

# The Family Law Review

A publication of the Family Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia – Fall 2025



# Editor's Corner

By Kem A. Eyo



The Family Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia is proud to provide you with this Fall 2025 edition of the Family Law Review!

The Family Law Review strives to inform practitioners, provide tools that may be of use in educating the family law

litigant, and provide materials that the practitioner can use to educate clients. It is with this goal in mind that, I present to you the enclosed. You will find material intended to benefit the practitioner; material to assist with educating your client; and more “out of the box” material. You will also find herein a recap of the 2025 Family Law Institute.

Our section contains nearly 2,000 members (1,841 as of the day I’ve written this message). With that many individuals, our section is rather diverse and robust. The goal of the Executive Committee, therefore, is to offer materials that reflect the section. You can help! If you think you may want to present at FLI (even if you do not have a topic in mind) or have ideas of topics for the Institute, please complete the Family Law Institute 2026 - Speaker Proposal Form (contact any member of the Executive Committee to receive a link to the form.). If you fancy yourself an author, or if you cannot string together sentences but have ideas of topics you would like to read about, please reach out to me at [kem@rbafamilylaw.com](mailto:kem@rbafamilylaw.com).

I would also like to issue an apology to Andy Flink. Though he submitted a beautifully written and informative piece, the published article ended up containing numerous errors. An error-free version of *Harnessing Artificial Intelligence in Family Law Mediation: Opportunities and Challenge* has been re-published herein.

# Editor's Emeritus

By Randall M. Kessler



Incredible that we are almost through the first quarter of the century. It’s a milestone year. For me personally, I finally attained the status of empty nester, and it is a change. And my daughter grew up in the section, so looking over old

family photos helps me look back on how things have changed in our section; for the better.

Despite setbacks due to Covid and changes within ICLE, the section is thriving. It is bigger than ever and more diverse than ever. I do miss a lot of the folks who I used to consider old timers (too many great ones to name here, but simply look at the list of former section chairs for starters). They had some great stories and there were some huge personalities. But new lawyers and newly formed family law firms are appearing every day and raising the bar for all of us. Yet the one thing that has not changed, is the camaraderie.

Certainly, camaraderie was easier to build before zoom and virtual court and virtual mediation and virtual depositions. But now when we get together for in-person court or for seminars, it is more special. It’s akin to a family reunion every time I see divorce lawyers in person. And when we see each other in person, why not take time to ask about family, to remember and discuss old cases and old clients. It’s part of what makes us who we are. And while you’re allowed to have CLE credits online, I also suggest that you consider attending seminars in person. There’s nothing like being in a room full of your colleagues that you respect and getting to know them.

There are some truly great people in our section and I’ve been blessed to be around many of them for a long time. I hope many of you feel as I do, and I look forward to seeing you all soon, in court, at a seminar, or at any number of other social events we all often attend.

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# From the Chair

By Jeremy Abernathy



As I write my first message as Section Chair, I want to begin with two simple words: THANK YOU.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity.”—Melody Beattie

Those words capture the spirit of where we are as a section—reflecting on all we have accomplished together and setting our sights on the opportunities ahead. None of this would be possible without the incredible people who make our section what it is.

First and foremost, I want to extend my deepest appreciation to our Immediate Past Chair, Jonathan Dunn. Jonathan served our section with remarkable dedication and energy over the past year. He juggled a demanding court schedule, family responsibilities, and miles of travel to attend meetings—all while making sure our section’s needs were front and center. Jonathan’s commitment and tireless service have left an indelible mark on our section, and we are grateful for all he has done to move us forward.

I am equally thankful for the extraordinary members of our Executive Committee. These leaders devote countless hours behind the scenes to ensure that our section thrives. Their passion, teamwork, and vision make all the difference.

- Vice Chair: *Jamie Perez*
- Secretary: *Roslyn Grant Holcomb*
- Editor, Family Law Review: *Kem Eyo*
- Legislative Liaison: *Erik Chambers*
- Young Lawyers Division Representative: *Emily Long*
- Sponsorship Chair: *Megan Wyss*
- At-Large Members: *Kevin Rubin, Nilu Abdi-Tabari, Drew Wilkes, Katie Connell, Alex Cutler, William Alexander, Sean Ditzel, Cheresse Clark-Wilson*

Finally — and most importantly — thank you to each and every one of our section members. The 2025 Family Law Institute was an incredible success because of you. It was more than just a conference; it was a gathering of colleagues and friends, a celebration of knowledge, fellowship, and community.

As we build on that momentum, I am excited for what lies ahead. Together, we will continue to foster excellence, share ideas, and strengthen the practice of family law in Georgia.

From the bottom of my heart: thank you for being a part of this journey. I am honored to serve as your Chair, and I look forward to all we will accomplish together.

## From the Immediate Past Chair

By Johnathan Dunn



The Family Law Section has emerged from the 2024–2025 cycle with renewed vigor, strategic clarity, and a deepened commitment to education, advocacy, and community engagement. Propelled by a dynamic

Executive Committee, the Section has demonstrated fiscal strength, programmatic innovation, and inclusive outreach.

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) remained a cornerstone. The “Nuts and Bolts” series saw 90 registrants in March 2025, with a second event planned for fall under incoming Secretary Roslyn Grant Holcomb. The Midyear Meeting featured Superior Court judges discussing child support and caregiving, followed by a networking cocktail hour.

The Family Law Institute (FLI), held May 30–June 1, 2025, was a standout success. Led by current Chair Jeremy Abernathy and a dedicated planning team, the event embraced the theme “The Roller Coaster of Family Law.” It incorporated a multi component program that included wellness activities (such as a soundbath), first timers’ breakfasts, judge/speaker dinners, an after

party, an inclusion event, and sports tournaments. We are especially grateful to our sponsors for making this happen.

Committee initiatives gained traction. The Inclusion Committee, led by Nilu Abdi-Tabari, hosted events at the Legal Aid Building and FLI. The Young Lawyer Division, under Ashley O’Neil, began reviving in-person engagement through networking and speaker events.

As the Section looks ahead to 2025–2026, it does so with confidence, buoyed by financial health, impactful programming, and a deepened sense of purpose. The collective efforts of its members, sponsors, and leaders continue to shape a vibrant and responsive legal community.

## “Holding Attorneys’ Feet to the Fire”: The Importance of Volunteering and Its Unexpected Benefits, and Tips from Superior Court Judge Pandora E. Palmer

By Bianca Carthern



“To the profession, I offer assistance. I will strive to keep our business a profession and our profession a calling in the spirit of public service<sup>1</sup>.” To Judge Pandora E. Palmer, the legal profession is deeply rooted in public service. Upholding the value of the profession requires its members to engage in community service. This past February, Judge Palmer celebrated thirty years as a member of the Georgia bar. As Judge Palmer reflects on her thirty year legal career, Judge Palmer admits that she would not be where she is today without others holding her feet to the fire and stressing the importance of helping others in the community.

