



# Connection

UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW ■ SAYRA AND NEIL MEYERHOFF CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND THE COURTS

## Legal Parentage of Both Parents in Same-Sex Couples Increasingly Is Sanctioned Nationwide

BY NANCY D. POLIKOFF

States increasingly recognize the legal parentage of both partners in a same-sex couple, even in states banning same-sex marriage.

This comes even as two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court this term focused public attention on same-sex marriage<sup>11</sup> and, with that, on the children same-sex couples are raising. Supporters argued that marriage equality

was necessary to protect the well-being of those children; opponents recommended caution, suggesting that not enough is known about the possible negative consequences of

being raised by a gay or lesbian couple.

Recognizing the legal status of both parents is crucial to protect the child's well-being. It triggers economic advantages—access to

*Recognizing the legal status of both parents is crucial to protect the child's well-being.*

benefits under social security law should a parent die or become disabled; the ability to inherit by intestate succession; the right to sue for wrongful death; and the entitlement to financial support. It also triggers consequences critical to the child's physical and emotional well-being, including medical decision-making and preservation of the parent-child relationship should the couple relationship end. Supporters of marriage equality have used these consequences in seeking access to marriage, but the consequences flow, as they should, from legal parentage, which exists, as it does for heterosexuals, regardless of whether the parents are married.

### ADOPTION

In many states, lesbian and gay couples jointly can adopt a child related to neither of them. In addition, when a woman gives birth to a child (or a man becomes the father of a child through surrogacy), a practice called second-parent adoption allows a partner to adopt the child in a manner similar to that of a stepparent. This is possible when the state's adoption statute allows an unmarried partner to adopt without terminating the rights of the child's biological parent. The second-parent adoption practice is utilized in about half the states; in other states it is available in some counties, and seven states prohibit it.

## The Future Unified Family Court Will Expand to Handle Burgeoning Cases

BY JUDGE HOWARD I. LIPSEY

The jurisdiction of the family court in Rhode Island has expanded dramatically since its inception in 1961, with the number of litigants coming to the courts to solve their increasingly complex issues registering a similar increase.

When Rhode Island established the first Unified Family Court 42 years ago, the cases handled were relatively limited. They included juvenile delinquency and wayward cases, termination of parental rights together with dependency, neglect and abuse cases, divorces, child support collection and issues involving custody and visitation with children.

Now, we not only are handling the cases noted above, but we also are involved in addressing juvenile and adult drug issues and truancy issues, on their own dockets. We have established a juvenile mental health clinic. We have initiated and expanded mediation in both domestic cases and disputes involving termination of parental rights. Civil unions are now part of our jurisdiction and it is anticipated that, in the near future, divorces resulting from same-sex marriages also will come under the jurisdiction of our Unified Family Court. We already have child support guidelines for these cases and it is anticipated that we soon will have alimony guidelines as well. We also handle civil domestic violence cases.

see page 7

see page 4

## OVERVIEW:

# Family Courts Enduring Budget Cuts Nationwide

As the number of family law cases continue to rise in courts across the country, courts facing budget reductions are searching for ways to meet the needs of families coming into the court system for help.

In this issue of the *Unified Family Court Connection*, we take a look at a myriad of issues facing courts nationwide. We hope you find the following articles informative and helpful:

- **Nancy D. Polikoff**, a law professor at American University Washington College of Law, writes about how legal parentage of both parents in same-sex couples increasingly is sanctioned nationwide, even in states banning same-sex marriage.

- **Harry Cassidy**, the assistant director in the Trial Court Services Division of the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts who has been responsible for the Family Practice Division since 2002, discusses how family courts in states nationwide have experienced significant budget reductions despite the continuing increase of family law cases filling their dockets.

- **The Honorable Howard Lipsey**, an associate justice (ret.) of the Rhode Island Family Court, offers his view on how Unified Family Courts will expand to handle the burgeoning number of cases coming into the courts.

