

GENERAL RULE 22  
ACCESS TO FAMILY LAW AND GUARDIANSHIP COURT RECORDS

- (a) Purpose and Scope of this Rule. This rule governs access to family law and guardianship court records, whether the records are maintained in paper or electronic form. The policy of the courts is to facilitate public access to court records, provided that such access will not present an unreasonable invasion of personal privacy, will not permit access to records or information defined by law or court rule as confidential, sealed, exempted from disclosure, or otherwise restricted from public access, and will not be unduly burdensome to the ongoing business of the courts.
- (b) Definition and Construction of Terms.
- (1) "Court record" is defined in GR 31(c)(4).
  - (2) "Family law case or guardianship case" means any case filed under Chapters 11.88, 11.92, 26.09, 26.10, 26.12, 26.18, 26.21, 26.23, 26.26, 26.27, 26.50, 26.52, 73.36 and 74.34 RCW.
  - (3) "Personal Health Care Record" means any record or correspondence that contains health information that (1) relates to the past, present, or future physical or mental health condition of an individual including past, present, or future payments for health care; or (2) involves genetic parentage testing.
  - (4) "Personal Privacy" is unreasonably invaded only if disclosure of information about the person or the family (a) would be highly offensive to a reasonable person and (b) is not of legitimate concern to the public.
  - (5) "Public access" means unrestricted access to view or copy a requested court record.
  - (6) "Restricted personal identifiers" means a party's social security number, a party's driver's license number, a party's telephone number, financial account numbers, social security number of a minor child and date of birth of a minor child.

COMMENT

A party is not required to provide a residence address. Petitioners or counsel to a family law case will provide a service or contact address in accordance with CR 4.1 that will be publicly available and all parties and counsel should provide a contact address if otherwise required. Pattern forms shall be modified, as necessary, to reflect the intent of this rule.

- (7) "Retirement plan order" means a supplemental order

entered for the sole purpose of implementing a property division that is already set forth in a separate order or decree in a family law case. A retirement plan order may not grant substantive relief other than what is set forth in a separate order. Examples of retirement plan orders are orders that implement a division of retirement, pension, insurance, military, or similar benefits as already defined in a decree of dissolution of marriage.

- (8) "Sealed financial source documents" means income tax returns, W-2s and schedules, wage stubs, credit card statements, financial institution statements, checks or the equivalent, check registers, loan application documents, retirement plan orders, as well as other financial information sealed by court order.

(c) Access to Family Law or Guardianship Court Records.

- (1) General Policy. Except as provided in RCW 26.26.610(2) and subsections (c)(2) and (c)(3) below, all court records shall be open to the public for inspection and copying upon request. The Clerk of the court may assess fees, as may be authorized by law, for the production of such records.
- (2) Restricted Access. The Confidential Information Form, Sealed Financial Source Documents, Domestic Violence Information Form, Notice of Intent to Relocate required by R.C.W. 26.09.440, Sealed Personal Health Care Record, Retirement Plan Order, Confidential Reports as defined in (e)(2)(B), and any Personal Information Sheet necessary for Judicial Information System purposes shall only be accessible as provided in sections (g) and (h) herein.
- (3) Excluded Records. This section (c) does not apply to court records that are sealed as provided in GR15(c)(2)(B), or to which access is otherwise restricted by law.

(d) Restricted Personal Identifiers Not Required-Except. Parties to a family law case or the protected person in a guardianship case shall not be required to provide restricted personal identifiers in any document filed with the court or required to be provided upon filing a family law or guardianship case, except:

- (1) "Sealed financial source documents" filed in accordance with (f)(1) below:
- (2) The following forms: Confidential Information Form, Domestic Violence Information Form, Notice of Intent to Relocate required by R.C.W. 26.09.440, Vital Statistics Form, Law Enforcement Information Form, Foreign Protection Order Information Form, and any Personal Information Sheet necessary for Judicial Information

System purposes.

- (3) Court requested documents that contain restricted personal identifiers, which may be submitted by a party as financial source documents under the provisions of section (f) of this rule.

COMMENT

Court records not meeting the definition of "Sealed Financial Source Documents", "Personal Health Care Records", Retirement Plan Orders, Confidential Reports or court records that otherwise meet the definition but have not been submitted in accordance with (f)(1) are not automatically sealed. Section (f)(3) provides authority for the court to seal court records containing restricted personal identifiers upon motion of a party, or on the court's own motion during a hearing or trial.

