
SERVICE OF CITATION

A. Service of Citation

In lawsuits filed by DFPS, the agency is responsible for obtaining service of citation containing the original petition and providing notice of trial settings and other events during the pendency of the legal case. Citation on the filing of an original petition in a SAPCR shall be issued and served “as in other civil cases.” [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.009\(c\)](#). However, most courts do not require service on all those entitled to service before proceeding with the Adversary Hearing. The court may proceed with temporary orders prior to any required service by publication. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.201\(o\)](#).

1. Parties to be Served

DFPS is responsible for obtaining service of citation on the following parties:

- Each parent (including an alleged father), unless the parent’s rights are terminated, or a parent signs a waiver of service;
- A managing or possessory conservator, guardian, or other person with court-ordered access to the child;
- A prospective adoptive parent with standing or a conservator designated in an affidavit of relinquishment; and
- The Texas Attorney General’s Office or any other child-support agency (if child-support payments may be affected). See [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.009\(a\)](#); [CPS Policy Handbook § 5230](#) Service by Citation.⁶

Citation may be served on any other person who has or who may assert an interest in the child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.009\(b\)](#).

Service must be accomplished via the method prescribed in [Tex. R. Civ. P. 106](#) and by a person authorized pursuant to [Tex. R. Civ. P. 103](#).

2. DFPS Must Make a Diligent Effort to Locate Parent and Relatives

If a parent, as defined by [Tex. Fam. Code § 160.102\(11\)](#), of the child has not been personally served in a suit in which DFPS seeks termination, DFPS must make a diligent effort to locate that parent. [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.107\(b\)](#).

If a parent has not been personally served and cannot be located, DFPS shall make a diligent effort to locate a relative of the missing parent to give the relative an opportunity to request appointment as the child’s managing conservator. [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.107\(c\)](#).

3. Relative Defined for Diligent Search Purposes

A relative means a parent, grandparent, adult sibling, or child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.107\(a\)\(2\)](#). If DFPS is not able to locate a missing parent or a relative of that parent and sufficient information is available concerning the physical whereabouts of the parent or relative, DFPS shall request the

Office of the Attorney General to use the parental locator service to determine the location of the missing parent or relative. [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.107\(d\)](#).

DFPS shall be required to provide evidence to the court to show what actions were taken by DFPS in making a diligent effort to locate the missing parent and relative of the missing parent. [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.107\(e\)](#).

4. Citation by Publication and Diligent Search

Once DFPS has made the effort and has been unsuccessful, DFPS can file a Motion to Cite by Publication under [Tex. R. Civ. P. 109](#).

[Tex. R. Civ. P. 109](#) requires that before citation by publication can be issued by the clerk, the petitioner must file an affidavit of “due diligence.” That rule also requires the court trying the case to inquire into the sufficiency of the diligence exercised in attempting to ascertain the residence or whereabouts of the known parent who cannot be located, before granting any judgment on such service.

Special Issue: As of July 1, 2020, the Office of Court Administration’s Public Information website is available for posting citations and other public or legal notice required to be posted on the website or requested to be posted by a court or court clerk. For more information, visit the [Citation by Publication and Court Notices Website](#).

B. Notice

DFPS is responsible for providing service of citation and notice of several matters relating to agency activities relating to a lawsuit (investigations, removals, review hearings, etc.). While the same word “notice” is often used for both, it is important to distinguish between service and notice. The Texas Family Code requires that DFPS provide notice to parents of the investigation and removal of a child, as well as notice to relatives of the removal, and notice to parties, relatives, caregivers, and child if age 10 or older, of all review hearings. These notice obligations, however, do not need to be executed in accordance with the rules governing service under the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.0021](#) provides several methods of notice available to DFPS.

1. The Right to Notice

The Petitioner, which is usually DFPS, must ensure that notice of the lawsuit is provided to those who are sued.

2. Methods of Providing Notice of Hearing

The requirements for citation are different from requirements for notice of motions or of particular hearings. Citation generally must be by personal service on the Respondent unless citation is waived by the Respondent, forfeited under the “paternity registry” process, or given by some form of substituted service, including citation by publication, as authorized by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

Once citation is complete and a return of service is on file, notice may be served by delivering a copy to the party to be served, or the party’s duly authorized agent or attorney of record, as the

case may be, **electronically through the electronic filing manager if the email address of the party or attorney to be served is on file with the electronic filing manager or in person, by mail, by commercial delivery service, by fax, by email, or by such other manner as the court in its discretion may direct.**

Service by mail shall be complete upon deposit of the paper, enclosed in a postpaid, properly addressed wrapper, in a post office or official depository under the care and custody of the United States Postal Service. Service by telephonic document transfer after 5:00 p.m. local time of the recipient shall be deemed served on the following day. Notice may also be served by a party to the suit, an attorney of record, a sheriff or constable, or by any other person competent to testify. [Tex. R. Civ. P. 21a](#).

3. Information Provided to Relatives and Certain Individual; Investigation

When DFPS takes possession of a child under [Tex. Fam. Code Chapter 262](#), DFPS **shall** provide information to each adult DFPS is able to identify and locate who:

- Is related to the child within the third degree of consanguinity, as defined by [Tex. Gov't Code § 573.023\(c\)](#);
- Is an adult relative of the alleged father if DFPS has a reasonable basis to believe the alleged father is the child's biological father; and
- Anyone who is identified as a potential relative or designated caregiver on the proposed Child Placement Resources Form. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(a\)\(1\)](#).

DFPS **may** provide information to each adult DFPS is able to identify and locate who has a long-standing and significant relationship with the child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(a\)\(2\)](#).

The written notice must include:

- A statement that the child is in the state's custody;
- Options available for participation in the care and placement and support of the family;
- Options that may be lost if the individual fails to timely respond; and
- The date, time, and location of the Status Hearing, if known. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(b\)](#).

DFPS is not required to provide information to a person who has criminal or family violence history. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(c\)](#).

DFPS must use due diligence to identify and locate all individuals described by [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(a\)](#) within 30 days of the date DFPS files the SAPCR, and the failure of a parent or alleged father to complete the Child Placement Resources Form does not relieve DFPS of its duty to seek information about persons under [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(d\)](#). [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095\(d\)](#) and (e).

4. Report Regarding Notification of Relatives

[Tex. Fam. Code § 263.007](#) requires DFPS to provide the court with a report regarding their compliance with [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.1095](#). The court should review this report to assess DFPS' diligent efforts. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.007](#).

5. Notice to Parents of Right to Counsel

Before commencement of the full Adversary Hearing, if an attorney has not already been appointed under [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.013](#), the court must inform each parent not represented by an attorney of:

- The right to be represented by an attorney; and
- If a parent is indigent and appears in opposition to the suit, the right to a court-appointed attorney. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.201\(c\)](#).

[Tex. Fam. Code § 107.0141](#) allows the court to appoint an attorney for a parent whenever the SAPCR is filed, but if a parent's first appearance is at the Adversary Hearing and the parent requests the appointment of an attorney, then the court shall require the parent to complete and file with the court an affidavit of indigence. The court may consider additional evidence to determine whether the parent is indigent, including evidence relating to the parent's income, source of income, assets, property ownership, benefits paid in accordance with a federal, state, or local public assistance program, outstanding obligations, and necessary expenses and the number and ages of the parent's dependents. If the appointment of an attorney for the parent is requested, the court shall make a determination of indigence before commencement of the full Adversary Hearing. If the court determines the parent is indigent, the court shall appoint an attorney to represent the parent. [Tex. Fam. Code § 262.201\(c\)](#).