

## Courtroom Observation Assignment

### I. Goals of Assignment

- A. To enhance your understanding of the substantive law and procedural rules governing the resolution of family law disputes in Maryland.
- B. To foster the development of a critical perspective about the operation of courts, including an ability to differentiate between "law in the books" and "law in operation."

### II. Assignment

#### A. Court Observation

You are required to observe proceedings in a Family Division or related court for a 2-1/2 to 3 hour session. Because I have made prior arrangements for these observations in both the Baltimore City and Baltimore County Family Divisions of the Circuit Courts, either of these courts would be good choices. Information concerning scheduling, location, and other details for these courts and others is included in this memo. You may, however, observe proceedings in any court hearing family law matters in Maryland. **Whatever court you choose, please dress appropriately for court; introduce yourself to the judge or master, if possible; and, of course, treat all court personnel with courtesy and respect.**

#### B. Written Narrative

After your observation, prepare a 2 to 4 page typed, double-spaced description and analysis of what you observed. The narrative should include:

1. Date and time of your observation; name of court and judge you observed.
2. Type of hearing(s) observed: divorce, child support, custody, contempt, etc.; pendente lite vs. merits; domestic violence (ex parte vs. protective order).
3. Describe the content of the hearing(s): the evidence and arguments presented at the hearing; whether the parties were represented by counsel or appeared pro se.
4. Comment on the performance of the attorneys (if any) and judge and describe the judge's decision(s). In addition, provide your reflections/analysis of the observation,

including commentary about how the observation relates to class assignments and discussions.

5. If you are observing a parenting class, provide information requested above except that instead of describing a hearing you will be describing the class and evaluating the participants (teacher (s), parents attending, etc.)

**C. Deadlines**

1. Although I have eliminated two class sessions to compensate for time spent in observation, you may schedule your observation any time between now and mid-April. Do not wait until the last week to schedule your observation -- it may take more than one trip to court to obtain the information required for your written narrative.
2. **Your written narrative is due on April 12, 2007.** Please feel free to turn it in earlier, and keep a copy of your narrative for use in class discussion.

**III. Options for Court Observation**

**A. Baltimore City**

1. Family Division of the Circuit Court

The Judge in Charge of the Family Division is Judge Audrey J.S. Carrion, Courtroom 124 (410-396-5130). Domestic cases in the Family Division of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City are heard by both masters and judges. There presently are three domestic masters:

Master Robert Bloom, Room 107, Courthouse East, 410-396-5110  
Master Theresa Funari, Room 103, Courthouse East, 410-396-1919  
Master Andrea Kelly, Room 323, Courthouse East, 410-396-3599

The masters hear primarily pendente lite (temporary) issues in open court, but they also hold settlement/scheduling conferences in chambers. Masters Kelly, Funari, and Bloom are permanently assigned to domestic matters.

The Circuit Court judges rotate through the Family Division assignment. The judges sitting in the Family Division are:

Judge Audrey J.S. Carrion, Courthouse East (410) 396-5130

Judge Yvette M. Bryant, Courthouse East (410) 396-5102  
Judge Michel Pierson, Courthouse East (410) 396-4916

\* Courthouse East is located at 111 North Calvert Street, the old post office building.

\*\* Courthouse West is located at 100 North Calvert Street, the Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse. (East and West are across the street from one another.)

The masters and judges receive their scheduling orders a week in advance of hearings/trials. In order to observe a family law case, **you should call the judge's/master's chambers a maximum of one week in advance** to see what is on the docket for a specific day and to ascertain where the judge will be hearing cases that day. Ask to speak to the judge's or master's law clerk. It is a good idea to recheck the morning you intend to observe to determine whether a case has been postponed, rescheduled, cancelled, etc.

## 2. District Court

The District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City - Civil Division is located at the corner of Fayette and Gay Streets. This court hears ex parte and protective order hearings for domestic violence cases. Although the Circuit Court has concurrent jurisdiction over protective orders, the District Court in Baltimore City still hears most of these cases.

