

## Reduced Fee Mediation Referral Program

This program was developed in order to assist low income families in achieving an agreed plan to better co-parent their children and avoid the stress and costs a lengthy custody battle creates.

Specifically, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is the recipient of a grant which helps promote equal access to justice through the use of reduced fee mediation.

Though Juvenile Court is not mandated by statute to refer to mediation during custody proceedings, Judge Philyaw implemented the above program because parents who agree to co-parenting plans are more inclined to follow it in benefit of their children.

The Reduced Fee Mediation Referral Program is used by the Juvenile Court Judge and Magistrates during custody proceedings where parties are, among other things, seeking to establish or modify a parenting plan.

During these proceedings, the judge or magistrate must determine that the party or parties is/are indigent. Then, they refer the parties to mediation that must be at least attempted before the next court date. According to the above mentioned grant, the maximum fee that a party will pay for "out of session" time is \$40 and \$50 for "in session time". Therefore, if the judge or magistrate determines that the parties must pay \$10 each for out of session time and \$10 each for in session time, the Administrative Office of the court will pay the mediator the remaining balance per hour.

**For Example:** Mom is found to be indigent and ordered to pay \$10 per hour; the AOC will pay the mediator the remaining \$30 per hour for out of session time and the remaining \$40 per hour for in session time.

The mediator will then send a report to the court, informing the judge or magistrate if the parties reached a mediated agreement or not. The parties often then submit an agreed parenting plan.

This program has helped hundreds of co-parenting parties save time, money and avoid the hardship that a long drawn out litigation entails.