administrative order (this "Order") regarding the use of divorce masters and the process for hearings conducted thereby in the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

For the sake of clarity, this Order is not intended to act as a local rule of court. Rather, this Order is intended to provide guidance to attorneys and *pro se* parties regarding the appointment, use, and compensation of divorce masters in the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District for the resolution of issues ancillary to divorce, as provided by Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.51, with the specific exception of custody matters.<sup>1</sup> The appointment of, powers of, and process to be followed by divorce masters shall in all instances be governed by the applicable rules of civil procedure, including, without limitation, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.33, 1920.51, 1920.55-2, 1920.53, and 1920.54, and the individual orders issued by this Court appointing such divorce masters

*Process*

Upon receipt of a motion for the appointment of a divorce master or a petition for court action regarding equitable division that is **fully compliant** with the requirements of Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.33(a), the Court will review the motion or petition and determine whether the matter is one that is appropriate for review and determination by a divorce master. The Court may appoint a divorce master based upon the motion of a party or upon its own motion, pursuant to Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.51(a)(1)(ii). If a party files a motion for the appointment of a divorce master

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<sup>1</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District has not adopted a local rule regarding the use of alternative hearing procedures for matters involving partial physical custody or supervised physical custody, as required for the use of such procedures under Pa.R.Civ.P. 1915.4-1(a). All custody matters are therefore heard directly by the Huntingdon County Court of Common Pleas.

or a petition for court action regarding equitable division that is not compliant with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.33(a), such as where the motion or petition has been filed before the party has filed their inventory, the Court will hold the motion or petition in abeyance pending the party's compliance with the rule and certification thereof to the Court.

If the Court finds that the matter is one that is appropriate for review and determination by a divorce master, the Court will select a master and enter an order appointing them in accordance with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.51(a)(3). The selection will be made from the list of approved divorce masters set forth in Administrative Order AO-8-2023 (entered concurrently herewith), as may be amended from time to time, and which may be limited to a single attorney, at the Court's discretion. Such administrative order will also establish the fees for the divorce master's services. The order appointing the divorce master will be in the form attached hereto as Exhibit A, subject to such modifications as may be needed for each particular case.

BY THE COURT:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
George N. Zanic, President Judge

C: Angela J. Robinson, District Court Administrator  
Sarah Snare, Prothonotary/Clerk of Courts

EXHIBIT A

**Standard Form of Divorce Master Order**

*Please see attached.*

**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF HUNTINGDON COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA  
CIVIL DIVISION**

PLAINTIFF,	:	CP-31-CV-000-2023
	:	
	:	
	:	
VS.	:	
	:	
	:	
DEFENDANT,	:	
	:	
	:	
	:	

**ORDER APPOINTING DIVORCE MASTER**

AND NOW, this 30th day of June, 2023, Ethan V. Wilt, Esq., is appointed as Divorce Master for the following claims:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equitable Division of Marital Property | <input type="checkbox"/> Alimony            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counsel Fees                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Costs and Expenses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (Other)                                |   |

**MOVING PARTY**

Name: Click or tap here to enter text.  
 Attorney: Click or tap here to enter text.  
 *Pro se*

**Contact Information**  
(Attorney, or Party if *pro se*)

Address: Click or tap here to enter text.  
Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text.  
Email: Click or tap here to enter text.

**NON-MOVING PARTY**

Name: Click or tap here to enter text.  
 Attorney: Click or tap here to enter text.  
 *Pro se*

**Contact Information**  
(Attorney, or Party if *pro se*)

Address: Click or tap here to enter text.  
Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text.  
Email: Click or tap here to enter text.

1. All correspondence to the Divorce Master shall be sent, with copy to the other party, either: (a) by U.S. Mail to Ethan V. Wilt, Esq., Huntingdon

County Court of Common Pleas, 223 Penn St, Huntingdon, PA 16652; or (b) by email to ewilt@huntingdoncounty.net.

2. The Divorce Master's fees shall be governed by Administrative Order AO-8-2023, as in effect on the date hereof and appended to this Order. Such fees shall be comprised of the Base Rate plus time for work not included in the Base Rate billed at the Hourly Rate, as defined and set forth in AO-8-2023.
3. Within 14 days of the date hereof, the Moving Party shall pay to the Prothonotary an amount equal to the Base Rate as security for the payment of the Divorce Master's fees. No action shall be taken by the Divorce Master until such payment has been made.
4. Also within 14 days of the date hereof, the Divorce Master shall schedule a preliminary conference and shall provide notice of same to the attorneys (or the parties themselves if *pro se*) in accordance with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.51(b)-(e). The preliminary conference shall be held not less than 45 days nor more than 60 days from the date hereof, unless schedule conflicts require otherwise.
5. Not less than one week prior to the preliminary conference, each party shall file and serve on the other party a pre-trial statement compliant with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.33(b). The Moving Party may include claims in their pre-trial statement that were not included in their pleadings or the motion or petition for relief that resulted in the issuance of this order; likewise, the Non-Moving Party may include claims in their pre-trial statement that were not included in their pleadings. However, once the pre-trial statements have been filed, the Divorce Master may invoke Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.33(d), as appropriate.
6. Within 14 days of the preliminary conference, the Divorce Master shall schedule a hearing on the parties' claims. The order scheduling such hearing may include deadlines for the resolution of any outstanding discovery issues, as appropriate. The Divorce Master may bifurcate such hearing, or schedule it to occur in multiple parts, as appropriate.

