

Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

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NEWS RELEASE: COVID-19

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 6, 2020

NEW ONLINE TOOL TO HELP PARENTS RESOLVE CUSTODY DISPUTES WITHOUT COMING TO COURT

No Charge for the Online Dispute Resolution Program During the Pandemic

Parents seeking to negotiate and resolve Family Law child custody and visitation issues without coming to court may take advantage of a new free online tool to help them reach a Parenting Plan Agreement. The Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) program is part of the Court's many initiatives that offer access to justice in convenient, efficient ways during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

Effective May 18, an attorney, or a parent who is self-represented or represented by an attorney, may initiate a negotiation invitation through the ODR program. The other party will then receive an email invite to participate. The other parent or attorney then has the option to provide a response. Once the parents agree on a plan, the ODR tool will generate a Parenting Plan Agreement, which the parents may file with the Court via fax, U.S. mail or drop box outside the courthouse. If accepted, the plan becomes the order of the court.

"I want to thank the Court's Executive Officer/Clerk of Court Sherri R. Carter for finding an online solution for parents to resolve their child custody disputes," Presiding Judge Kevin C. Brazile said. "The Court is not currently scheduling or conducting Child Custody Mediations as part of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This new online tool is another way the Court is continuing to offer convenient, safe ways to help Los Angeles County residents access justice from anywhere, which helps to promote social distancing in our courthouses. Over the past six years, the Court has prioritized and developed technology innovations to integrate online tools for convenient, modern access to justice. Those improvements have provided the framework for the Court to quickly expand technology improvements during this pandemic."

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Rusty Smith, president of Tyler Technologies' Courts & Justice Division, provider of the new ODR tool, said: "The Superior Court of Los Angeles County is at the forefront of courts finding ways to increase access to justice with online tools. Tyler values our partnership with the nation's largest trial court, and we are enthusiastic about working together to help ensure all residents have equal access to justice by allowing parents to remotely establish custody agreements. While this type of service is critical now more than ever, we believe the platform will remain a valuable resource to the community even after the immediate public health crisis subsides."

The ODR program will be accessible later this month at this link:
<http://www.lacourt.org/division/familylaw/familylaw.aspx>.

If the parties are unable to resolve all child custody and visitation issues, they will be required to attend a Family Court Services mediation appointment in-person at a future date.

Family Court Services handles more than 12,500 mediation cases and conducts over 1,500 parenting plan assessments annually. Currently, in-person mediation appointments are scheduled many months from now due to the COVID-19 restrictions that prioritize essential, time-sensitive matters. The ODR program offers an alternative to those mediation appointments and allows the parties to resolve their cases much sooner.

Issued by: Sherri R. Carter
Executive Officer/Clerk of Court

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