

## **Special Name Change Procedure Virtual Name Change Protocol**

The Special Name Change procedure will resume holding monthly name change hearings. These hearings will be held virtually using a video conferencing/communication platform (as outlined further below). As always, please be sure to reach out to the Special Name Change Judge's chambers (currently Judge Christine A. Ward) at [specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us](mailto:specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us) to confirm Special Name Change Hearing dates and times. This Virtual Name Change Protocol is intended to serve as guidance for attorneys assisting clients and pro se individuals proceeding with a name change pursuant to the Special Name Change Procedure.

### **Virtual Special Name Change Hearings**

Until further notice, with respect to each Special Name Change Hearing, please follow the below steps to participate in a virtual Special Name Change Hearing:

1. Advise the Special Name Change Judge as soon as possible via email (at [specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us](mailto:specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us)) if you will be attending a Special Name Change Hearing.
2. At least one day prior to the Special Name Change Hearing, request a judgment search for Allegheny County from the Department of Court Records, Civil Division. The judgment search is a statutory requirement for a name change and the Name Change Petition cannot be granted if the judgment search is not included. You may request a judgment search for Allegheny County in person or by submitting an email to [DCRCivilFamily@AlleghenyCounty.us](mailto:DCRCivilFamily@AlleghenyCounty.us). When requesting an Allegheny County judgment search by email be sure to include the petitioner's name, the case number, the petitioner's address(es) for the last 5 years, and a copy of the Praecipe to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* (or payment (which must be mailed to and received by the Department of Court Records, Civil Division or brought in person to the Department of Court Records, Civil Division) in the amount of \$25 if not proceeding *In Forma Pauperis*). If you need to conduct judgment searches outside Allegheny County be sure to start that process early as it may take significantly longer to complete the judgment search process in other jurisdictions.
3. At least one day prior to a Special Name Change Hearing, submit the following to the Special Name Change Judge by sending an email to [specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us](mailto:specialnameschangemotions@alleghencourts.us):
  - a. The applicable name change documents (i.e., the Name Change Petition (which includes the decree), Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication (or signed order granting that motion), Verified Statement in Support of Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication, and Praecipe to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* (if applicable));

- b. A copy of the Decree for Change of Name (attached to the Name Change Petition) in Microsoft Word format;
  - c. All required judgment searches; and
  - d. Results of the criminal background check.
4. After submitting all required name change documents to the Special Name Change Judge, you will receive an email from the Special Name Change Judge's chambers with information about how to join the virtual Special Name Change Hearing. As always, friends and family are welcome to attend the Special Name Change Hearing and the hearing information may be shared with friends and family. Please send the emails of everyone who would like to attend to [specialnameschangemotions@alleghenycourts.us](mailto:specialnameschangemotions@alleghenycourts.us) so they receive an electronic invite.
5. At the time of the Special Name Change Hearing, join the virtual hearing using the information provided by the Special Name Change Judge's staff.
6. Once the hearing is called to order, the hearing will proceed as directed by the Special Name Change Judge's staff. That is, cases will be called by a member of the Special Name Change Judge's staff. As each case is called, the attorney for the petitioner (or the pro se individual) and the petitioner must introduce themselves to the Special Name Change Judge. After the Special Name Change Judge acknowledges the attorney (or pro se individual), the attorney (or pro se individual) will be directed to present the Name Change Petition to the court.
7. After presenting a Name Change Petition, the attorney (or pro se individual) may leave the virtual hearing or remain to observe the rest of the hearing.
8. After the Special Name Change Hearing, the Special Name Change Judge's staff will provide via email a copy of the signed Decree For Change of Name to the attorney for the petitioner (or the pro se individual) and forward an electronic copy of the Decree For Change of Name to the Department of Court Records, Civil Division. Attorneys (or pro se individuals) will be able to request that the Department of Court Records, Civil Division prepare certified copies of the signed Decree For Change of Name and mail the certified copies of the Decree For Change of Name to them. To request the certified orders via email, submit an email to [DCRCivilFamily@AlleghenyCounty.us](mailto:DCRCivilFamily@AlleghenyCounty.us). This email should include:
  - a. The petitioner's name;
  - b. The case number;
  - c. A request that 5 (or the applicable number) certified copies be prepared. If you are proceeding *In Forma Pauperis*, be sure to indicate that the certified orders should be provided at no cost. If not proceeding *In Forma Pauperis*, payment must be provided (either mailed to and received by the Department of Court Records, Civil Division or brought in person to the Department of Court Records, Civil Division) in the amount of \$20 per certified order before you will receive the certified copies;

- d. Include a copy of the Praeceptum to Proceed *In Forma Pauperis* (if payment is required, be sure to contact the Department of Court Records, Civil Division to confirm acceptable forms of payment); and
- e. Include your address and request that the certified orders be mailed to you.

### **Initiating New Special Name Change Cases**

With respect to new Name Change Petitions, a virtual process is also being instituted for the submission and signing of orders on Motions to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication. To submit a new Name Change Petition and Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication to the Special Name Change Judge, please follow the below steps:

1. Submit ALL documents relating to the name change case to the Special Name Change Judge's chambers by submitting an email to [specialnameschangemotions@allegheycourts.us](mailto:specialnameschangemotions@allegheycourts.us). All documents may be submitted in portable document format (pdf) but please include a copy of the order on the Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication in Microsoft Word format.
2. After the Special Name Change Judge makes a determination on the Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication, the signed order granting or denying the Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication will be returned to the attorney of record (or pro se individual).
3. Place all of the documents relating to the name change case (including the order on the Motion to Seal the Record and/or Waive Publication, one copy of the Name Change Petition, the fingerprint card, and the envelopes (with postage)) in a seal envelope marked "Confidential: To Be Filed Under Seal" on both sides of the envelope. If you want or require a time stamped copy of the documents being filed you must include either the cover sheet of each document being filed (which will be time stamped) or a complete copy of each document being filed (which will be time stamped) and a pre-addressed return envelope (in which the time stamped copies will be returned) which must have sufficient postage affixed to the envelope. Then place that envelope in another envelope and mail the package to the Department of Court Records, Civil Division at the following address:

Department of Court Records Civil/Family Division  
414 Grant Street 1st Floor  
City County Building  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

4. Once received by the Department of Court Records, Civil Division, the name documents will be filed and the Department of Court Records, Civil Division will mail the fingerprint card, copy of the Name Change Petition to the PA State Police for a criminal background check.

5. Once the results of the criminal background check are received, start with Step 1 relating to virtual Special Name Change Hearings, above.