



PRO SE / SELF-REPRESENTED GUIDE

Protective Order Exhibit Guide

A practical guide to gathering and organizing evidence for restraining orders, orders of protection, and domestic violence protective orders.

You need a protective order. Maybe you are dealing with domestic violence, stalking, or harassment. Courts can issue a temporary protective order the same day you file, but the permanent hearing requires evidence. Under 18 U.S.C. section 2265 (the Full Faith and Credit for Protection Orders Act), a valid protective order from one state must be enforced in all states. The Violence Against Women Act (34 U.S.C. section 12291) provides additional protections. This guide walks you through what evidence to gather and how to present it so the judge can follow the pattern of behavior.

Incident Documentation

- Incident timeline with dates**
A written chronology of each incident — date, time, what happened, who was present
- Police reports**
Copies of all police reports filed for any incidents
- 911 call records**
Request these from your local dispatch center — they show dates and what you reported
- Witness statements**
Written accounts from anyone who saw an incident or its aftermath

Threatening Communications

- Text messages**
Screenshots with timestamps showing threats, harassment, or violations of boundaries
- Voicemails**
Save threatening voicemails — transcribe them and note the date and time
- Social media messages**
Screenshots of DMs, posts, or comments directed at you
- Emails**
Print full headers showing date, sender, and subject line

Medical & Safety Records

- Photos of injuries**
Photographs with timestamps — include something for scale and take photos from multiple angles
- Medical records from ER visits**
Emergency room records, including triage notes that document how the injury occurred
- Counselor or therapist records**
Records showing treatment for trauma, anxiety, or PTSD related to the abuse
- Shelter or hotline records**
Documentation from domestic violence shelters or hotlines you contacted

Prior Court & Legal Documents

- Prior protective orders**
Any previous orders against the same person — shows a pattern
- Criminal records**
Arrest records or conviction history relevant to the respondent
- Bail or bond conditions**
Any conditions imposed by a criminal court that the respondent has violated
- Divorce or custody filings**
Related family court documents if applicable

Safety Planning Documents

- Safety plan**
Your written plan for safe housing, emergency contacts, and escape routes
- Children's records**
School records, medical records, or statements from children if they witnessed abuse
- Property damage documentation**
Photos and repair estimates for property the respondent damaged

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. Not screenshotting threats before the other person deletes them
2. Waiting too long after an incident to file — courts weigh recency
3. Bringing disorganized evidence to an emergency hearing where time is limited
4. Not requesting 911 call records and police reports in advance
5. Leaving out the pattern of behavior and only presenting the most recent incident

ORGANIZATION TIPS

- Create a chronological timeline as your first exhibit — judges look for patterns, not isolated incidents
- Screenshot every threatening text, voicemail, and social media message immediately — content gets deleted
- Organize medical records by date with the injury photos next to the corresponding ER visit
- Keep originals in a safe location outside your home (a trusted friend, a shelter, a bank safe deposit box)
- Number exhibits sequentially and create a one-page index so you can reference documents quickly at the hearing

COURTROOM PREPARATION

- Courts can issue a temporary protective order the same day you file — bring your evidence organized
- Present the pattern of behavior first: the timeline, then supporting evidence for each incident
- The standard is typically "preponderance of evidence" — more likely than not, not beyond a reasonable doubt
- If the respondent has an attorney and you do not, ask the court about free legal aid available at the courthouse
- Stay factual. Judges are trained to evaluate evidence, not emotional appeals.
- Bring three copies of everything: one for you, one for the judge, one for the respondent
- If you feel unsafe in the courtroom, ask the court for a safety escort or separate waiting area before the hearing

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