- **William J. Howe III, Esq.**, chair of the Oregon Task Force on Family Law, and the **Honorable Paul J. DeMuniz**, former Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, discuss how years of budget cuts and the prospect of continuing austerity threaten family courts in Oregon and across the country. They note that dockets are slipping and service is reduced, which impacts families. ■

## THE SAYRA AND NEIL MEYERHOFF CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND THE COURTS



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# Family Courts Experience

BY HARRY T. CASSIDY

Family courts in states nationwide have experienced significant budget reductions, despite the continuing increase of family law cases filling their dockets.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) ([www.ncsc.org](http://www.ncsc.org)) reported that about one third of all states indicated that they have reduced services to the public and experienced increased delays and backlogs, while about one quarter reported that actions taken due to budgetary concerns have resulted in limited access to court services.

NCSC's budget data, available on the NCSC website, is based on information received from 49 states, territories, and the District of Columbia. The budget summaries for each state are compiled into charts that indicate which states over the past three years have taken actions such as reduced hours of operation, staff layoffs, delays in filling judicial or staff support positions, furloughs and/or delays in jury trials. The site also highlights the steps taken by courts to reorganize, re-engineer procedures, or implement electronic filing records management and case tracking, sometimes referred to as "eCourt" solutions, to respond to these reductions.

Local court budgets are complicated and, accordingly, the impact of diverse changes in state and local budgets on courts around the country is complex. In fact, the establishment of a central source or clearinghouse for this data could be a worthwhile project, particularly with an emphasis on sharing creative responses to budget cuts.

The provision of accessible services to the public, including supportive social services, assistance to self-represented litigants and intensive case management are critical features of a family court. Have these services been disproportionately affected by budget reductions? To consider this question, I have focused on a few states and jurisdictions.

Over the past four years in my home state of New Jersey, the state judiciary budget, which funds all trial level staff and judges, has been virtually flat, which, combined with a salary contract for unionized workers, resulted in a budget reduction of about \$30 million each year. Managers had their salaries frozen during this time. Staff levels overall have been reduced by about 5 percent. Actual staff in the Family Division statewide has been reduced about 8.75 percent from December 2008 to December 2011.

The state has taken measures, such as delaying the filling of positions, reducing titles and requiring a state level review when filling a vacant position. Staff furloughs were instituted for one fiscal year. Despite these challenges, Family Division managers across the state report that the steps taken to streamline procedures, the cross training of staff, improvements in computer systems and the dedication of staff and managers have mitigated the direct impact on public services. Yet, there is an undeniable increase in backlogs and delays, particularly in cases, like contested divorce, that call for extensive case management and trial.

California may be the clearest example of the impact of significant statewide reductions in services in local courts. NCSC reports a reduction



# Budget Reductions as Cases Increase

in the judiciary's budget of 25 percent, which amounts to \$1 billion. The California Judicial Branch website (<http://www.courts.ca.gov/12973.htm>) lists specific consequences due to budget cuts—delays in the issuance of domestic violence restraining orders, the reduction of “self-help” services, delays in custody hearings, suspension of mediation and settlement programs, reduced hours for public access and the closure of court rooms.

In Santa Cruz County, Chief Probation Officer Scott MacDonald labels the local budgets as ranging from “bad to very bad.” Yet the commitment to examine practices, MacDonald believes, has resulted in improved services and ensured that all probation officer positions have been retained, albeit with furloughs in the last several years.

In New York, published reports conclude that budget cuts to the New York state judiciary have strained virtually every aspect of the court system, increasing delays, necessitating layoffs and adversely affecting those who depend on the courts for justice, particularly poor litigants with limited resources.

A New York State Bar Association report noted that emergency cases, such as those involving child custody and domestic violence, cannot be heard on the same day as they are filed, forcing families to incur the expense of additional child care and time off from work.

The near-elimination of the judicial hearing officer program, in which retired judges heard specialized cases, has added to judges' workload, according to the report. Layoffs of court staff have increased wait times for litigants planning to file paperwork and for members of the public seeking access to court buildings. New York City Family Court Administrator Edwina Richardson-Mendelson, testified: “In family court, the children bear the brunt of this. They wait longer and longer (sometimes years) to go home from foster care, or to find out which parent they will live with.”