1 A Lawyer’s Creed as entered by the Order of the Supreme Court of Georgia, October 9, 1992, *nunc pro tunc* July 3, 1990.

The Honorable Pandora E. Palmer is a current sitting Superior Court judge in the Flint Judicial Circuit in McDonough, Georgia. Before being appointed as a judge, Judge Palmer spent a majority of her legal career in private practice engaging in family law, criminal defense, personal injury, juvenile, and Guardian Ad Litem cases. In October of 2012, Judge Palmer opened her own law firm, Pandora E. Palmer, P.C., after serving as a Partner with Smith, Welch, Webb, and White<sup>2</sup>. Prior to her appointment to the Superior Court bench, Judge Palmer served a short tenure as an appointed State Court judge in the Flint Judicial Circuit from January of 2019 to October of 2020.

Judge Palmer attended the University of Georgia where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and Pre-Law as a first-generation college graduate. She further received her Juris Doctor from the Georgia State University College of Law where she attended part-time while working full-time to support her young daughter. However, Judge Palmer's formal education did not end there. Judge Palmer continues to further her education today as she is currently a candidate for Masters of Judicial Studies in the Judicial Studies program at the University of Nevada in Reno.

When she is not presiding over a busy civil, criminal, or domestic calendar, Judge Palmer's passion for the law continues to grow through her commitment to accountability courts and service to numerous voluntary organizations. Judge Palmer currently presides over the Henry County Veterans Treatment and Accountability Court<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, Judge Palmer currently serves as a member of the Ethics Committee within the Council of Accountability Court Judges and is a member of the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution. Every September, you can find Judge Palmer volunteering at the Henry County Kiwanis Club Fair. Or you can also find Judge Palmer advocating for clarity in the Uniform Superior Court Rules as a member of the Uniform Superior Court Rules committee.

For Judge Palmer, keeping the profession in the spirit of public service paved her pathway to the bench. Attending bar association luncheons, helping organize

2 Formerly known as Smith, Welch, and Brittain, LLP.

3 The Henry County Veterans Treatment and Accountability Court was recently named a Model Treatment Court by the Council of Accountability Court Judges.

CLEs, and volunteering to speak on panels allowed Judge Palmer to connect with other attorneys, which opened doors for her as a first-generation attorney. If Judge Palmer could offer one piece of advice to new attorneys, it would be to get involved. Specifically, she urges new attorneys to start small and get involved with their local bar associations.

While involvement in local bar associations is a great way to get involved in the community, Judge Palmer stresses the overlooked value of your local bar association: which is, connecting with your local judicial officers. Whether you practice in their courtrooms or not, there is an unsung, indescribable value in meeting your local judicial officers. There are a lot of misconceptions and stigmas surrounding speaking to judges. However, it is important to note that judges are multifaceted individuals whose roles require them to embody a judicial persona on the bench. Outside of the bench, judges generally encourage an open dialogue with practicing attorneys. Even if you are not an attorney who litigates, it would not hurt to speak to a judge to merely ask about general tips for practicing.

Additionally, Judge Palmer highly recommends for practicing attorneys to volunteer to assist with the Georgia High School Mock Trial program. As a former attorney coach for Union Grove High School, Ola High School, and Eagles Landing High School, Judge Palmer finds the high school mock trial program is an excellent way for practicing attorneys to help shape the future of our profession. Judge Palmer urges practicing attorneys to take it one step further and invite the high school students to observe a day with you as a practicing attorney. It could change their entire outlook on what the future holds for them.

Inside the courtroom, Judge Palmer consistently holds practicing attorneys' feet to the fire as she demands attorneys to show up to her courtroom prepared to advocate on their client's behalf. Outside of the courtroom, Judge Palmer urges new attorneys to uphold the values of the profession by giving back to the community. Now, your feet have officially been held to the fire. How will you ensure our profession remains a calling in the spirit of public service?

*Bianca S. Carthern is an Associate at the Foster Law Firm LLC. A first-generation attorney, Bianca enjoys serving her community as a servant leader.*

# Preparing Your Client for a Virtual Hearing

By Elizabeth Schneider



Since the pandemic, technology has transformed how we handle cases, making it essential to get your clients fully prepared for this new virtual landscape. Whether your client is tech-savvy or a complete

novice, it's your job as their attorney to walk them through the process, ensuring they're ready to take on their virtual hearing with confidence.

## 1. Confirm the Platform and Format of the Hearing

Although at the beginning of the pandemic some hearings were exclusively held online, some of those hearings are now shifting back to in-person proceedings. Check with the Court to confirm whether Zoom, WebEx, or Microsoft Teams will be used for the hearing or if the case will be heard in person. Test the link to the hearing, typically found on the Rule Nisi, prior to the hearing date, and encourage your client to take the time to familiarize themselves with the hearing platform.

## 2. Ensure Technical Equipment and Connectivity Are Ready

The most common issues with virtual hearings are technical difficulties such as poor internet connectivity, microphone issues, and camera malfunctions. Make sure that your client has a reliable internet connection and strongly discourage them from using their phone or iPad. Viewing evidence on a phone is extremely difficult; and clients often cannot do so and testify while using a phone. A wired connection, if possible, is best; however, if your client only has access to a wireless connection, make sure that they close all non-essential applications and other distracting programs during their trial. Prior to the hearing, log on and ask your client to test his or her microphone AND camera, and make sure that they know how to mute and un-mute themselves.

## 3. Choose an Appropriate Location

A quiet, private, and well-lit space is essential for a successful virtual hearing. Distractions, background noise, and poor lighting can be distracting and can affect how your client's case is perceived. If your client can be present in your office, you may want to request that they attend the hearing with you. Remind your client that it is not appropriate to appear from their vehicle, their bedroom, or their bathroom, and that they should be in a private, well-lit, and quiet space. You may want to encourage your client to test using a virtual background prior to the hearing in order to remove any additional concerns about clutter or distracting views.

## 4. Prepare Your Client Mentally and Emotionally

Virtual hearings can feel less personal than traditional hearings, and this often causes anxiety and confusion for clients. Preparing your client emotionally is just as important as preparing them technically for the online proceedings. Explain the process to your client beforehand and walk them through how the virtual hearing will unfold, including the order of events, how the judge will communicate with all individuals involved, and the rules for speaking. Remind your client that they can ask for clarification if they cannot understand or hear what is being asked, and that regardless of what is being said, they must appear calm and composed. Even more than an in-person hearing, the judge is able to view their expressions and reactions and draw conclusions from what is being conveyed non-verbally. Make sure to have your client's cell phone or email available so that you can communicate with them outside of the virtual chat. Your client may try to use the group chat function to communicate with you, or to speak out when others are speaking, thus caution them to write to you discreetly so that the communication remains confidential, and they avoid unwanted outbursts or communicating directly with the court.

