



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA
94102-3688
Tel 415-865-4200
TDD 415-865-4272
Fax 415-865-4205
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

FACT SHEET

Elkins Family Law Task Force

The Elkins Family Law Task Force, chaired by Associate Justice Laurie D. Zelon of the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District (Los Angeles), was appointed in May 2008 to conduct a comprehensive review of family law proceedings and recommend to the Judicial Council of California proposals that will increase access to justice, ensure due process, and provide for more effective and consistent rules, policies, and procedures.

Committed to Equal Justice and a Collaborative Process

The Elkins Family Law Task Force was appointed in response to an August 2007 California Supreme Court opinion, *Elkins v. Superior Court* (2007) 41 Cal.4th 1337, which held that marital dissolution trials should “proceed under the same general rules of procedure that govern other civil trials” (*id.* at p. 1345). The charge of the task force is to propose measures to improve efficiency and fairness in family law proceedings and ensure access to justice for all family law litigants.

Family law cases are critically important to litigants, children, and families, as well as the community at large. The increasing demands on courts dealing with family law cases include complex legal issues, the high volume of cases, and staggering numbers of self-represented litigants—in many communities, over 75 percent of family law cases have at least one self-represented party.

At its initial meeting in June 2008, the task force defined values that have guided its work and will inform proposed recommendations:

- Ensuring justice, fairness, and due process in family law;
- Ensuring meaningful access for all litigants;
- Using innovative techniques to promote effectiveness and efficiency;
- Improving the status of, and respect for, family law litigants and the family law process; and
- Securing adequate resources, including existing, reallocated, and new resources.

The task force has sought input from all stakeholders, including litigants, attorneys, judicial officers, and court staff and will continue to do so as it develops its recommendations.

Guiding Principles

The work of the task force is guided by the following six principles:

1. Courts will ensure consistent and timely access to equal justice for all individuals, families, and children in family law proceedings.
2. Statutes, rules, procedures, and practices will protect procedural fairness and the due process rights of parties as well as seek to increase efficiency, effectiveness, consistency, and understandability. Simplification must not diminish due process rights. Task force recommendations will be evaluated for their potential impact on due process, fairness, and effective and timely access.
3. Court services, procedures, and calendaring should address the needs of parties—whether attorney-represented or self-represented. They should also be adapted to the complex and diverse needs of individuals, families and children in court. In making its recommendations, the task force will be cognizant of the various challenges litigants may have accessing the courts, including language barriers, cultural barriers, and disabilities.
4. The task force will identify the resources courts require to handle increasingly complex and demanding family law caseloads. Investing in the modernization of family law courts will improve the quality of outcomes for Californians and enhance the priority given to and status of family law proceedings.
5. The task force is aware of the unique opportunity to make far-reaching, positive changes in family law. The task force is mindful of the long-term impact of family law on individuals, families, children, and society.
6. The task force will develop its recommendations through an inclusive process that relies on consultation with interested stakeholders and the public, as well as coordination and collaboration with ongoing related projects and efforts to improve family law.

Diverse Membership With Extensive Expertise

The 38-member task force includes appellate court justices, judges, court commissioners, private attorneys, legal aid attorneys, family law facilitators, self-help center attorneys, court executives, family court managers, court administrators, and

legislative staff. Members have extensive experience in all aspects of family law and represent courts and diverse cultural and economic communities from throughout the state. A roster of members is included at pages 4-5.

Input Sought Through Several Channels

The task force has been seeking input in a variety of ways, including:

- Focus groups conducted across the state;
- Research on best or promising practices both within and outside of California;
- Presentations from task force members and other experts about different aspects of the court process;
- Public hearings;
- A survey of bar members;
- Public comment, solicited via the Web, e-mail, and regular mail; and
- Circulation of draft recommendations for consideration by the public and the courts.

The Elkins Family Law Task Force welcomes written comments and specific suggestions from interested stakeholders. Please e-mail: elkinstaskforce@jud.ca.gov.