In Oregon, cuts in the state judiciary budget resulted in an overall 12 percent reduction in court staff. In Multnomah County, which includes Portland, the state's largest city, staff was reduced by 19 percent. Chief Family Court Judge Maureen McKnight reported that assistance to self-represented litigants was eliminated and that courtroom staff was reduced to less than one per judge and staff has been reassigned to courtrooms daily. The lack of resources has undermined specialty courts such as domestic violence and drug courts. There have been delays in the entry of judgments and orders into the computer system, although enhanced technology enabling the electronic submission and distribution of restraining orders has had a positive impact. Nonetheless, Judge McKnight is concerned about any future reductions, noting that “we have no fat left to cut.”

Some states, such as North Dakota, have experienced a boom in new resources, while other local jurisdictions around the country

also have enjoyed greater resources or remained stable during the recession. In addition, the use of technology, such as remote video appearances, electronic filing and electronic distribution of notices and orders, also has improved efficiency and mitigated the effects of staff reductions in some cases.

A member of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) advised that at a recent meeting the potential relationship between economic conditions and changes to the population of children in foster care was discussed. In New York City, reductions in this population have resulted in reduced hearing delays, as noted by Judge Richardson-Mendelson, while, in Los Angeles, the expansion of this caseload has aggravated delays in the handling of foster care cases. This area merits additional review.

I would recommend that those involved in family law reform consider establishing a database that provides comprehensive information on family court budgets and the innovative solutions that managers and judges have developed across the country to improve the efficiency of their courts and reallocate court resources. ■



Harry Cassidy is an assistant director in the Trial Court Services Division of the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts and has been responsible for the Family Practice Division since 2002. He began his career in the New Jersey judiciary as a probation officer in Burlington County.

## BENCHBOOK ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE IS NOW AVAILABLE

While substance abuse and addiction are pervasive throughout the family court system, few resources are available for family law attorneys and members of the judiciary who want information specifically geared to parents and children in the family justice system.

In order to meet this need, the University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts has published the *Benchbook on Substance Abuse and Addiction for Family Courts*. The long-awaited publication provides clear and concise information about the range of substance abuse and addiction issues affecting families and children in family courts.

To learn more, visit:

<http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc/publications/index.cfm> or email [cfcc@ubalt.edu](mailto:cfcc@ubalt.edu).

# Sanctioning Legal Rights of Both Parents from pg. 1

## LEGAL PARENTAGE BY STATUTE OR COMMON LAW

Increasingly, states recognize a child's two same-sex parents by operation of law without an adoption. This can happen in four different ways.

### Laws that apply to donor insemination

Many states address parentage of children born through assisted reproduction. The original Uniform Parentage Act (UPA) states that a husband who consents to his wife's insemination with donor semen is a parent of the resulting child. The more recent American Bar Association Model Act on Assisted Reproductive Technologies defines parentage to include any consenting partner, regardless of gender or marital status. The District of Columbia, New Mexico and Washington have enacted such a law, thus making a birth mother's consenting female partner a parent of the resulting child. In Oregon, whose statute tracks the original UPA, an appeals court ruled that, to save the statute from unconstitutionality, it must equally apply to the consenting female partner of a woman who bears a child.

### Laws that presume parentage of a person who functions as a parent

The 1973 UPA creates a presumption that a man is a child's father if "he receives the child into his home and openly holds out the child as his natural child." The 2002 UPA modified the presumption to apply when "for the first two years of the child's life, he resided in the same household with the child and openly held out the child as his own."

On its face, this statute applies to a male same-sex couple raising a child conceived through surrogacy using the genetic material of one partner. The 1973 and 2002 UPA also state that provisions in the act for determining paternity apply to determinations of maternity. Courts in California, Colorado, New Mexico and Kansas have applied this statutory "holding out" framework to find a mother's female partner a presumptive parent. Those courts further declined to rebut the parentage presumption, because it would leave the child with only one parent and because a man's parentage is not automatically rebutted by his lack of biological connection to a child.

