



JUSTICE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Because Justice is for All



How to Collect Evidence of Domestic Violence

A Self-Help Guide

Why Collect Evidence?

Evidence of abuse can help you to get a PFA or other protective order. This evidence may also be useful in other types of cases where domestic violence is relevant (custody, criminal matters).

Even if you do not currently have a legal case pending, saving evidence of abuse may be helpful sometime in the future.

About Criminal Records

If your abuser has pending criminal actions or a prior criminal history, this information may be very important to a legal action.

A “certified” criminal record is the best evidence to present to the court. Room 220 of the Allegheny County Courthouse can help you with this. There is a cost associated with getting a certified criminal record. If you cannot get the certified record, the court may also examine the information publicly available on the website at: <https://ujportal.pacourts.us/CaseInformation.aspx>. Navigate to Case Information -> Court Case -> Search **BOTH** Magisterial and Common Pleas (and any other relevant courts). Search under name, county, and case type to be sure to capture the entire Pennsylvania criminal history. Tell your lawyer if you know your abuser has a criminal history!

Social Media, Text Messages, and Emails

- Screenshot social media (postings can be deleted and the evidence lost).
- If you cannot screenshot on your phone, take a picture of the screen using a different device.
- Try to include dates and times of messages, emails, and postings.
- Try to include the phone number/name/username/email address associated with the text, post, or email communication.
- Capture the **ENTIRE** content of the message, email, or social media post.
- You may need to take more than one screenshot or picture to get the entire message or post. Overlap each screenshot or post to show that they are connected and nothing has been deleted.
- Emails can be printed or forwarded to your attorney or another trusted person in their entirety.

Regular "Snail" Mail

- Save the letter and the envelope or package that it was delivered in.



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Voicemail

- Save your voicemail evidence.
- Many phones allow voicemails to be forwarded. Consider forwarding to a trusted friend/family member, your attorney, or saving to a database.
- You can also save a voicemail on a different device by playing it on one device while recording on the other.
- If your voicemail recording does not announce when it was made (iPhones do not), use a different device to take a video of yourself touching the phone screen and playing the relevant voicemail. You can also screenshot the call log.

Photographic Evidence

- Pictures may show visible injuries or signs of violence (torn clothing, bloodstains, damaged property, etc.)
- Take multiple pictures of injuries from different angles, as well as closer and
- farther away. Include your face in at least one of the pictures.
- Take comparison shots between injured and uninjured parts of your body.
- Save these to a database (see “Helpful Tips” on back) and/or share them with a **TRUSTED** friend or family member and/or your lawyer.

Medical Records

- Discharge and other paperwork is helpful to prove injuries and can be used in court.
- Full medical records may be requested from the medical records department at the healthcare provider. There may be a cost associated with this.
- In addition to a regular copy, it is best to also obtain a copy of “Certified Records” which will be provided in a sealed envelope marked “certified.” **Do Not Open** this envelope.

Witnesses

- People who have seen or heard abusive incidents or injuries can testify about what they saw or heard.
- Witnesses must appear at court in person. Written statements – even if notarized – will not be accepted.
- Sometimes a witness may be permitted to testify by phone. This is the exception. Consult your attorney about this.

Police Reports

- Police reports are extremely helpful. Try to obtain copies of any time the police were involved or called.
- Usually, police officers will not appear in court unless they are subpoenaed.



Helpful Tips

- Let your attorney know the evidence you have, including witnesses.
- Send copies of any evidence to your attorney in advance, if possible.
- Bring printed copies of your evidence to court, if possible.
- Keep your evidence safe to prevent it from being lost or deleted (maybe keep it with a trusted family member or friend).
- For electronic or digital evidence, consider using Google Drive or Dropbox to store the evidence in a secure location.
- If a witness needs a subpoena (an order which **REQUIRES** them to come to court), let your attorney know.
- Usually witnesses do **NOT** need a subpoena but check with your attorney just in case.





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How to Get Help

Visit our website and apply online at

www.nlsa.us

and choose "Get Legal Help"
or call

1-866-761-6572

NLS provides interpreters and translation services.
All services are confidential

Allegheny County Office

928 PENN AVENUE | PITTSBURGH, PA 15222-3757

Beaver County Office

STONE POINT LANDING, SUITE 204A

500 MARKET STREET | BRIDGEWATER, PA 15009-2998

Butler County Office

HOLLY POINTE BUILDING, SUITE 306

220 S. MAIN STREET | BUTLER, PA 16001

Lawrence County Office

TEMPLE BUILDING, SUITE 329

125 EAST NORTH STREET

NEW CASTLE, PA 16101-3751



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