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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

Clients of Z Family Law, LLC

Re: Z Family Law's Recommendations
In Light of Governor Hogan's Stay-
Home Order

Dear Clients,

Earlier today, Governor Larry Hogan issued a Stay-Home Executive Order to help control the spread of coronavirus. While this Executive Order has transformed into requirements what were previously recommendations, many of the families we serve may have questions about what this new Order means to them. Our team has been working diligently to stay apprised of the situation and to ensure that we have the latest information for you and your family. Once Governor Hogan issued his Executive Order this morning, we have been consulting with colleagues and members of the judiciary. Although measures to combat the virus in Maryland remain fluid, we do have some updates for you now.

For Co-Parents

One of the biggest areas of concern is whether or not the Stay-Home Executive Order overrides what custody orders say about parents sharing time with their child or children. ***The overwhelming response from long-time family law practitioners and the judiciary is that custody orders remain in full force and effect.*** Specifically, Governor Hogan's Chief Counsel offered this comment: "People are allowed to leave their houses as required by court order. Custody exchanges should be covered by a court order."

With that guidance in mind, we offer the following recommendations:

- When leaving your home to exchange custody, carry with you your Custody Order, Parenting Plan, or Judgment of Absolute Divorce. This is particularly important if your custody exchange requires you to cross state lines (example: If you live in Virginia and your child's other parent lives in Maryland). After all, the Executive Order permits travel for the purposes of following court orders.

- By agreement, you and your co-parent ***absolutely can*** temporarily modify your custody schedule to meet the needs of your family. If you can agree, you should consider the following:
 - Changing the place of exchanges to occur so that the child (or children) go directly from car to car rather than into a public space (example: if your normal exchange is in McDonalds, perhaps move the exchange to the parking lot of the McDonalds).
 - Modify the access schedule so that it better suits the current situation. An unexpected advantage of the stay-home order is that daily travel to and from school is no longer a consideration. Minimize transitions and your children’s exposure to the virus—children can stay at one home and “visit” the other via Skype, you could consider a week on/week off schedule, you could change the schedule so that one parent is working on distance learning while the other parent works. Parents can trade off later.
 - Be flexible, but do not bite off more than you can chew. You do not have to make an open-ended agreement without knowing how long the situation will last. Try reaching an agreement for one month at a time. Put it into an email with the other parent so that you both have easy access to it and do not have to try to remember what the other parent said. It is essential that both sides understand what has been agreed to, and for how long.
 - Make-up time: If you are the parent who is missing out on your time with your child or children because, for example, you are a first responder, because your personal circumstances make it better for your child to stay with the other parent, because you wish to minimize transitions, or because you simply believe you are doing the right thing to keep your child safe – take heart. Lawyers and judges alike encourage parents to be flexible with make-up time once safety measures are lifted. Even if you have little hope of reaching an agreement now, remember that Courts will be very open and willing to order make-up time. They will also be unhappy, and thus willing to sanction, a parent who refuses make-up time and thus punishes the parent who prioritized the child’s safety over time with the child.
- If you or your child(ren) are experiencing or living under the threat of domestic violence, the Executive Order expressly permits you to leave an unsafe situation and seek help. Please immediately get yourself to safety and reach out to us.

- If you are required to pay child support and/or alimony, you must continue making payments. If you need a permanent or temporary modification, please reach out to us.

When to Call Us

There are going to be situations where you may need help with your co-parent. If, for example, your child becomes ill and your co-parent will not seek medical attention, this may be an emergency and we may be able to get this heard by a Court. If you and your co-parent cannot work out an alternate schedule, we can assist you with these negotiations and help you to reach an agreement.

If you would like to schedule a one-on-one appointment to review your family's coronavirus co-parenting plan, we are offering these sessions at a discounted rate of \$100 for a half an hour. The session will help you formulate a plan to deal with illness, school closures, access difficulties, co-parenting disagreements, communications issues, etc.

You can schedule an appointment for a virtual parenting and COVID-19 session [here](#).

If you need a more in-depth meeting to discuss other aspects of your family situation (whether or not a court case exists), or to resolve an emergency, simply schedule a telephone or videoconferencing appointment, by e-mailing your attorney and copying their legal assistant, and we will work with you to schedule that appointment.

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If you are struggling with the logistical or emotional aspects of how to handle the impact of COVID-19 on your family law matter, but you do not need legal advice, our divorce coach is happy to help! Just e-mail her to schedule an appointment.

Dr. Elizabeth DuBois—elizabeth@zfamilylaw.com

Z Family Law is working to ensure that our clients continue to receive excellent legal services as soon as – or before – the need arises. We have also created a comprehensive and frequently updated COVID-19 Resources section on our website, www.zfamilylaw.com. These resources include regular webinars, tips on co-parenting, and other information to help families get through this difficult period.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation. We will continue to monitor all legal developments and will provide you with updates as they become available. Please be safe and stay healthy.

Sincerely,

Christy A. Zlatkus

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Inna Loring

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