Alabama, Minnesota, and Texas also presume parentage for a man who holds out the child as his own; apply the principles for determining paternity to determinations of maternity; and have case law that a presumed parent's lack of genetic connection does not automatically rebut parentage. Those states have not yet had the opportunity to apply that legal framework to a child raised by two mothers.

### De facto parentage by case law or statute

The Washington Supreme Court ruled in a case involving the child of a lesbian couple that the state's UPA was not the only method of proving parentage. Using common law, the court found that the child's non-biological mother was a de facto parent and stood "in legal parity" with the

*A state court cannot refuse to recognize parentage conferred on a same-sex couple by an adoption decree or parentage judgment from another state.*

child's biological mother. In Delaware, after a court rejected such reasoning, the legislature amended its UPA to add a statutory definition of a de facto parent. A person is a child's parent if she exercised parental responsibilities, functioned as a parent long enough for a bonded and dependent relationship to develop with the child, and if the child's parent fostered the establishment of that parent-like relationship. The Delaware Supreme Court has applied this statute to find that a

child had two legal mothers.

### The marital presumption

As of August 1, 2013, 13 states and the District of Columbia allows same-sex couples to marry. Seven additional jurisdictions extend to same-sex couples the state-based legal consequences of marriage, including the presumption that the spouse of a woman who gives birth is a parent of that child.

## INTERSTATE RECOGNITION

There is no public policy exception to the Full Faith and Credit Clause. A state court, therefore, cannot refuse to recognize parentage conferred on a same-sex couple by an adoption decree or parentage judgment from another state. Parentage by way of the marital presumption alone, however, is vulnerable in states with a constitutional amendment banning recognition of same-sex marriages from elsewhere, as a court might find such parentage to be recognition of the marriage. Parentage conferred by statute or common law, independent of a couple's marital status, is less vulnerable, but advocates for gay and lesbian families urge all couples to obtain an adoption or parentage judgment to garner the protection the Full Faith and Credit clause provides.

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

For over two decades, disputes over custody and visitation rights have arisen when a same-sex couple splits up and there has been no second-parent adoption. The parent with legal status based on biology or adoption may claim a statutory and constitutional right, citing *Troxel v. Granville*, to control the child's upbringing. Courts recognizing parentage on the statutory or common law theories discussed above uniformly have responded that the child has two parents who have equal constitutional rights to raise the child.

In most states where the second functional parent is not recognized as a legal parent, including many where same-sex couples cannot get any legal recognition, such as Kentucky and

*see page 6*

# Oregon's Unified Family Court Is Doing More with Less Resources

BY WILLIAM J. HOWE III AND  
JUDGE PAUL J. DEMUNIZ

Years of budget cuts and the prospect of continuing austerity threaten family courts not just in Oregon but across the country. Dockets are slipping and service is degrading. As a consequence, families are suffering.

Twenty years ago, the Oregon Task Force on Family Law proposed the most global revision of family conflict management in the U.S. These reforms included the creation of Unified Family Courts, research-based parenting plans, mandatory parent education and settlement conferences, forms for self-represented litigants, court facilitators to assist self-represented litigants and expanded court-connected mediation programs.

These reforms were informed by Association of Family and Conciliation Courts research and best practices models from other states and foreign jurisdictions such as Australia, which pioneered a vertically integrated family court in 1975.

The goal of these reforms was to substitute a more therapeutic, problem-solving approach for the traditional adversarial model of divorce proceedings. Deschutes County, Oregon is a mixed urban and rural judicial district that was honored as a model family court by the National Center for State Courts. It still operates a family court but with a drastically reduced staff. In 2012, the Deschutes County Court was forced to cease answering telephone calls after 2 p.m. because of staffing cuts. Staff was ordered to promptly enter judgment instead of maintaining filing because there was insufficient staffing to accomplish both.

