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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LASC FAMILY LAW DIVISION ANNOUNCES VOLUNTARY SETTLEMENT PROJECT PILOT

The Family Law Division of the Los Angeles Superior Court is excited to announce the launch of a pilot project which will provide an opportunity for those with family law cases to participate in court-sponsored Voluntary Settlement Conferences (VSC).

The no-cost program is designed so that families of all economic status, including the self-represented community, can avail themselves of a resource generally available only to those who possess the financial resources to hire a private dispute-resolution professional as a means of accomplishing an early settlement of their case.

“Free programs and services sponsored by the Court to help litigants meet, talk, and fairly resolve their differences with guidance from trained and knowledgeable personnel, are to be applauded,” said Betty Nordwind, executive director of the Harriet Buhai Center for Family Law. “This of course assumes adequate protection for victims of domestic violence who oftentimes lack equal bargaining power and are fearful of dealing directly with their abuser.”

All family law case types are eligible to participate, including cases where one or both parties are self-represented. In order to be considered for the program, counsel and the parties acknowledge that they have all the information necessary to reach a full and complete settlement at the VSC.

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Even if the case does not settle through participation in the VSC, the process will result in a case that is appropriately prepared for trial, saving time and money for all involved.

“This pilot project will provide mediation at an earlier point where there is the real possibility that the parties will still be able to protect and divide the assets which they have worked so hard to achieve and where there is the ability to protect their children from further acrimony of their parents, thereby allowing our Courts to do what is in the best interest of our children,” said Jody Bogen, chair of the family law section of the Los Angeles County Bar Association. “By providing trial judges as mediators for these families, there is the real possibility for settlement, especially when the litigants will be hearing from judges who actually hear all of their similar issues on a daily basis.”

All VSC requests will be administered by the family law supervising judge in Department 2 at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse. If the case is deemed appropriate for VSC, the conference will be scheduled in one of the long-cause courtrooms located in the four courthouses listed below.

When feasible, cases will be assigned to courtrooms based on geographic zones: the **Van Nuys East Courthouse** will service the Chatsworth and Michael D. Antonovich courthouses; the **Governor George Deukmejian Courthouse** in Long Beach will service the Pomona, Santa Monica, and Torrance courthouses; and the **Central Civil West (CCW)** and **Stanley Mosk** courthouses will service all other courthouses and cases in which the parties are willing to travel to Mosk or CCW in downtown Los Angeles.

Family law cases are heard at 12 courthouses located throughout the county and over 96,000 family law cases were filed in 2016. Family law filings include dissolutions (divorce), legal separations, child support, and paternity cases, as well as requests for domestic violence restraining orders.

“The pilot program is the result of the collaborative effort of the entire family law division,” said Judge Thomas Trent Lewis, supervising judge of family law. “We are committed to finding new, innovative ways to optimize efficiency while providing a high degree of service to court users. It is important that the Los Angeles Superior Court ensure that access to justice is attainable for the entire community we serve, not just for those who are better situated economically.”

Presiding Judge Daniel Buckley said “Our Court faces many challenges. Some of them require additional funding and some we are addressing through expanded use of technology. But by utilizing the greatest resource we already have, our roster of talented, committed judicial officers, we can increase our ability to assist with the fair resolution of these cases so people can move on with their lives.”

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