

Have You Been Served with a Peace Order?

Hello. I'm here to help you understand what to do if you're served with a Maryland peace order.

I'll start by explaining the legal language in the order and clearing up some common assumptions. Then I'll go over the information in the peace order. We'll talk about the court hearing, too, including your options to either challenge or agree to a final peace order. Finally, I'll explain what can happen if you violate a peace order.

Peace orders have serious consequences. Think about speaking with a lawyer before you go to court.

Let's start with some legal language and assumptions.

You are identified in the peace order as the Respondent. The person who has asked the court to grant them a peace order is the Petitioner. When you are served with a peace order, it does not mean you are being arrested or charged with a crime. But, because this is not a criminal case, you are not entitled to a public defender.

So, what's in the peace order?

First, read it very carefully. The order explains how much interaction, if any, you can have with the Petitioner. This includes in-person contact and communication by telephone, text, social media, and more. The order also indicates whether you must stay away from certain places. This can be the Petitioner's home, work, or school. Finally, look for your hearing date, time, and location.

It's important that you attend the hearing.

A peace order hearing is public. That means other people will be in the courtroom. The judge will ask whether you want to agree, or consent, to the order. If you agree or consent, there won't be a trial with evidence or testimony. The judge grants the order and you do not admit fault. When the peace order ends, you can ask the court to keep the records private.

You can also challenge (or contest) the order. If you challenge the order, each party is placed under oath and will tell their version of events.

Each party can call witnesses and present evidence. You will be expected to know the law and follow court rules.

At the end, the judge will decide whether to grant or deny the order. If the judge denies the order, depending on the circumstances, you can ask to have those records kept private.

Once a peace order is in place, you must abide by it or you risk a violation.

If you don't follow the peace order, you can be found guilty of a misdemeanor. This may mean a fine of up to \$1,000 and jail for up to 90 days. Those penalties increase if you violate a peace order more than once.

So that's what happens after you're served with a Maryland peace order.

A reminder: If you're served with a peace order, you are called the Respondent. It doesn't mean you've been arrested or charged with a crime. The order tells you how much contact you can have with the other person, and when your hearing is taking place. At the hearing, you can agree or consent to a peace order. You can also challenge or contest the order. Finally, you may face penalties if you violate a peace order.

I hope this helps. When you're finished here, please visit mdcourts.gov/peaceorders. That's where you'll find answers to your questions, a brochure on keeping records private, and information about finding legal help.