## 5. Review the Case and Key Documents

Ensure that your client has electronic and/or physical copies of all documents they may need for the hearing, and use a secure platform like Dropbox or ShareFile to share these materials to ensure confidentiality. Help your client organize their documents in advance, so they know exactly where to find what they need if the judge or opposing counsel asks them to refer to specific exhibits during the hearing. Review key arguments, objections, or questions with your client. If you have

the opportunity, hold a mock hearing with the client so that they are aware of the limitations and advantages of an online hearing.

## 6. Dress Professionally

Just because a hearing is virtual, that does not excuse your client from dressing for the occasion. Advise your client to wear business/professional attire; and remind clients that there are situations where they may be seen standing or moving, so their entire outfit may be seen. Encourage your client to avoid wearing bright colors or anything that may be distracting, including text or graphics. Solid colors often work best on camera as plaids, checks, or stripes tend to “strobe” on camera and can be distracting as well.

## 7. Explain Virtual Courtroom Etiquette

Just like in a physical courtroom, virtual hearings require participants to follow certain decorum. This includes respecting the court’s rules, not interrupting others, and avoiding unnecessary distractions. Advise your client to keep their microphone muted unless they are speaking. Remind your client to speak directly into the microphone, speak clearly, at an even pace, and at an appropriate volume. Since virtual hearings lack in-person interactions, clear verbal communication is crucial. Instruct your client to refer to the judge as “Your Honor” and to wait for permission before speaking. No matter what is said, your client should avoid interrupting the judge, opposing counsel, or any witnesses.

## 8. Plan for Technical Issues

Despite the best preparations, technical issues can sometimes arise. Help your client understand how to address common problems without panicking. Discuss with your client what to do if their internet connection fails or their device malfunctions during the hearing. Make sure they know how to immediately contact you or your team if they need help.

## Conclusion

Preparing your client for a virtual hearing requires a combination of technical preparation, emotional guidance, and courtroom etiquette. With the right guidance, your client will be ready to face the virtual courtroom with confidence and professionalism.

*Elizabeth Schneider is an associate attorney at Stern Edlin Graham and founder of Court Confidence, a consulting firm dedicated to helping clients prepare for family law trials, depositions, and expert meetings. With nearly 15 years of experience, Elizabeth specializes in child custody, divorce, and mediation. Reach out to Elizabeth at [elizabeth@court-confidence.com](mailto:elizabeth@court-confidence.com) or 770-880-4781.*

# A House Divided – Divorce & the Family Home

*By Mary Anne Walser*



I am a Realtor. In our office, when we are looking for leads, we look for what we call the five “D”s of residence change: diamonds, diapers, divorce, downsizing, and death. That is, people are most likely to move when they: become engaged, have kids, divorce, become empty nesters, or when someone dies. So, family law attorneys can be a rich source of business for us; and we love to work with you.

There are certain issues that need legal counsel. When these can be worked out ahead of time, it can make the home sale as a result of a divorce that much easier for everyone. Sometimes couples interview real estate brokers before they consult an attorney – sometimes after – but regardless of where they are in the process, here are the various decisions that must be made and agreed upon in order to sell the home efficiently. As a family law practitioner, ironing out these issues in advance can fend off a lot of headaches later. So here goes – a Realtor’s wish list:

1. Division of Proceeds: An agreement about division of proceeds should be made in advance. The real estate agent should not be involved in this decision, and the best course is to work this out with legal counsel before the listing begins.

2. Home Repairs: Where will the money to prepare the home for sale come from? Will the parties agree to fix up the home in order to sell, pay for staging, or do they need or want to sell the home “as is”?

**3. Communication:** During the course of the listing, who should the Realtor correspond with for showings, when offers come in, and when other decisions must be made? I often find that the parties argue about every little thing that happens. If possible, if one party can be put in charge of these decisions, all the better. If both parties must be a part of the process, how should the Realtor correspond with them? Which party should be called or notified first? Does every communication have to be to both parties simultaneously via email? (Communication by email is not ideal, as some decisions must be made quickly).

**4. Budgeting:** Most buyers will demand an inspection period and ask for repairs after the inspection. Where will that money come from? Budgeting in advance is a good idea.

**5. Showings:** Who will be responsible for making the home available for daily showings and perform the tasks required for those showings (clearing up clutter, making sure the home is show ready, making beds, that sort of thing)?

**6. Staging:** If one party is leaving the home prior to sale, will they be willing to leave some clothing / furniture so that the home does not appear to be a “home of divorce”? (If it is apparent there is a divorce going on, it may turn buyers off from the home).

**7. Pricing:** How aggressively will the home be priced, and who will decide what offer will be accepted and countered? If the home doesn't sell right away, it is very helpful to have a predetermined schedule of price reductions agreed upon in writing.

**8. Non-participation:** What penalty will there be if one of the divorcing parties takes action to thwart any potential sale?

Having agreements on these issues can help smooth over any potential rough-going in the aim to sell a family home in divorce. As a family law practitioner, the more you know about the home sale process and its ins and outs, the better. Most of us Realtors are always happy to help!

*Mary Anne Walser, Esq., REALTOR, has been a top producing real estate agent in Atlanta for more than two decades. She is with Atlanta Fine Homes Sotheby's International Realty. Although she now works exclusively in real estate sales, she is also a member of the State Bar of Georgia.*

## Summary of 2025 Family Law Institute

By Ashley L. Bays



Since I first attended the Family Law Institute a few years ago, I have lovingly referred to it as “law camp”. Why? It is much like adult summer camp. The theme of the camp is the practice of family law in Georgia. The attendees are your co-counsels, opposing counsels, attorneys from related legal fields, judges from all over the state, professionals in the fields of psychology, forensic accounting, and real estate. The location? That is one of the best parts and much better than summer camp cabins in the woods. For 2025, Family Law Institute took place at the Omni Resort in beautiful Amelia Island, Florida. In addition to hearing from many experts in the field of family law on various topics that affect our practice, there are also receptions, happy hours, and many opportunities to network and socialize with people we most often only get to interact with from behind a screen. Law camp is an immersion into Georgia family law – appropriate for practitioners who are brand new to their career or experienced veterans. Be sure to attend “Law Camp 2026” and in case you missed it this year, here are some highlights:

**New Laws:** Katie Connell briefed us all on the new parenting time adjustment statutory change to O.C.G.A. §19-6-15 which will go into effect January 1, 2026. This new law will affect every family law practitioner in Georgia, and it was helpful to hear about the practicalities of the new law and how the state's child support worksheet will be changing. Elizabeth Lindsey and Kim Martin provided a helpful overview

of the Support for Adult Dependent Children law found in O.C.G.A. §19-6-15.1, including advice of how to “do no harm” to the adult dependent child by ensuring they receive the maximum amount of support to which they are entitled.

