

Rule 802. The Rule Against Hearsay

Hearsay is not admissible except as provided by these rules, by other rules prescribed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, or by statute.

Comment

Pa.R.E. 802 differs from F.R.E. 802 in that it refers to other rules prescribed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and to statutes in general, rather than federal statutes.

Often, hearsay will be admissible under an exception provided by these rules. The organization of the Pennsylvania Rules of Evidence generally follows the organization of the Federal Rules of Evidence, but the Pennsylvania Rules' organization of the exceptions to the hearsay rule is somewhat different than the federal organization. There are three rules which contain the exceptions: Pa.R.E. 803 Exceptions to the Rule Against Hearsay – Regardless of Whether the Declarant is Available as a Witness, Pa.R.E. 803.1 Exceptions to the Rule Against Hearsay – Testimony of Declarant Necessary, and Pa.R.E. 804 Exceptions to the Rule Against Hearsay - When the Declarant is Unavailable as a Witness.

On occasion, hearsay may be admitted pursuant to another rule promulgated by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. For example, in civil cases, all or part of a deposition may be admitted pursuant to Pa.R.C.P. No. 4020, or a video deposition of an expert witness may be admitted pursuant to Pa.R.C.P. No. 4017.1(g). In preliminary hearings in criminal cases, the court may consider hearsay evidence pursuant to Pa.R.Crim.P. 542(E) and 1003(E). **In criminal trials, Pa.R.Crim.P. 574 provides a procedure for the admission of forensic laboratory reports supported by a certification.**

Also, hearsay may be admitted pursuant to a state statute. Examples include:

1. A public record may be admitted pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 6104. See Comment to Pa.R.E. 803(8) (Not Adopted).
2. A record of vital statistics may be admitted pursuant to 35 P.S. § 450.810. See *Comment* to Pa.R.E. 803(9) (Not Adopted).
3. In a civil case, a deposition of a licensed physician may be admitted pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 5936.
4. In a criminal case, a deposition of a witness may be admitted pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 5919.

5. In a criminal or civil case, an out-of-court statement of a witness 12 years of age or younger, describing certain kinds of sexual abuse, may be admitted pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 5985.1.
6. In a dependency hearing, an out-of-court statement of a witness under 16 years of age, describing certain types of sexual abuse, may be admitted pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 5986.
7. In a prosecution for speeding under the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code, a certificate of accuracy of an electronic speed timing device (radar) from a calibration and testing station appointed by the Pennsylvania Department of Motor Vehicles may be admitted pursuant to 75 Pa.C.S. § 3368(d).

On rare occasion, hearsay may be admitted pursuant to a federal statute. For example, when a person brings a civil action, in either federal or state court, against a common carrier to enforce an order of the Interstate Commerce Commission requiring the payment of damages, the findings and order of the Commission may be introduced as evidence of the facts stated in them. 49 U.S.C. § 11704(d)(1).

Hearsay Exceptions and the Right of Confrontation of a Defendant in a Criminal Case

The exceptions to the hearsay rule in Rules 803, 803.1, and 804 and the exceptions provided by other rules or by statute are applicable both in civil and criminal cases. In a criminal case, however, hearsay that is offered against a defendant under an exception from the hearsay rule provided by these rules or by another rule or statute may sometimes be excluded because its admission would violate the defendant's right "to be confronted with the witnesses against him" under the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution, or "to be confronted with the witnesses against him" under Article I, § 9 of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

The relationship between the hearsay rule and the Confrontation Clause in the Sixth Amendment was explained by the United States Supreme Court in *California v. Green*, 399 U.S. 149, 155-56 (1970):

While it may readily be conceded that hearsay rules and the Confrontation Clause are generally designed to protect similar values, it is quite a different thing to suggest that the overlap is complete and that the Confrontation Clause is nothing more or less than a codification of the rules of hearsay and their exceptions as they existed historically at common law. Our decisions have never established such a congruence; indeed, we have more than once found a violation of confrontation values

even though the statements in issue were admitted under an arguably recognized hearsay exception....

Given the similarity of the values protected, however, the modification of a State's hearsay rules to create new exceptions for the admission of evidence against a defendant, will often raise questions of compatibility with the defendant's constitutional right to confrontation.

In *Crawford v. Washington*, 541 U.S. 36 (2004), the Supreme Court, overruling its prior opinion in *Ohio v. Roberts*, 448 U.S. 56 (1980), interpreted the Confrontation Clause to prohibit the introduction of "testimonial" hearsay from an unavailable witness against a defendant in a criminal case unless the defendant had an opportunity to confront and cross-examine the declarant, regardless of its exception from the hearsay rule, except, perhaps, if the hearsay qualifies as a dying declaration (Pa.R.E. 804(b)(2)).

In short, when hearsay is offered against a defendant in a criminal case, the defendant may interpose three separate objections: (1) admission of the evidence would violate the hearsay rule, (2) admission of the evidence would violate defendant's right to confront the witnesses against him under the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and (3) admission of the evidence would violate defendant's right "to be confronted with the witnesses against him" under Article I, § 9 of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

Pennsylvania Rule of Criminal Procedure 574 provides a mechanism for the admission of a forensic laboratory report supported by a certification. This Rule provides a defendant an opportunity to exercise the right of confrontation and to object to the report on hearsay grounds. Following pre-trial notice by the prosecution, and in the absence of a demand by defendant for declarant's live testimony, the Rule permits the admission of a properly certified forensic laboratory report at trial and the accompanying certification at trial. See Pa.R.Crim.P. 574.

Committee Explanatory Reports:

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Final Report explaining the February 19, 2014 revision of the Comment published with the Court's Order at Pa.B. (, 2014).