



News Release

Superior Court of California

County of San Francisco

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SAN FRANCISCO SUPERIOR COURT HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF MEDIATION PROGRAMS DURING STATEWIDE MEDIATION WEEK

SAN FRANCISCO -- The San Francisco Superior Court is holding a mediator appreciation event at the Civic Center Courthouse on March 20 to honor mediators in the Court's five mediation programs. The event, which coincides with Mediation Week activities held by Courts throughout the state, recognizes the contribution of the Court's mediation programs in Juvenile Dependency, Probate, General Civil, Small Claims and Family Law.

"Mediators are essential to helping parties settle their differences," Presiding Judge James J. McBride said. "Mediators help parties to avoid the financial and emotional hardships of litigation. Their success in helping parties reach agreement also helps the Court run efficiently."

The San Francisco Superior Court will hold a Mediation Week event to recognize the work of mediators who work in the Court. Presiding Judge McBride will address mediators during the event, which is scheduled for Noon to 1:30 p.m. on Friday, March 20th in the Civic Center Courthouse, 400 McAllister St., 4th Floor Rotunda. Ron Kelly, a mediation expert and trainer, will give a workshop on "Dealing With Difficult Parties." **Attendance is limited to program mediators. For more information, please call (415) 551.3869.**

On March 13, 2009, the Judicial Council unanimously adopted a standing resolution recognizing the third week of every March as "Mediation Week." Chief Justice Ronald M. George and Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey signed the resolution, which recognizes the benefits and success of Court mediation programs. The resolution also commends the efforts of all those who make mediation and mediation programs available to the citizens of California, and encourages the courts to recognize those individuals and to publicize their mediation programs during Mediation Week.

The San Francisco Superior Court offers the following mediation services:

- **The Unified Family Court Services** department provides free, confidential mediation. All Unified Family Court Services mediators are Court employees. They are clinically trained and experienced in working with families. The mediators' main focus is always the best interests of the child.
 - The program offers mediation for all parents in Family Law who cannot resolve disputes related to **custody and/or time-sharing arrangements**. Parties must attend mediation and an orientation program before the Court will hear any requests related to custody or time-share issues.
 - Mediations also are provided in **Juvenile Dependency (child protection) cases**. The judge may order the case to mediation on its own motion, or based on a request from the parties. Immediately following the mediation, the matter is returned to Court for judicial review and the entry of the parties' agreement as an order of the Court. Juvenile dependency mediation services are available at any stage of the dependency process. Some of the issues that may be mediated are jurisdictional issues, visits, service plans, the appropriate placement of children, reunification transition plans, the termination of services, and the determination of permanent plans.
- **The Alternative Dispute Resolution Program** offers general **civil litigants** three different types of mediation opportunities: the Judicial Mediation Program, Mediation Services through the Bar Association of San Francisco, and the Voluntary Civil Mediation Panel. The Judicial Mediation program utilizes active trial court judges to conduct pro bono mediations in both complex and general civil cases. Mediation Services was created in collaboration with the Bar Association to offer parties three free hours of mediation with a mediator specializing in the subject matter of the parties' dispute. The Voluntary Civil Mediation Panel is a list of highly qualified, pre-screened, professional mediators available to mediate general civil cases at any time in the life of case. All civil mediation panels are composed of mediators who have up to 30+ years in legal and/or mediation experience. These mediation programs have been assisting thousands of litigants in reaching mutually satisfactory settlements for more than a decade.
- Two panels of volunteer attorneys provide **Pro Bono Mediation** in the **Probate Department**. The first panel, which is administered by a private probate litigation

attorney, provides mediators for disputes involving trusts and decedents' estates. The second panel, which is administered by the Court, provides mediators for those who are involved in guardianship and conservatorship matters. All the mediators have received mediation training under the sponsorship of the Court. The judge refers the matter to mediation upon the agreement of the parties. Following mediation, the matter is returned to Court for judicial review. Typical issues in trusts and decedents' estates include contests in wills over assets, title of real property, and validity of the will or trust.

Typical issues in guardianships include parental visitation, the possibility of co-guardianship or termination of guardianship. In conservatorships, the issues are visitation, sibling disagreements about how a parent is being treated, the possible need for a different conservator, and the amount of money being spent on the conservatee.

- **The Self-Represented Litigant (SRL) Mediation Program** provides mediation for **Small Claims** and **Limited Civil** cases. People can schedule mediations through the ACCESS Self Help Center to fit their schedules, including evenings and weekends. Mediators also are available in Department 506 for Small Claims calendars and litigants have an opportunity to meet with them before going to trial. The multilingual SRL Mediator Panel is made up of more than 100 Court-trained volunteers. The program has mediated more than 721 cases since its beginning in November 2007.

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