**Judges’ Takes:** Fourteen different judges and justices from all over the state provided invaluable insight into their views of things from the bench on topics like professionalism, how to try a temporary hearing effectively, business valuations, and various custody-related issues. Just the preferences and recommendations shared by these judges were enough to make the whole trip worthwhile.

**Expert Opinions:** We heard from Erica McCurdy about parenting coordination – when it can be helpful and how to go about it the right way. Dr. Howard Drutman, Ph. D., shared about what family law attorneys can do to help the mental health professionals involved in our cases. Attorney Robert Port taught us about some common probate and estate-related pitfalls clients may encounter and how to avoid same. Real estate professionals Wendy Chambers and Jill Heineck informed us about issues we should be including in our settlement agreements and proposed orders if the parties are selling real property.

**Hot Topics:** Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) was a hot topic that came up in multiple presentations. The conclusion seemed to be that it is here, it is inevitable, and it should be used ever so cautiously. Attorney Kevin Rubin introduced several ways to productively and safely use AI in your law practice.

Over the three days of the conference, there were multiple knowledgeable speakers and interesting topics covered. Perhaps more importantly though, there were reunions between colleagues, friendly conversations between opposing counsels, and new connections made. If I see you there next year, mention this article and your next drink from the open bar is on me. ;)

The 2026 Family Law Institute will take place May 29–31, 2026, at the Omni Amelia Island Resort.

*Ashley Bayes is an associate attorney at Stern Edlin Graham Family Law. She is about to begin her eighth year of practicing family law. Ashley is admitted to practice in the State of Georgia and Commonwealth of Kentucky. She lives happily in Cobb County with her husband, daughter, and basset hound.*



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Georgia Lawyers Helping Lawyers (LHL) is a confidential peer-to-peer program that provides colleagues who are suffering from stress, depression, addiction or other personal issues in their lives, with a fellow Bar member to be there, listen and help.

If you are looking for a peer or are interested in being a peer volunteer, visit [www.GeorgiaLHL.org](http://www.GeorgiaLHL.org) for more information.

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# 2025 Award Recipients



*Pictured: Tina Roddenbery, Esq. and Katie Connell*

The 2025 Jack P. Turner Award (which recognizes the Family Law Section member who has demonstrated outstanding achievement in the area of family law; and, generally, achieved the highest pinnacle of service to the Section, the Bar in general, the area of family law, and to the guiding principles of ethics and professionalism that we all strive to put into our practices every day.) was awarded to Tina Roddenbery of Boyd Collar Nolen Tuggle & Roddenbery LLC.

The 2025 Joseph T. Tuggle, Jr. Professionalism Award (which recognizes the Family Law Section member who best exemplifies the ideals of professionalism in a given year) was awarded to Katie B. Connell of Connell Cummings, LLC.

# About the 2025 Jack P. Turner Award Recipient

*Speech By The Honorable Rebecca Crumrine Rider*

It is my honor today to present Tina Shadix Roddbery with the Jack P Turner Award. Now, I have to admit, when Megan Wyss confided in me Tina was the recipient of this award, I requested to be included in the presentation. Megan, thank you for your grace, and allowing me this opportunity.



10 Years ago, when Gwen Holland presented the Joseph T. Tuggle Professionalism Award to Tina, Gwen referenced the influence Tina’s parents had on her: service with exemplarity of ideals—providing Tina with the rules, obligations and standard of excellence that structured her soul, her path – shaped her deep reverence to our profession – her service: to clients and to the bar - as something sacred. Thank goodness her best friend wanted to go to law school and so Tina went as well! As Megan points out, some people are fated to be who they are.

Tina’s vast dedication and gifts to the Bar and to our profession are too many to list – her service on the board of governors for 32 years, her service to this section as executive member and chair, her service to AVLF, the Supreme Court of Georgia Unauthorized Practice of the Bar, her dedication to the law and work with the legislature through statutory changes, inclusive of her tireless work in the early 2000s with the child support overhaul –

What many do not know about Tina is her service as a role model and mentor. Tina leads by example. Something she learned from her parents and which she now passes on, not only to her own children – Megan

and Julian – but also to those who come behind her and beside her. We are the sum of our parts. Tina carries with her the strong ethical standards and professional responsibilities engrained in her by her parents, and passes those to each of us with whom she has interaction – whether be it by serving with her in various capacities throughout the law or by engaging in cases with her. Tina lifts people up and strives to make us all better. She has left an indelible mark on this Section, on the Bar, and on the many people who she has helped – as clients, as lawyers, as judges and as opposing counsel.

Tina, thank you for all you have done. For me. For Megan. For all of us. Your lifetime of service, as Gwen referenced, makes it easier for all of us to be good.

*Speech By Megan P. Wyss*

I think both Judge Reider and I could go on and on about Tina’s resume and all the roles and positions she’s held within the State Bar, our Section, AAML and beyond. While her heart for service leadership was one of the major reasons I nominated Tina for this award, what truly sets her apart from others is her dedication to mentorship. When I say Tina is dedicated to mentorship, I don’t just mean her dedication to cultivating excellent lawyers who are zealous advocates. I mean Tina takes the time and effort to nurture a heart of service in those she mentors. The ripple effect of Tina’s mentorship and her ability to inspire service to the profession is undeniable:



Jamie Perez, secretary of the executive committee of the Section, former Director of the AVLF Safe and Stable Families Project is Tina's former associate. Jamie said, "Tina gave me my first job out of law school, and I credit her with teaching me professionalism, strength of character, and the importance of holding yourself and those around you to the highest standards. These are the keys to our reputations in the legal field and achieving the best outcomes for our clients. I will always be grateful for, and consider myself incredibly lucky to have benefited from, her mentorship and guidance."

Erik Chambers, judicial liaison and member of the executive committee of the Section, is Tina's former associate. Erik said, "Before I even recognized my own interest in becoming more involved with the Bar, Tina planted the seed and set the example by leading and serving with dedication and integrity. She instilled in those of us lucky enough to work for her a deeper understanding of true service and commitment to the legal profession."

Will Davis, former President of the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar, is also Tina's former associate. Will said, "I am so grateful for the 2 years I worked under Tina. She became not only a mentor but a colleague and I'm so grateful to have her as our trusted

friend. The first time Tina edited one of my settlement agreements, there was so much red, I assuredly thought I would be fired. But she worked with me and mentored me, and without a doubt, I'm the lawyer I am today because of Tina. I awarded her the Ross Adams Award while I was YLD President because I was tasked with awarding it to an former YLD President, and I couldn't think of a more deserving lawyer who has impacted young lawyers with her mentorship."

