



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Dept. of Aging: Essential Court Functions and Legal Assistance Are Available

Harrisburg, PA – As Pennsylvanians follow the Governor’s stay-at-home order and social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 emergency, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s Office of Elder Justice in the Courts remind older adults and their families that essential court functions and legal assistance remain available.

“The Wolf administration is committed to protecting Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable citizens in every aspect of their lives during this outbreak,” said Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “Situations requiring immediate legal protections don’t stop during this crisis. The courts and legal advocates for older adults are available to provide essential services and assistance.”

“The Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s Office of Elder Justice in the Courts are committed to the protection of older Pennsylvanians during the COVID-19 crisis,” said Supreme Court Justice Debra Todd. “During these uncertain times, we want all older Pennsylvanians to know that the courts in Pennsylvania remain available for emergencies to ensure you are protected.”

While courts have generally been ordered closed to the public through April 30, there are essential court functions that are still being conducted. These essential functions include:

- Temporary protection from abuse actions;
- Civil mental health reviews;
- Guardianship defense and representation;
- Any pleadings or motions relating to public health concerns and involving immediate and irreparable harm;
- Emergency petitions related to protection of abused or neglected children; and
- Any other function deemed by a president judge to be essential and consistent with constitutional requirements.

Senior-serving organizations available to help with legal assistance during this crisis include:

- Pennsylvania SeniorLAW HelpLine: 877-PA SR LAW (877-727-7529)
- Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE): 800-356-3606
- Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP): Help Line 800-274-3258[®] or www.phlp.org.
- PALawHelp: www.PALawHelp.org

Two essential functions of the Department of Aging are advocating for the rights of older adults and protecting them from abuse, neglect, exploitation and/or abandonment. Anyone suspecting elder abuse can contact their local Area Agency on Aging or call the statewide Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline at 1-800-490-8505 which is operational 24/7, 365 days per year.

Visit the PA Department of Health's [dedicated Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19. Information about the statewide court response to COVID-19 is available [here](#).

Learn more about the various programs offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging at www.aging.pa.gov.

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