As you walk through the main entrance of the District Court Courthouse, dockets for each courtroom are posted on the wall behind and to the left of the metal detector. The sheets indicate which judge is assigned to the Domestic Violence docket for that day. The clerk's office is past the metal detector to your right. Usually, one courtroom will be designated for domestic violence cases. If you are unsure or have questions, however, please check with a court clerk.

### **B. Baltimore County Circuit Court**

The Circuit Court for Baltimore County is located at 401 Bosley Avenue in Towson. The Judge in Charge of the Family Division is Judge John Grason Turnbull, II (410-887-2647). Domestic cases in the Family Division of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County are heard by both masters and judges.

There presently are six domestic masters:

Master C. Theresa Beck, 410-887-8611

Master Jacqueline E. Dawson, 410-887-8611

Master Richard J. Gilbert, 410-887-5564

Master Richard A. McAllister, Jr., 410-887-2829

Master Phyllis Brown, 410-887-8611

Master Paul J. Hanley, 410-887-5564

Like the masters in the Family Division of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, the masters hear primarily pendente lite (temporary) issues in open court, but they also hold settlement/scheduling conferences in chambers. All hearings are held in Hearing Rooms A, B, C and in Courtroom 7 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor. The best days to observe a Master's hearing are Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Additionally, the morning you arrive at the Courthouse, you should **always check the docket that is available at the first floor Information Desk** for further information regarding hearings/trials being heard that day. You may also inquire at the Information Desk as to the location of the particular courtroom where you intend to observe.

The Circuit Court judges presently assigned to the Family Division are:

Judge Robert N. Dugan (410) 887-6531  
Judge Timothy Martin (410) 887-6515  
Judge Patrick Stringer (410) 887-2500  
Judge Judith Ensor (410) 887-2668  
Judge Vicki Ballou-Watts (410) 887-2690  
Judge John Hennegan (410) 887-3290

The masters and judges receive their scheduling orders in advance of hearings/trials. In order to observe a family law case, call the judge's/master's chambers to see what is on the docket for a specific day or you can check the docket on the web page for the Baltimore County Circuit Court: [www.co.ba.md.us](http://www.co.ba.md.us). While the masters do not have law clerks, the judges do; thus, ask to speak to the judge's law clerk. It is a good idea to re-check the morning you intend to observe to determine whether a case has been postponed, rescheduled, canceled, settled, etc. If you are unable to speak to someone in the judge's/master's chambers, you may also call Central Assignment at 410-887-3497 in the morning to inquire about that day's family docket. If you experience difficulty arranging an observation, you may contact Richard Abbott, Differentiated Case Management Coordinator, at 410-887-6578.

#### **IV. Court of Appeals, Court of Special Appeals**

Both of Maryland's appellate courts are in the Court of Appeals Building located at Rowe Boulevard and Taylor Avenue (361 Rowe Boulevard) in Annapolis. Check the *Daily Record*, *Maryland Domestic Law Report*, the *Family Law Monthly* or <http://www.courts.state.md.us/coappeals>, for information concerning the courts' schedules for family law arguments. Observing an appellate court argument will be meaningful only if you have had an opportunity in advance to review the briefs or some commentary on the case to be argued. In addition, the appellate court docket will not always include family law cases. For these reasons, if you are interested to observe an appellate court argument, please see me and I can assist you to select a date and obtain background materials for the

case.

## **V. Court-Sponsored Parent Education Seminar**

1 Parent Education Seminars are offered to parties involved in custody, visitation and child support cases. These parties are ordered to attend these seminars designed to minimize disruptive effects of separation and divorce on children. Md. Rules 9-204 (Vol. 2). See also, MD. CODE ANN., Fam Law § 7-103.2 All Maryland jurisdictions should have co-parenting classes available so you may attend in any convenient location. Go to the following website:

<http://www.courts.state.md.us/family/coordinators.html> to find the name and contact number for the family services coordinator in the county in which you would like to observe. Most Co-Parenting classes consist of two sessions. For this assignment, you only need attend one session. Upon contacting a particular jurisdiction, let them know that you are a student in my Family Law Class, that you are attending for observation only, and that you do not need to attend both sessions