

How to Represent Yourself at a Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order Final Hearing



Can I represent myself without an attorney?

Yes. You can represent yourself at all stages of the Civil Protection Order process.

What should I do at the final hearing?

- **Prepare:** You should prepare your testimony and evidence beforehand. You should tell the judge every act of abuse and threat, including anything you told the judge at the first hearing or wrote in your petition. If you are nervous, you may forget important details so you can write them down ahead of time. You should also be prepared to bring any witnesses or physical evidence (such as printed text messages, printed photographs, and printed police reports), even if you presented them at the first hearing.
- **Attire:** Dress neatly and appropriately for court (no tank tops, shorts, crop tops, or inappropriate language/graphics).
- **Arrive Early:** You should arrive at least fifteen minutes before the hearing.
- **Present Your Case:** When the judge says it is your turn to speak, you should start with some basic information about yourself and your relationship with the other party. Next, tell the judge about the most recent incident of violence or threat of violence. Continue to tell the judge about as many incidents of violence or threats as you can. You should include as much detail as you can, including when it happened, where it happened, what happened, and if anyone saw it. You should also tell the judge what you are afraid will happen if you are not protected.
 - **Requesting Protection for Children:** If you are requesting protection for your children, you must tell the judge about how the abuser has hurt the child, threatened to hurt the child, and what effect the abuse has had on the child.
 - **Using Exhibits:** You or your witness must testify about each exhibit/physical evidence you want the judge to consider.
 - If you are using a photograph, tell the judge when the photograph was taken and describe what it is showing (for example, state that it shows what an injury looked like on that day)
 - If you are using a text message, email, or letter, tell the court when the message(s) were sent. If the document is handwritten tell the judge how you are familiar with the writer's handwriting. If it is an electronic message, tell the judge why you believe it came from the sender's account.
 - After showing your exhibit to the judge, it is important you say: "Your Honor, I would like to offer this exhibit into evidence".
 - **Using Witnesses:** If someone you know has seen the abuser's violence, heard a threat of violence, or saw injuries from the abuse, they may be a good witness. A witness can back up your testimony. When you are done with your testimony, you should ask the judge to hear from your witness(es). Your witness cannot testify on their own, you must ask the witness questions that explain who the person is and what

incident(s) they saw.

NOTE: Witnesses must come to court. Witnesses cannot send written, signed, or notarized statements.



What can my abuser do at the hearing?

- **Ask Questions:** When you are done testifying, the abuser or their attorney can ask you questions. You do not have to look at the abuser; however, you do need to answer the questions honestly. Often abusers try to upset you during this process. Stay calm and only answer the questions they ask. After their questions, the judge will give you another chance to talk and explain what you just said. The abuser can also ask your witnesses questions.
- **Abuser Presents Their Case:** When you complete your case, the abuser can present their own case. Remain calm during their testimony; do not argue or roll your eyes at their testimony. When they are done talking you can ask them questions, but you do not have to. You can ask them about any criminal records related to being untruthful.



What happens next?

After everyone presents their case, you can make a closing statement if you want. A closing statement is a summary of why you are in court and what you want. After this, the judge may decide while in court if you will receive a Civil Protection Order. The judge may also take the decision “under advisement.” This means they will write a written decision that will be sent to you.

If you get a Civil Protection Order, you should keep a certified copy of it with you at all times. You should always have a safety plan in case of an emergency. If your abuser violates the Civil Protection Order, you should call law enforcement at once.

**The information on this flyer is not legal advice.
If you are seeking representation or legal advice, please contact LASC or SEOLS.
An attorney-client relationship does not exist between you and LASC or SEOLS.**

Contact for Services: Intake line: 1-844-302-1800

www.columbuslegalaid.org

www.seols.org

LASC provides services in Central Ohio and has offices in Columbus and Marion.

SEOLS provides services in thirty-four counties in Southeastern Ohio and has offices in Athens, Chillicothe, New Philadelphia, Newark, Portsmouth, and Steubenville