7. The Divorce Master shall estimate the time required to complete the hearing(s) and the time required for the Divorce Master's preparation and filing of the report and recommendation prescribed by Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.54. Should the Divorce Master's estimate of the fees for such time exceed the amount on deposit with the Prothonotary, the Divorce Master may require the deposit of additional funds with the Prothonotary as security for such fees. The Divorce Master may require the Moving Party or the Non-Moving Party to pay such deposit, or may require the parties each to contribute funds for such deposit, in the Divorce Master's discretion. The hearing(s) shall not be held until such deposit has been made.
8. At the conclusion of the hearing(s), the parties shall notify the Divorce Master of whether they intend to file proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law. The Divorce Master may also direct the parties to make such filings, at the Divorce Master's discretion.
9. If proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law will be filed, such filings shall be made:
  - a. If no request for transcript(s) has been made, 30 days after the conclusion of the hearing(s); or
  - b. If a request for transcript(s) has been made, 30 days after the filing of the complete transcript(s) of the hearing(s).Transcript requests shall be made within 5 days of the conclusion of the hearing(s).
10. If proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law will not be filed, the Divorce Master shall prepare their report and recommendation and file it with the Court within 30 days of the conclusion of the hearing(s). If proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law are to be filed, the report and recommendation shall be filed 30 days after the last such filing is made. These dates may be extended by Court upon petition of the Divorce Master, for reasonable cause.

11. The Divorce Master shall comply with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.55-2 with respect to the filing of the report and recommendation and the service of same upon the parties, including notice of the right to file exceptions.
12. All hearings, including the preliminary conference, shall be held in Courtroom 2 at the Huntingdon County Courthouse, unless otherwise authorized by the Court. All such proceedings shall be on the record and shall be recorded using the Court's electronic recording system. Should a party request a transcript or request that a court reporter's services be used in lieu of the electronic recording system, such party shall be solely responsible for the court reporter's fees, unless directed otherwise by the Divorce Master.
13. All hearings, and the matter generally, shall be conducted in accordance with applicable law, rules of evidence, rules of procedure, and orders of this Court. The Divorce Master shall have the general power of a court, including, without limitation:
  - a. The power to issue subpoenas and, with approval from the Court, to issue attachment for failure to comply therewith.
  - b. The power to administer oaths and affirmations to witnesses, to determine the admissibility of evidence, to permit testimony to be offered by deposition or by means of advanced communication technology, and to decide the law and facts of the case.
  - c. The power to compel production of documents, records, and things, in whatever form and however stored, that are deemed material to the case.
  - d. The power to make findings and recommendations to the Court regarding alleged incidents of contempt and sanctions therefor; **provided, however,** that this Court shall retain the authority to adjudicate whether contempt has occurred and to impose any resulting penalty.
14. All decisions of the Divorce Master shall be deemed interlocutory and not subject to appeal until the report and recommendation has been filed, at

which time the parties may file exceptions challenging such decisions in accordance with Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.55-2. Notwithstanding the preceding, the parties may appeal decisions of the Divorce Master to this Court where such decisions involve: (a) discovery of information or materials that are sensitive, embarrassing, or have a particular degree of confidentiality<sup>1</sup>; or (b) the admissibility of such information or materials as evidence.

15. Continuance requests shall be made using the standard Huntingdon County continuance request form, and shall be submitted directly to the Divorce Master with copy to the Office of Court Administration and to the other party. Submission to the Divorce Master may be made via U.S. Mail or email.

- a. For a first continuance request by a party, no fee shall be charged unless the request is made within one week of the subject proceeding, in which case the fee shall be \$50, due and payable to the Prothonotary upon the granting of the request; **provided, however**, that if the request is submitted on the business day before, or day of, the subject proceeding, such fee shall be \$100.
- b. For any successive continuance request by a party, the fee generally shall be \$50, due and payable to the Prothonotary upon the granting of the request, unless the request is submitted on the business day before, or day of, the subject proceeding, in which case the fee shall be \$200.

The Divorce Master may waive the continuance fee for good cause shown, at the Divorce Master's discretion. The Divorce Master shall provide notice of the grant or denial of any continuance request to the Office of Court Administration, simultaneous with notice to the parties and filing with the Prothonotary. Continuance fees paid to the Prothonotary shall be held on deposit, to be paid to the Divorce Master as part of the final fees approved by the Court.

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<sup>1</sup> I.e., information or material that is confidential for reasons other than those set forth in the *Case Records Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania*, such as corporate records or business plans.



16. Simultaneous with the filing of the report and recommendation, the Divorce Master shall file a proposed itemized invoice for the fees to be charged. The Court will review the invoice along with the report and recommendation, and determine the final amount of fees to be paid. Such fees shall be included in the costs of the action, and the responsibility for such costs may be apportioned between the parties as recommended by the Divorce Master and approved by the Court.
17. Upon the entry of an order approving the final fees, the Prothonotary shall pay the Divorce Master out of the funds placed on deposit, with any remaining balance to be returned to the appropriate party per the fee order. If the funds on deposit are not sufficient to satisfy the fees, the amount remaining shall be immediately due and payable to the Prothonotary by the responsible party, again per the fee order. Should the division of costs require a different or unique disposition of the funds on deposit, the Court will direct the Prothonotary as to such disposition in the relevant order.
18. The Court's actions in reviewing the report and recommendation, reviewing and considering any exceptions filed by the parties, making its final decisions on the issues, and issuing its final decree, will all be governed by the applicable rules of civil procedure, including, without limitation, Pa.R.Civ.P. 1920.55-2

BY THE COURT:

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George N. Zanic, President Judge

C: (Plaintiff's attorney)  
(Defendant's attorney)