In Oregon, judicial districts, the state court administrator's office, and the appellate courts currently function without sufficient staff. All courts are closed on mandatory "furlough days" to preserve sufficient staffing levels on days when the courts are open.

With the ongoing budget cuts, a party's inability to access the court in a family law case temporarily ratifies the status quo, which likely is unjust and potentially harmful to one of the parties or the children. The National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges surveyed 36 courts around the country and found that 70 percent were clearing fewer cases than were being filed, so increasing backlogs are a national problem.

Litigants with financial resources often are resorting to private judging, the practice of hiring retired judges as reference judges. This threatens to create a two-tiered system where the poor and middle class are being served by the crumbling public system while the wealthy retain private judges. This likely will result in affluent litigants no longer feeling obligated to support the public system.

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*The strain on family courts is exacerbated by increasingly complex matters before the courts.*

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The strain on family courts is exacerbated by increasingly complex matters that involve the dissolution of same-sex relationships, domestic partnerships, reproductive technology issues, parental relocation and complex children's issues in our country, where over 40 percent of children are born to unwed mothers.

Family law cases involve greater numbers of self-represented litigants. Indeed, in most jurisdictions, over 50 percent of family law litigants are self-represented. In Oregon, that number is over 60 percent, while California and other states register still higher numbers of self-represented litigants. Even educated and affluent litigants who choose to represent themselves have great difficulty maneuvering through a judicial process designed for litigants represented by lawyers.

During the past 50 years, the courts and legislatures increasingly have privatized family relationships and allowed for greater self-determination by the parties. Premarital agreements, long held to be void as violating public policy, now routinely are enforced. Domestic partnership agreements and settlement agreements reached between divorcing parties are not only enforced but favored.

There is no realistic prospect that funding of the Judicial Branch in Oregon or other states will be restored to pre-recession levels in the near future. Even if by some magical means all budget cuts were reversed, the tidal wave of self-represented litigants and increasingly complex family law litigation could not be managed without substantial reform.

Courts have met the challenge of dealing with major cultural shifts in the past. Many reforms now under consideration are not simply a response to shrinking budgets, but also represent more enlightened public policy. Courts have adapted to other cultural changes by, for example, adopting "no-fault" divorce, initially in California in 1969, with 46 states following suit by 1976. Another example is the "tender years doctrine," based on a strong preference for awarding custody to a mother in child custody disputes, which was replaced by the "best interest" standard, recognizing the value of fathers as engaged parents. Courts have become far more sensitive, sophisticated and effective in managing domestic violence, mental health and chemical abuse issues.

So how can family courts improve access to justice in this time of austerity? Oregon is pursuing the following policies and initiatives:

- Oregon courts and judicial officers, at a minimum, must be able to perform their core functions of fact finding, issuing judgments and enforcing court orders. In order to preserve judicial resources and perform these functions, some previously court-connected functions will be taken over by community partners. For instance, law libraries and eventually other libraries will be encouraged to become information centers for self-represented litigants

see page 6



## Oregon's UFC is Doing More With Less Resources *from pg. 5*

since family law facilitators are no longer employed by most judicial district courts.

- Deschutes County will pilot the Informal Domestic Relations Trial (IDRT) modeled on Idaho's Informal Custody Trial (Rule 16.p.) but with much expanded subject-matter jurisdiction. All parties to dissolution of marriage cases will be offered the choice to "declare" at an early status or case management conference whether they wish to utilize the IDRT, which waives most rules of evidence, offers an accelerated docket, and makes the entire domestic relations process more accessible to litigants without lawyers. Ironically, the goal is to make it more cost-effective and easier for litigants to hire lawyers because the process will be shortened dramatically.

- State judiciary will implement eCourt, which will be fully operational statewide by 2014. This program provides a statewide virtual courthouse, using technology to increase access to the courts, improve court efficiency, and ensure

that judges have complete and timely information with which to make the most effective dispositions.