I am also Tina's former associate. I was hired to work directly with Tina at a point in my professional career when I didn't see a path forward in my growth as an attorney. Tina's encouragement changed the path of my career and my life, leading to my deep involvement in the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar and the executive committee of this Section. I still have a moment of disbelief when an attorney of Tina's caliber and reputation refers to me as her law partner.

Tina's impact is far beyond the example of these 4 associates. Tina truly lifts up others as she rises. Tina, your legacy is written not just in the policies you've shaped or the positions you've held, but in the countless lives you've touched and inspired—including mine. It was an honor to nominate you for the Jack P. Turner Award.

## We all have to start somewhere.

The State Bar of Georgia values wellness in the legal profession, and we offer a variety of resources to help lawyers in their lives and practices. Visit [lawyerslivingwell.org](http://lawyerslivingwell.org) to read articles on wellness and access discounts to gym memberships and classes. Plus, learn about the following programs:

Lawyer Assistance Program  
Lawyers Helping Lawyers  
Suicide Awareness Campaign  
SOLACE  
#UseYour6

GEORGIA  
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[lawyerslivingwell.org](http://lawyerslivingwell.org)

Questions? Please contact one of our Wellness Committee members, listed at [gabar.org/committees](http://gabar.org/committees) under Attorney Wellness.



# 2025 Scholarship Recipients



**Courtney Johnson** –  
*Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation*



**Christain Miles** -  
*Staff Attorney to The Honorable Pandora E. Palmer,  
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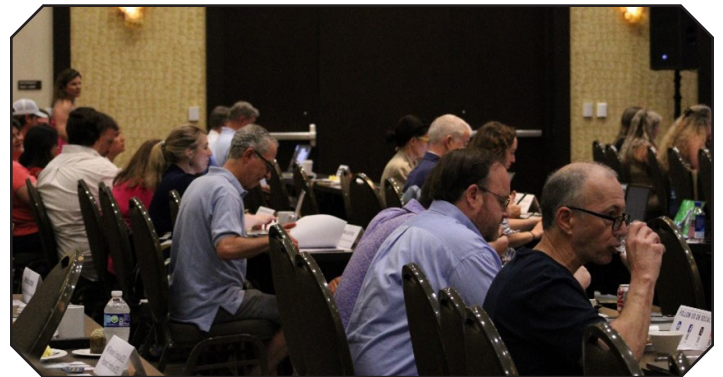
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# What You Need To Know About 3 Key Options For Health Insurance After Divorce

By Heather L. Locus\* (originally published in 2018)



A common ripple effect of going through a divorce is the loss of health insurance coverage by one spouse after the divorce is final. Given the ever-increasing costs of health care, it is important to understand your options to find the coverage that matches your health needs and budget if you are currently on

your spouse's plan. For employed individuals eligible for their own employer's group insurance, switching to your company plan will likely be the best choice. It's typically the easiest way to get coverage, has the lowest premiums, and is deducted from your payroll so you get a tax benefit.

Going a step further, at-home spouses often seek employment post-divorce in large part so that they qualify for their own group policy. A few associations offer group health insurance for members as well. If none of these are options for you, don't panic! There are a few other good choices available to get the coverage you need. ([click for the chart linked here.](#))

## 1. COBRA

This well-known choice is the result of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) of 1985. The act created federal legislation that allows individuals to continue their health insurance coverage for a designated period after a qualifying event occurs. Divorce is considered a qualifying event. Unfortunately, even in the case of amicable divorces, insurance companies will no longer insure the ex-spouse of an employee. That's where COBRA kicks in. COBRA applies to employer groups with 20 or more employees.

The good news for divorcing individuals is that if they

elect COBRA, they can remain under their former spouse's employer's group health plan that they were covered by pre-divorce for up to three years. It is easy to obtain, but not automatic, and critical that you complete and return COBRA enrollment forms within 60 days of receiving the eligibility notice. If you miss the deadline, you will lose all rights to COBRA. Unfortunately, COBRA is expensive. It's typically 102% of the total group rate that was previously being paid - calculated as paying both the employee *and* employer portion of the bill as well as a 2% administration fee. In addition, you still must pay any deductibles, out-of-pocket and prescription costs.

## 2. State Continuation Coverage

In most states, divorcing individuals may be eligible for state sponsored healthcare continuation coverage (often referred to as mini-COBRA). While some states only provide mini-COBRA for three months, other states allow coverage in select situations to continue until the age of Medicare eligibility at 65. In general, mini-COBRA laws were designed to cover employers with less than 20 employees, but the applicability to large companies, amount of time covered, and administrative charges on premiums varies greatly by state. Large companies may self-insure and not be required to provide state sponsored spousal continuation. Check with your state's department of insurance and company's human resources to understand all your specific options.

## 3. Individual Health Insurance Under The Affordable Care Act (ACA)

Individual health insurance is coverage that you purchase on your own rather than through a group. It can be either through the government exchange, off-exchange direct from the health insurance carrier, or through a broker. When the bulk of the ACA's reforms took effect in 2014, individual plans became guaranteed issue with no underwriting or pre-existing condition exclusions, and benefits became more robust. Most people get coverage through plans under the ACA when they lose group coverage.

To get an idea of the premium costs for different plans through the exchange, a good place to start is [healthcare.gov](#). Coverage varies based on the plan selected. Plans are categorized by metals: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Typically, Bronze plans offer the least amount of coverage for the lowest premium and Platinum

plans offer the widest range of coverage for the highest premium. Don't forget to budget for prescriptions, vision and dental costs, as well as co-pays and deductibles. It's also critical to check whether your doctors, hospital, and other health care providers are part of your new network. While open enrollment is typically November 1st – December 15th, losing health insurance due to divorce qualifies for a special enrollment period for 60 days after the divorce is finalized.

**What if you are separated but not divorced? You can stay on your spouse's insurance while you are married, even if you are not living together.** Keep in mind, your spouse will probably receive any insurance statements. While your spouse likely cannot take you off their plan during the current plan year, divorces often take one to two years and your spouse potentially could change their election in their next open enrollment from family to individual or individual and kids, even if you are still married. While not common, if you have a contentious divorce talk to your attorney about how to protect yourself.

**Divorce is stressful,** and that stress is only heightened when health insurance coverage is at risk. Make sure you make time for self-care. Get up to date on all your wellness visits and preventative care. The first step to making a smart decision on health care coverage is to understand that you have options. From there, you can make a choice that fits your health and budget.

