

## **RULE 1915.4-2 CUSTODY CONFERENCE OFFICERS**

- (a) Custody Conference Officers shall be appointed by the Court to meet with the parties and their legal counsel in a custody action to conciliate the matter, attempt to resolve issues and reach an agreed Parenting Plan/Custody Order and/or if this cannot be accomplished, to define and narrow the issues to be heard by a Judge.
- (b) The compensation of Custody Conference Officers shall be set by order of court by the President Judge.
- (c) Custody Conference Officers – Not Witnesses
  - 1. To facilitate the conference process and encourage frank, open and meaningful exchanges between the parties and their respective counsel, statements made by the parties, or their witnesses, shall not be admissible as evidence in a Custody Trial before the Court.
  - 2. The Custody Conference Officer shall not be a witness for or against any party in a Custody Trial before the Court or in any other proceeding whatsoever absent Court Order.
- (d) Agreement of Parties at Conciliation Conference.
  - (1) If the parties are able to reach an agreement during the Custody Conference, the Custody Conference Officer shall prepare a proposed Parenting Plan and Custody Order memorializing the agreement.
  - (2) The Proposed Parenting Plan and Order shall be submitted to a Family Court Judge. If a Family Court Judge has previously handled any of the parties' prior contested family law matters, it will be submitted to that Judge.
  - (3) If approved and signed by the Court, the Court Administrator's Office shall file the Parenting Plan/Custody Order with the Prothonotary and mail copies to all parties.
- (e) No Agreement
  - 1. If the parties are unable to reach an agreement during the Custody Conference, the Custody Conference Officer shall prepare a Conference Summary Report for the Court which shall include the following:
    - (a) All relevant information gathered by the Custody Conference Officer during the conference.

- (b) A summary of the contested issues to be decided by the Court.
  - (c) List any criminal or abuse history on the parties' Criminal History and Abuse Verification warranting the Court to immediately order an Evaluation pursuant to 23 Pa.C.S.A. §5329 or §5330.
  - (d) Summarize any mental health or drug or alcohol problems raised at the Conference and recommend whether the Court should order an evaluation pursuant to Pa.R.C.P. 1915.8.
  - (e) Any agreed Interim Parenting Plan/Custody Order.
  - (f) A list of the names and relationships of all persons who reside in each parties' household.
  - (g) Any reports from appropriate agencies/experts.
  - (h) Whether independent counsel should be appointed for the child(ren).
  - (i) The present status of the custody of the child(ren).
  - (j) Any existing Parenting Plan/Custody Order.
2. The Court Administrator's Office shall file the Conference Summary Report with the Prothonotary and mail copies to all parties.
  3. The Court Administrator's Office shall promptly forward the Conference Summary Report and file to the assigned Family Court Judge.
  4. As a general rule, if a Judge has handled a contested family law case for that family, the matter will be assigned to that Judge.