- Litigants in family law cases are better served if they have legal representation, even when representation is limited to specific issues in the case. The courts will encourage promotion of "unbundled legal services" by lawyers. Lawyers willing to engage in this form of limited service representation have guaranteed malpractice coverage by Oregon's Professional Liability Fund, its lawyer-owned malpractice carrier, and Oregon's Code of Professional Responsibility has been amended to approve unbundled legal services.

The authors and Professor Barbara Babb of the University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts, among others, are members of the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System's Honoring Families Initiative (HFI) advisory board. HFI's goal is to develop a model for a multidisciplinary center, which will be piloted at the University of Denver. The center will permit litigants or prospective litigants to gain access to various services outside of the court in order to help them develop parenting skills, financial stability and strategies for navigating the legal system that foster healthy reorganization of families. If successful, this model will be replicated in Oregon, resulting in improved services to divorcing families and relieving the court of responsibilities that can be better and more efficiently assumed by others.

Many other reforms are under consideration. It is trite but true that the funding crisis faced by Oregon courts has presented an opportunity to reevaluate the judicial branch's core functions and retool in ways that better serve children and families who are dealing with family conflict and divorce. While change is never easy, helping children and families makes it worth the effort. ■

## Sanctioning Both Parents' Legal Rights

*from pg. 4*

North Carolina, courts nonetheless have ruled that the deliberate creation of a two-parent home by the legal parent is entirely distinguishable from a situation in which a grandparent or other third party seeks visitation rights. Those courts have approved joint custody and visitation awards. A small number of state courts have held to the contrary, however, finding *Troxel* applicable, at least in the absence of a statute to the contrary. In those states, a child can lose one of the two persons with whom he has a child-parent relationship, with no assessment of that child's best interests.

Children planned for and raised by a same-sex couple have two parents. Increasingly, courts and legislatures recognize this, but the law is unsettled in many states, and families who move pose additional challenges. Lawyers without experience in this area should consult a national organization, such as the National Center for Lesbian Rights ([www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)), which has a staff that offers its expertise in individual cases. NCLR and the national network with which it works, also can help legislators and policy advocates who want to reform state laws along the lines discussed above. This work is necessary, even with the recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on same-sex marriage. ■

<sup>[1]</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court, on a 5-4 vote, held that Section 3 of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) denying benefits in same-sex married couples violated the U.S. Constitutional's guarantee of equal protection under the law. Also on a 5-4 vote, the Court let stand a lower court decision that struck down California's Proposition 8 ballot initiative, which defined marriage as between one man and one woman. The June 26, 2013 decisions effectively paved the way for same-sex couples to receive the federal consequences of marriage and allowed same-sex marriages to resume in California.



Nancy D. Polikoff is a law professor at American University Washington College of Law. She previously supervised family law programs at the Women's Legal Defense Fund (now National Partnership for Women and Families) and practiced as part of a feminist law collective. She recently authored *Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage: Valuing All Families Under the Law* (Beacon Press 2008).



William J. Howe, III, Esq., is a shareholder at Gevurtz, Menashe, Larson & Howe, serves as chair for the Oregon Task Force on Family Law and is vice-chair of the Oregon Statewide Family Law Advisory Committee.



The Honorable Paul I. DeMuniz was Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court from 2006 to 2012 and former judge of the Oregon Court of Appeals. He currently is a distinguished jurist at Willamette University College of Law.

# Unified Family Courts Will Expand in the Next Decade *from pg. 1*

*Courts are seeing a dramatic increase in the numbers of litigants with multiple issues.*

With this expanded jurisdiction, the necessity for a Unified Family Court is obvious, particularly as the numbers of litigants pouring into the courts with multiple issues dramatically have expanded as well. The courts are now faced with a massive number of self-represented litigants. The funding to provide counsel to all but a small number of self-represented litigants is limited as a result of the financial crisis that most states are facing.

What, then, do I foresee as the future of the Unified Family Court, or for that matter any other type of family court?