**What do you need to do to ensure your next chapter is happy and healthy?**

*\*Heather founded the National Divorce Practice Group at CORIENT Private Wealth. Heather helps divorcing men and women find the right fit attorney and educates the team on the tax and long-term financial implications of potential settlements. The CORIENT SettleSmart® analysis gives clients clarity and confidence to end their case based on their attorney's recommendation at the appropriate time. Heather and her team implement the Marital Settlement Agreement and manage client's investments to provide the cash flow and growth they need to fund their future.*

*Heather has been named a Best-In-State Wealth Advisor by Forbes, a Five Star Wealth Manager according to Chicago Magazine, and a Top 200 Wealth Advisor Mom by Working Mother.*

*She has contributed to various publications such as The Wall Street Journal, Crain's Chicago Business, ISBA Family Law Newsletter, Family Lawyer Magazine, and Divorce Magazine on topics ranging from how to protect an estate during a divorce to key financial considerations before signing a divorce settlement or pre-nuptial agreement.*

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## An Emerging Expert at the Intersection of Divorce and Real Estate

*By Jill Heineck, Certified Divorce Real Estate Expert*



Who you hire matters, especially when it comes to divorce and real estate. The real estate professional handling the sale of the marital residence is just as important as the counsel representing the parties. Divorce can often make things feel like a zero-sum game where every decision is tied to power struggles or emotional baggage. This can turn the sale of a home, which should be a fairly straightforward transaction, into a long, drawn-out process that gets bogged down by the drama of the divorce itself.

For this reason, it is critical that a Certified Divorce Real Estate Expert™, or CDRE®, handles the

sale to close the case successfully. The CDRE® is specifically trained to support the real estate needs in a case and is vital to ensuring that the real estate side of a divorce case goes as smoothly as possible. The fact that the marital residence is often the most valuable asset in a divorce makes it a central point of focus, and having a professional who understands both the real estate and legal aspects can prevent a lot of potential problems.

**An Emerging Expert.** In existence for just seven years, the CDRE® credential came to be because it was evident that not having a specially trained expert helping the divorce listing process along unnecessarily prolongs the case. To become a CDRE®, an experienced agent must pass a rigorous months-long, closely vetted certification program. This program is application-only (less than 10% of applicants are accepted) and is taught by a faculty of family law attorneys, mediators, mortgage professionals, and real estate experts. The goal of the credentialing organization is to have qualified CDRE®s handling divorce listings across the US.

**A Trained Neutral.** As an integral part of the family law ecosystem, a Certified Divorce Real Estate Expert™ is both a trained neutral and a specialized resource. This is what truly sets the CDRE® apart in these often highly charged situations. Our training and adherence to a higher Code of Ethics provide a critical structure for maintaining the integrity of the process, and the fact that CDRE®s are not just average agents, but educators, consultants, and problem-solvers, highlights the value of the role the CDRE® plays in divorce cases.

**CDRE®s Don't Practice Law.** The CDRE® is tasked with protecting the net of the asset and moving the process along. Core to our code of ethics is to stay in our lane and avoid crossing into providing legal advice, which is something that can complicate the situation, as we have seen it blow up cases where it could have been avoided. This is where educating both the family law community and clients on how real estate transactions work in the context of divorce and working with a CDRE® is essential.

**Agent Selection In A Divorce Case.** Agent selection can be yet another cross to bear for the parties, but

it does not have to be. While selecting a friend, family member, or the agent who sold the property to the couple seems like the natural thing to do, it is one of the **biggest risks** when it comes to divorce. In a situation where emotions are running high and trust between the parties is already fractured, any agent with even a hint of personal connection can unwittingly deepen the divide. It's human nature—there's no way to maintain a truly neutral stance if you're emotionally invested in one side or the other; even if you're trying to remain objective. It's like walking a tightrope.

**A Trained Neutral.** This is exactly why a CDRE®'s expertise becomes invaluable, particularly in this setting. The CDRE® comes in with zero personal bias, laser-focused on the task of selling the property as fairly and efficiently possible. Typically, the CDRE® doesn't have any past relationships or emotional connections influencing their actions. They know how to keep things moving forward without being swayed by the emotional baggage that often clouds judgment during divorce.

When you think about the **neutrality** required in a divorce real estate transaction, it's almost like being a referee in a game where both teams have completely different objectives—and they may even be arguing over every little call. A CDRE® knows the rules of the game, and they know how to manage the players without getting caught up in their drama.

**A Proven System.** An experienced, unbiased CDRE® can spot the small but crucial signals in divorce situations—the subtle ways the parties might be trying to get the upper hand or the emotional triggers that could derail progress. The key is to stay focused on the goal: a clean, fair sale that moves the clients forward while protecting the bottom line. The CDRE® isn't just navigating the logistics of selling a property but is also managing and mitigating the emotional currents that often come with it. A CDRE® might use the following techniques:

**1. Clear, open communication:** The CDRE® acts as the neutral messenger between both parties, helping them understand the process, the timeline, and the shared goal of selling the house. They will often be the one who communicates updates, answers questions, and keeps everyone on track.

**2. Setting boundaries:** It's important to establish a clear role early on. CDRE®s are not therapists. They make it clear to both parties that the home needs to be treated as an asset, not a battlefield.

**3. Neutral framing:** A CDRE® approaches the sale in a way that minimizes emotional triggers. For example, when discussing offers or market conditions, they present facts and figures rather than letting any party "win" the conversation by making it emotionally charged.

**4. Using the law and facts to push the sale:** Sometimes, the only way to break the deadlock is by sticking to the legal and financial realities. A CDRE® understands how to work within these constraints, leveraging timelines, court orders, or even the prospect of lien payments or other financial considerations to get things moving.

**5. Strategic negotiation:** A skilled CDRE® can spot points of compromise between both sides, and offer solutions that are fair, unbiased, and in the best interest of both parties. This could involve adjusting timelines, finding common ground on repairs or staging, or creating a win-win scenario when it comes to the final price.

*A CDRE® with divorce-specific knowledge is not only a great resource to the family law community but also to divorcing clients. By providing a calm, neutral space, a CDRE® can help both parties see the larger picture: that the sale is not about "winning" or "losing" but about moving forward and getting the financial resolution they both need to start anew.*

*\*With over 25 years of experience in Atlanta real estate, Jill Heineck, Certified Divorce Real Estate Expert, supports the family law community and divorcing couples by providing expert guidance through the complex process of selling a marital home. As a trusted CDRE®, she ensures impartial, efficient transactions that maximize equity and help both parties transition to the next chapter with confidence. Jill Heineck can be reached at [jill@heineckandcompany.com](mailto:jill@heineckandcompany.com) or 404-418-9157.*

# Glass Boomerangs

*By Jason Norton and John Sims*

Raising a child with a disability presents unforeseen challenges. One of many is navigating the experience of his or her sibling(s). You may have heard the expression "Glass Children," which captures the sentiment of many siblings of children with disabilities. Specifically, the word "glass" refers to how invisible they may feel as parents funnel time, money, and emotions into the sibling who has demanding and expensive needs. We recognize and honor this feeling. This article is intended to address the dynamic within families and the transfer of responsibility that will occur from parents to siblings as the primary caregivers of the sibling with a disability. In what could be seen as a juxtaposition, the siblings who often feel like glass growing up can end up boomeranging back into the family in the central and critical role of primary caregiver of their sibling. As such, we propose the term "Glass Boomerang" to refer to these brothers and sisters.