- (e) Filing of Reports in Family Law and Guardianship cases ? Cover Sheet.
  - (1) This section applies to documents that are intended as reports to the court in Family law and Guardianship cases including, but not limited to, the following:
    - (A) Parenting evaluations;
    - (B) Domestic Violence Assessment Reports created by Family Court Services or a qualified expert appointed by the court;
    - (C) Risk Assessment Reports created by Family Court Services or a qualified expert;
    - (D) CPS Summary Reports created by Family Court Services or supplied directly by Children's Protective Services;
    - (E) Sexual abuse evaluations; and
    - (F) Reports of a guardian ad litem or Court Appointed Special Advocate.
  - (2) Reports shall be filed as two separate documents, one public and one sealed.
    - (A) Public Document. The public portion of any report shall include a simple listing of:
      - (i) Materials or information reviewed;
      - (ii) Individuals contacted;
      - (iii) Tests conducted or reviewed; and
      - (iv) Conclusions and recommendation.
    - (B) Sealed Document. The sealed portion of the report shall be filed with a coversheet designated:

"Sealed Confidential Report." The material filed with this coversheet shall include:

- (i) Detailed descriptions of material or information gathered or reviewed;
  - (ii) Detailed descriptions of all statements reviewed or taken;
  - (iii) Detailed descriptions of tests conducted or reviewed; and
  - (iv) Any analysis to support the conclusions and recommendations.
- (3) The sealed portion may not be placed in the court file or used as an attachment or exhibit to any other document excerpt under seal.
- (f) Sealing Financial Source Documents, Personal Health Care Records, and Sealed Confidential Reports in Family Law and Guardianship cases-Cover Sheet.
- (1) Financial source documents, personal health care records, and confidential reports as defined in (e)(2)(B) of this rule shall be submitted to the clerk under a cover sheet designated "SEALED FINANCIAL SOURCE DOCUMENTS", "SEALED PERSONAL HEALTH CARE RECORDS" or "SEALED CONFIDENTIAL REPORT" for filing in the court record of family law or guardianship cases.
  - (2) All financial source documents, personal health care records, or confidential reports so submitted shall be automatically sealed by the clerk. The coversheet or a copy thereof shall remain part of the public court file.
  - (3) The court may order that any financial source documents containing restricted personal identifiers, personal health care records, or any report containing information described in (e)(2)(B) be sealed if they have not previously automatically been sealed pursuant to this rule.
  - (4) These coversheets may not be used for any documents except as provided in this rule. Sanctions may be imposed upon any party or attorney who violates this rule.

COMMENT

See comment to (d)(3) above.

(g) Access by Courts, Agencies and Parties to Restricted Documents.

- (1) Unless otherwise provided by statute or court order, the following persons shall have access to all court records in family law or guardianship cases:
  - (A) Judges, commissioners, other court personnel, the Commission

Guardian  
for the  
Commission,  
on Judicial Conduct, and the Certified Professional  
Board may access and use restricted court records only  
purpose of conducting official business of the court,  
or Board.

of the  
(B) Any state administrative agency of any state that  
administers programs under Title IV-A, IV-D, IV-E or XIX  
federal Social Security Act.

(2) Except as otherwise provided by statute or court order,  
the following persons shall have access to all  
documents filed in a family law or guardianship case,  
except the Personal Information Sheet, Vital Statistics  
Form, Confidential Information Form, Domestic Violence  
Information Form, Law Enforcement Information Form, and  
Foreign Protection Order Form.

(A) Parties of record as to their case.

(B) Attorneys as to cases where they are attorneys of  
record.

(C) Court appointed Title 11 guardians ad litem as to  
cases where they re actively involved.

(h) Access to Court Records Restricted Under this Rule.

(1) The parties may stipulate in writing to allow public  
access to any court records otherwise restricted under  
section (c)(2) above.

(2) Any person may file a motion, supported by an affidavit  
showing good cause, for access to any court record  
otherwise restricted under section (c)(2) above, or to  
be granted access to such court records with specified  
information deleted. Written notice of the motion  
shall be provided to all parties in the manner required  
by the Superior Court Civil Rules. If the person  
seeking access cannot locate a party to provide the  
notice required by this rule, after making a good faith  
reasonable effort to provide such notice as required by  
the Superior Court Rules, an affidavit may be filed  
with the court setting forth the efforts to locate the  
party and requesting waiver of the notice provision of  
this rule. The court may waive the notice requirement  
of this rule if the court finds that further good faith  
efforts to locate the party are not likely to be successful.

(3) The court shall allow access to court records  
restricted under this rule, or relevant portions of  
court records restricted under this rule, if the court  
finds that the public interests in granting access or  
the personal interest of the person seeking access

outweigh the privacy and safety interests of the parties or dependent children. If the court grants access to restricted court records, the court may enter such orders necessary to balance the personal privacy and safety interests of the parties or dependent children with the public interest or the personal interest of the party seeking access, consistent with this rule.

[Adopted effective October 1, 2001; amended effective July 1, 2006.]