

LFLR 7. UNIFIED FAMILY COURT

(a) Purpose. The purpose of the Unified Family Court (UFC) is to promote effective judicial management of cases involving the health and welfare of children, and to facilitate the prompt resolution of these cases.

(b) UFC Case Management is suspended. (Reserved)

(c) UFC Court Programs.

(1) Family Court Services provides mediations and conducts evaluations in family law cases with children. Services are provided by court order or after referral through the court review process. Fees for these services are determined on a sliding scale.

(2) Early Resolution Program assists self-represented litigants resolve uncontested cases.

(3) Family Law Information Center provides self-help resources to unrepresented parties, including forms, instructions, document review, and general information about the court process.

(d) Case Management.

(1) Case Review. On the deadline in the case schedule, court staff will review cases for compliance.

(A) If eligible, cases in compliance will be referred to court programs for mediation, evaluation, or other assistance for resolving uncontested cases.

(B) Cases not in compliance shall receive an order setting a mandatory compliance conference or a show cause hearing.

(2) Pretrial Conferences. The court shall schedule a pretrial conference to determine trial readiness.

(e) Evaluations and Investigations. In parenting plan and custody cases not resolved by dispute resolution, the case may be referred to Family Court Services or other suitable person or agency for investigation upon motion or by stipulation of the parties. A report shall be provided in writing to the court and the parties in advance of trial.

(1) Child Advocate.

(A) Appointment. Upon motion of the parties or on the court's own motion, the court may appoint a child advocate who may be a guardian ad litem, a court appointed special advocate, or an attorney for the child. See also LGALR 1-7. The order shall designate the appointee, the duties, and make provision for the payment of fees.

(B) Notice. From the date of appointment, the child advocate shall receive copies of all documents that are to be served on parties, copies of all discovery, and notice of all hearings, presentations, and trials.

(C) Discharge. Unless otherwise set forth in these rules, the child advocate shall be discharged only by order of the court upon motion or upon completion of the case when final orders are filed with approval of the appointed child advocate.

(2) Evaluations. The court may, upon motion, order a mental health evaluation or physical examination when appropriate. See LFLR 5(e)(8)(B). The issues of costs shall be addressed in the order.