In my line of work, I speak with many parents of children with disabilities. One of my associates, John (a *Glass Child* himself), recalls that growing up with a sibling with a disability is both challenging and rewarding. He recalls life being fast-paced with long-term planning pushed to the back burner. It wasn't until he went off to college that John began to think about his role as a *Glass Boomerang*. He realized that his parents would someday no longer be able to care for his sister, and that he and his siblings would be called upon to support her physically, emotionally, and financially. The transfer of responsibility will be perfectly imperfect. There will be bumps and bruises along the way. The question now becomes: What can parents do, proactively, to ensure a smooth(ish) transition of care to the *Glass Boomerangs*? This transfer is not a matter of if, but when and how. Below are a few suggestions for families to consider as they begin this work.

- 1. Plan, plan, plan:** Having legal documents is imperative. However, even a properly drafted Supplemental Needs Trust and Will cannot address all of the social, emotional, and financial aspects of the transition of care. In other words, much of the day-to-day details fall outside the scope of legal

documents.

2. **Know the costs:** The planning process should include the needed financial support and be adjusted for inflation over time.
3. **Understand funding sources:** Individuals with special needs can receive funding, waivers, and health care from a variety of government agencies. For example, with the Social Security Administration, we have SSI, SDI, DIB, DWB, and DAC. Siblings need to understand what these are and how to consider each one in financial planning.
4. **Start the discussion right now:** Waiting will only delay a family's ability to adjust and consider the needs of all parties involved.
5. **Parents – memorialize your efforts:** Parents serve in many roles: advocates, nurses, physical therapists, etc. A daily journal can document these many roles and allow future caregivers to continue the standard of care the parents worked so diligently to establish and maintain.

To our *Glass Boomerangs*, long-term planning includes you, your feelings, and your boundaries. For example, supported living could be concerning to you if you are married with children in your home. We need to plan around and accommodate your lifestyle.

We respect that planning for life's unscripted moments is never easy. With that said, sustainability needs consistency. We encourage our families to have an open dialogue *right now* with all loved ones involved to plan for hopes and dreams.



*Jason Norton is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional and founder of Ability Wealth Group. A graduate of the University of Georgia with a degree in Consumer Economics, Jason also holds the Chartered Special Needs Consultant® designation. Inspired by his son Drew, who bravely battles a rare disease, Jason is passionate about helping families in the special needs community plan for their futures. He often says, "Sometimes your job finds you." An active member of the Athens community, Jason has served as President of Rotary and L.E.A.D. Athens, and currently contributes his time to Extra Special People, Inc. and Georgia Options, supporting opportunities for individuals with special needs to live independently.*



*John Sims, an Athens native, graduated from the University of Georgia in May of 2024 with a bachelor's degree in financial planning. John joined Ability Wealth Group in January 2024 as an administrative Associate. Since his graduation, John has moved to a full-time position with Ability Wealth Group, serving as the Client Relationship Manager. His job duties include assisting families in implementation, following the AWG planning process. His passion for financial planning is rooted in helping families plan for life, scripted and unscripted alike. Growing up with a sibling with special needs and a passion for serving families, Ability Wealth Group felt like a natural fit for John.*

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# Rethinking Family Law: The Case for Out-of-Court Resolution

By Jeanette Soltys



For years, family law attorneys have followed a traditional path: file the case, engage in adversarial litigation, and prepare for court battles. But as the inefficiencies of the court system grow more evident and the emotional and financial toll on clients increases, we must ask

ourselves—why do we continue practicing this way? The reality is that there is a better path, one that benefits not only our clients, but also us as practitioners. It's time to embrace a shift toward out-of-court resolution as the standard approach in family law.

## Why It's Better for Clients

The biggest reason to rethink our approach is that out-of-court resolution serves our clients far better than litigation. Divorce and custody cases are already emotionally draining. Adding lengthy and expensive court battles only amplifies the stress.

### Reduced Costs and Time

How many times have you had to bill a client for a court appearance, only to wait for hours just to get rescheduled? How many detailed motions have you painstakingly spent hours drafting, only for a hearing never to occur? Clients frequently express their frustration over thousands of dollars spent with little progress in their case. The court system is undeniably inefficient, often requiring multiple hearings, delays, and unnecessary procedural hurdles that drain both time and financial resources.

By contrast, alternative dispute resolution methods such as mediation, arbitration, and the Amicable Divorce Network provide a structured, yet efficient way to resolve cases. Clients save money because they're

not paying for unnecessary litigation tasks; and cases conclude more quickly, allowing them to move forward with their lives.

### Predictability and Client Control

One of the biggest frustrations of litigation is its unpredictability. Increasingly, judicial decisions vary wildly— even among judges in the same county. It is not uncommon for both attorneys and clients to leave courtrooms baffled by unexpected rulings.

When clients participate in mediation or other out-of-court negotiations, they have a say in shaping the outcome. They're not gambling on a judge's decision, but rather actively crafting agreements that work best for their families. This predictability leads to greater satisfaction with the results, and more importantly, it increases compliance with orders. Clients are far more likely to follow a settlement they helped design than a ruling forced upon them.

### Lower Emotional and Psychological Stress

Litigation is inherently adversarial. Clients are pitted against each other in a battle where the objective is often to "win" rather than to find a workable solution. The emotional toll of this process can be devastating, particularly in cases involving children.

I always knew that family law litigation was stressful for clients, but I never fully grasped the extent until my own husband went through a high-conflict custody modification case. Though I wasn't personally involved as a party, the experience of watching my stepchildren endure the conflict was eye-opening. The stress, financial strain, and emotional turmoil reinforced for me the urgent need for a better approach in family law.

By focusing on mediation and a more amicable divorce process, we allow families to minimize conflict and work toward cooperative solutions. This not only reduces stress for our clients but also helps preserve relationships, especially in cases where ongoing co-parenting is necessary.

## Why It's Better for Lawyers

While our primary duty is to our clients, we must also consider the impact of litigation on our own well-being. Practicing family law has become increasingly stressful. Many of us have had leave requests denied, conflict letters ignored, or cases rushed to trial when

all parties needed more time. Add to that the frequent last-minute document dumps—often from our own clients—and it’s no wonder so many family lawyers experience burnout.

### Less Stress, Better Work-Life Balance

Litigation is all-consuming. The late-night trial prep, unpredictable court schedules, and emotionally charged nature of family law cases can make it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. By shifting to out-of-court resolution methods, attorneys can reclaim control over their schedules, reducing stress and allowing for more time to recharge outside of work.

