Qualified Domestic Relations Orders (QDROs or DROs); Steps and Timeline in the QDRO Process

Step 1: Client completes intake sheet and provides all documents and information requested; signs fee agreement, and pays retainer.

- This step is usually completed within 2 weeks, although can take longer if there are many documents needed, e.g. to support a tracing, or if one side delays in payment of the retainer

Step 2: I prepare a QDRO Draft and send it to the client(s) to review

- Draft QDRO reviewed for accuracy by clients and their attorneys (as applicable)
- Questions answered, disagreements resolved, QDRO revised as necessary
- This step usually takes 1-2 weeks, but is heavily dependent on the involvement of the clients

Step 3: The Benefit Sponsor (the Plan) Reviews Draft QDRO

- The Plan determines whether the terms and conditions in the draft QDRO could be implemented when the Plan receives the QDRO as a court order (called "Qualification")
- Some plans (Fidelity for example) will not review draft QDROs
- This step is usually completed in one month but can take longer, depending on the Plan.

Step 4: The Parties sign the pre-approved QDRO

- The QDRO is signed by clients and their attorneys (as applicable)
- This step usually is completed in one month

Step 5: The QDRO is sent to Court to become a Court Order

- The QDRO is signed by the Judge and filed at the Court
- The Court clerk sends out a certified copy of the QDRO to me
- This step usually is completed in one month

Step 6: The QDRO is sent to the Plan for Qualification

- The Plan must formally review and qualify QDRO within 30 to 60 days from receipt
- The Plan then sends a Qualification letter with instructions to clients
    - Plan instructions vary depending on whether the benefit is a pension, IRA or 401(k)
- I follow up with the clients to make sure they have received and understood the Plan's instructions, and direct them to follow up with the Plan for completion of any necessary forms.