Contact:

Patricia Rivera, Administrative Coordinator, Center for Families, Children & the Courts
patricia.rivera@jud.ca.gov

Additional resources:

General court information, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_12courtssupct.htm;
Supreme Court, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/

Roster of the Elkins Family Law Task Force

Chair

Hon. Laurie D. Zelon
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,
Second Appellate District, Division Seven*

Members

Ms. Tülin D. Açıkalın
*Managing Attorney
Bay Area Legal Aid*

Hon. Sue Alexander
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Alameda*

Hon. Lorna A. Alksne
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego*

Hon. Irma Poole Asberry
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Riverside*

Ms. Kathy Bañuelos
*Counsel
California Senate Judiciary Committee*

Mr. Richard Barry
*Attorney at Law
San Rafael*

Hon. Louise Bayles-Fightmaster
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Sonoma*

Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Sacramento*

Ms. Linda D. Daeley
*Family Law Manager
Superior Court of California,
County of Orange*

Ms. Julie C. Dodge
*Family Law Facilitator
Self-Help Center Attorney
Superior Court of California,
County of Stanislaus*

Ms. Patricia Foster
*Director, Family Court and Special Services
Superior Court of California,
County of Tulare*

Ms. Ana María García
*Supervising Attorney
Neighborhood Legal Services of
Los Angeles County*

Hon. Michael J. Gassner
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of San Bernardino*

Hon. Barry P. Goode
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Contra Costa*

Mr. José Octavio Guillén
*Executive Officer
Superior Court of California,
County of Sonoma*

Mr. Vahan Hovsepian
*Director, Family and Children Services
Superior Court of California,
County of Butte*

Hon. Joan K. Irion
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,
Fourth Appellate District, Division One*

Hon. Irwin H. Joseph
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Santa Cruz*

Hon. Mark A. Juhas
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles*

Mr. Lawrence E. Leone
*Attorney at Law
Los Angeles*

Mr. Drew Liebert
*Chief Counsel
California Assembly Judiciary Committee*

Ms. Margaret Little, Ph.D.

Senior Administrator
Family Law and Probate
Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles

Ms. Judy B. Louie

Director, ACCESS Center
Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

Hon. Patricia M. Lucas

Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Santa Clara

Mr. Mark E. Minyard

Attorney at Law
Newport Beach

Ms. Suzanne Clark Morlock

Family Law Facilitator
and Self-Help Center Director
Superior Court of California,
County of Tuolumne

Ms. Sandra Joan Morris

Attorney at Law
San Diego

Ms. Lorie S. Nachlis

Attorney at Law
San Francisco

Hon. Kimberly J. Nystrom-Geist

Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Fresno

Ms. Rebecca L. Prater

Staff Attorney
Office of the Family Law Facilitator
Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego

Hon. Vance W. Raye

Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,
Third Appellate District

Mr. Stephen B. Ruben

Attorney at Law
San Francisco

Ms. Caron Caines Smith

Family Law Case Coordinator Attorney
Superior Court of California,
County of Ventura

Hon. Nancy Wieben Stock

Presiding Judge of the
Superior Court of California,
County of Orange

Mr. Hugh K. Swift

Executive Officer
Superior Court of California,
County of Amador

Hon. B. Scott Thomsen

Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, Counties of Nevada and Sierra

Mr. Peter M. Walzer

Attorney at Law
Woodland Hills

State Bar Liaison

Ms. Sharon Ngim

Program Developer and Staff Liaison,
Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal
Services
The State Bar of California Office of Legal
Services, Access & Fairness Programs

AOC Lead Staff

Ms. Diane Nunn

Director
Center for Families, Children & the Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts

AOC Staff to the Task Force

Ms. Bonnie Rose Hough

Managing Attorney
Center for Families, Children & the Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts

Ms. Katie Howard

Supervisor
Center for Families, Children & the Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts

Ms. Patricia Rivera

Administrative Coordinator
Center for Families, Children & the Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts

Ms. Julia Weber

Supervising Attorney
Center for Families, Children & the Courts
Administrative Office of the Courts