- The number of cases that actually are litigated will not only diminish rapidly but these cases will disappear almost completely.
- The courts will change from an arena for litigation to a source of mediation and social services.
- The divorces heard by the courts essentially will be run-of-the-mill uncontested cases. They already will have been mediated to the point of either an agreement in a decree or a marital settlement agreement prepared by a mediator and, in fact, submitted to the court by self-represented litigants.
- The use of mental health clinics and psychologists, either employed by the court or serving on a list of independent contractors, will increase. They will, in conjunction with the mediators, resolve almost all child custody cases.

• Juvenile justice cases still will involve a Justice of the Court because due process issues remain. Most judges currently on domestic calendars will return to juvenile calendars, even though statistically 95 percent of these juvenile cases are resolved by pleas.

• In view of the existence of child support guidelines and the probability that there will also be alimony guidelines, it is not far-fetched to assume that most cases involving child or spousal support will be resolved in an almost robotic manner.

• The family court of the future, whether unified or otherwise, will become an expanded social service agency as distinguished from the courts as we have known them in the past. The court personnel primarily will be individuals trained in mediation, psychology and associated areas of the social sciences.

The future remains to be seen, but I foresee that the continuing burgeoning of family law cases will result in significant changes in the landscape of family courts for the next decade. ■



Judge Lipsey is an associate justice (ret.) of the Rhode Island Family Court (senior status from January 1, 2009), a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, a fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and past chair of the American Bar Association's Section of Family Law.

## SUPPORT CFCC'S VITAL WORK

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC), a non-profit organization, offers strategic planning and technical assistance to structure Unified Family Courts (UFCs), as well as evaluations of the effectiveness of these courts and their related programs.

Other CFCC services include compiling surveys and reports, formulating performance standards and measures, providing training and workshops and organizing conferences for the judicial, legal and court communities. CFCC relies on the support of foundations, grants and partners to fulfill its mission to improve the lives of families and children and the health of communities through family court reform.

Visit <http://law.ubalt.edu/template.cfm?page=1189> for additional information. See also:

<http://www.facebook.com/CFCCatUBaltLaw>.

## IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Do you want to keep more students in school and help them re-engage and get excited about learning again? The University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) Truancy Court Program has a solid track record with proven results: over three-fourths of participating students during the 2011-2012 academic year reduced their unexcused absences and tardies by a minimum of 65 percent. CFCC's early intervention program leverages the stature and authority of volunteer judges to help students substantially increase attendance and improve grades and behaviors.

Learn how we do it by ordering the *Truancy Court Program Toolkit*. This guide enables you to implement a new program in your schools or enhance an existing one. It includes forms and detailed guides for the team, teachers, and judge.

To learn more, visit <http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc/publications/index.cfm> or email [cfcc@ubalt.edu](mailto:cfcc@ubalt.edu).



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### DVD on Unified Family Courts Now Available

A compelling DVD, "Unified Family Courts: Efficient, Effective, Responsive," puts a human face on the Unified Family Court (UFC), a court model designed to address the nature of family law cases. The DVD contrasts the experiences of two women in their divorce proceedings.



As portrayed in the DVD, one woman was subject to a traditional court system, while the other's divorce was handled in a UFC. The University of Baltimore School of Law's Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families Children and the Courts produced the DVD, which includes interviews with judges, attorneys, services providers and UFC experts.

For a free copy of the DVD, please email Professor Barbara A. Babb at [bbabb@ubalt.edu](mailto:bbabb@ubalt.edu).

**ASK THE EDITOR:** Unified Family Courts cover a myriad of issues, problems and innovations. If you have questions or you would like us to address, or if you want to contribute to the newsletter, please send your suggestions to us. We will try to include them in upcoming editions of the *Unified Family Court Connection*. Send your questions or contributions to: [ccfc@ubalt.edu](mailto:cfcc@ubalt.edu).

**FEEDBACK:** We value your opinions and your comments! We look forward to hearing from you at [ccfc@ubalt.edu](mailto:cfcc@ubalt.edu).

**MAILING LIST:** If you want to be added to our mailing list for the newsletter or know of others who would like to receive the *Unified Family Court Connection*, please send your request (with names and addresses) to [ccfc@ubalt.edu](mailto:cfcc@ubalt.edu).