

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## Protecting Your Interests In A Civil Court Case



*“Knowledge and human power are synonymous.”*

– Francis Bacon



This brochure should give you some idea of your rights and what you can ask for when you are in court.

Although courtrooms in different places have different rules, you do have certain rights.

You have the right to:

- ◆ Be heard;
- ◆ Represent yourself when you choose not to hire an attorney;
- ◆ Copies of papers filed by the other side;
- ◆ Notice of all hearings in time for you to attend;
- ◆ A judge or judicial officer on the bench;
- ◆ A “continuance” if you have a good reason for not being able to go forward with a hearing;
- ◆ An interpreter who speaks your language;
- ◆ Extra assistance for an impairment or disability;
- ◆ A decision on the facts of your case; and,
- ◆ Copies of all orders issued by the court.

When you go into court, you have the right to be treated fairly. This is your time to be heard about what has been happening to you. You should ask for what you want and ask questions, if you do not understand something that is going on.

There is no guarantee that you will get what you ask for, but you should ask anyway.

You also have the right to:

- ◆ Ask for what you need, including protections and financial help;
- ◆ A recording of the testimony at your hearing;
- ◆ An explanation of the order;
- ◆ Directions on how to enforce the order; and,
- ◆ Appeal a final order that is not in your favor.

If you decide to appeal your case or if you later get an attorney, you will want to have a record of your hearing.

You may ask for:

- ◆ Help from court staff to fill out forms;
- ◆ Your case to be heard without paying filing fees and court costs (*in forma pauperis*);
- ◆ Help with serving papers to your abuser;
- ◆ A domestic violence program legal advocate to support you in court;
- ◆ Your address to be kept secret; and,
- ◆ Your case records to be kept private.

Some courts offer:

- ◆ Childcare while you are in court; and,
- ◆ An escort to keep you safe while going to and from the courtroom.

**For help locating other services for abused adults, call:**

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

To contact your local domestic violence program or your local bar association or legal services/aid office, look in the emergency or human services pages of your phone book.

**Know Your Rights** was prepared by the Battered Women's Justice Project (BWJP) of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

For more information please contact BWJP at:  
1-800-903-0111 ext. 2  
6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300  
Harrisburg, PA 17112.

This project was supported by Grant No.98-WL-VX-K001 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