When cases resolve through mediation, arbitration, or the Amicable Divorce Process, attorneys can plan their work more effectively, avoiding the chaos of litigation. The ability to manage a predictable caseload not only benefits our professional performance but also enhances our personal lives.

### Stronger Client Relationships and Reputation

Clients don’t want to feel like just another case file. When attorneys prioritize resolving cases efficiently and amicably, they build trust and goodwill with their clients. Clients who feel heard and supported are far more likely to refer friends and family. A reputation for helping families navigate divorce with dignity is a powerful asset in any legal career.

### Financial Stability Without Court-Driven Chaos

Some attorneys worry that avoiding litigation will reduce billable hours. But in reality, ADR offers a sustainable and profitable model. Rather than unpredictable bursts of income based on court battles, attorneys can generate consistent revenue by offering structured, out-of-court resolution services. Many clients would prefer to invest in a process that offers certainty and efficiency rather than hemorrhaging money on drawn-out litigation.

### **Embracing a New Standard in Family Law**

It’s time for a shift in our profession. Just because litigation has always been the norm doesn’t mean it should continue to be. The inefficiencies of the court system, the increasing unpredictability of judicial decisions, and the emotional and financial toll on clients all point to the need for change.

We have the power to redefine how we practice.

Mediation, arbitration, and the Amicable Divorce Network offer viable, effective alternatives that serve clients better while also improving our own professional and personal lives. As family law attorneys, we should be problem solvers—not just litigators. By embracing out-of-court resolution as the preferred method, we can provide our clients with faster, less costly, and more sustainable outcomes while also reducing our own stress and improving our work-life balance.

The legal profession is evolving, and family law should evolve with it. The question isn’t whether we should change how we practice—it’s why we haven’t done so already.

*\*Jeanette Soltys has practiced family law in Atlanta for eighteen years, the first fifteen focusing on high conflict custody litigation. After her own divorce and her current husband’s custody modification, she realized there is a better way to resolve family law issues than litigation. This led her to start the firm Atlanta Holistic Family Law Soltys, LLC to help people stay in control of their life and divorce in a positive way. She is remarried with one son and two stepdaughters, and loves to travel and scuba dive in a positive way. She is remarried with one son and two stepdaughters, and loves to travel and scuba dive in her spare time. her spare*

# Harnessing Artificial Intelligence in Family Law Mediation: Opportunities and Challenges

*By Andy Flink*



We mediators have traditionally relied on our expertise, intuition, and deep understanding of human behavior to help parties reach mutually acceptable resolutions. However, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to transform

this field, offering new tools that promise to enhance efficiency, fairness, and accessibility.

AI encompasses a wide range of technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and advanced data analytics. In the legal sector, AI has already made significant inroads—from predictive case outcomes to streamlined document review.

This allows us to:

1. Analyze vast datasets of past cases.
2. Identify patterns in dispute resolutions.
3. Provide data-driven insights to mediators and clients.

For instance, some AI systems can help parties forecast the likely outcomes of various settlement scenarios by comparing case details with historical data. These tools are not designed to replace human judgment; rather, they serve as a decision-support mechanism, offering objective information to supplement a mediator's expertise.

As with each new tool we use in the process, there are both advantages and disadvantages of AI in family law mediation. The advantages are defined below. The disadvantages are deeply rooted in what we do not yet know, an easy example of which is social media when it first began.

## 1. Streamlined Documentation and Agreement Drafting

One of the most exciting applications of AI in mediation is its ability to facilitate real-time documentation. As mediators conduct sessions, AI can:

- ✓ Take detailed notes
- ✓ Track agreements between parties
- ✓ Generate drafts of the mediated agreement in real time.

By automatically converting discussions into structured documents, AI helps:

- ✓ Reduce drafting time
- ✓ Minimize errors
- ✓ Ensure accuracy of agreed-upon terms.

Think of it as a do-it-yourself LEGO model—but in words.

## 2. Data-Driven Decision Support

AI can analyze large volumes of historical data to help predict potential mediation outcomes. By identifying trends in similar cases, AI tools can assist mediators in suggesting settlement options that are both:

- ✓ Fair
- ✓ Perhaps more likely to be accepted by both parties.

For example, if Mom and Dad cannot agree on who should have final decision-making authority over extracurricular activities, AI could suggest common solutions that have worked in similar cases, helping mediators guide discussions effectively. Not the best example ever, but you get the idea.

## 3. Reduction of Implicit Bias

AI has the potential to mitigate human biases that can inadvertently affect mediation outcomes. By relying on objective data rather than subjective judgment, AI can help ensure that recommendations are rooted in empirical evidence. However, this benefit is contingent on:

- ✓ The quality of the data
- ✓ The fairness of the algorithm
- ✓ The user's interpretation of AI-generated insights.

## 4. Helping AI help you

Of course, it is every practitioner's job to assure your client is prepared for mediation. But it is just as simple for your client to input questions *they* may have into AI on their own. This is never a substitute for legal advice or advocacy, but it helps them understand the process better.

By relying on objective data rather than subjective judgment, AI can help ensure ☞ *"How can I best prepare for my divorce mediation next week?"* ...and receive customized, AI-driven guidance.

However, do not let AI replace what we humans possess. It cannot replace....

- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Intuition
- ✓ Nuanced understanding

...that human mediators bring to the table. Family law disputes are deeply personal and emotionally charged. The role of the mediator—to facilitate dialogue, manage conflict, and provide emotional support—remains irreplaceable.

You need to view it as a complementary tool that enhances (rather than replaces) the human touch in mediation.

For practitioners in Georgia and beyond, it is crucial to adhere to emerging guidelines on the ethical use of technology. The State Bar of Georgia and other legal associations are actively engaged in discussions about best practices for AI integration. Although in its infancy, much is “yet to come” in this emerging technology. Ongoing legal education will be essential. Mediators must be well-versed not only in traditional family law principles but also in the technological tools reshaping the field.

### **Looking Ahead: The Future of AI in Mediation**

The future of AI in family law mediation is, of course, promising; yet it must be approached with caution. Continued innovation will likely yield more sophisticated tools, providing deeper insights into dispute resolution.

However, integration must be thoughtful, with a steadfast commitment to:

- ✓ Ethical standards
- ✓ Mediator oversight
- ✓ The preservation of the human element in mediation.

### **Final Thoughts: AI in Family Law Mediation—Friend, Not Replacement**

In conclusion, AI is poised to become an invaluable tool in family law mediation, offering benefits ranging from:

- ✓ Improved efficiency
- ✓ Enhanced decision support.

However, successful integration hinges on addressing concerns related to:

- ✓ Privacy
- ✓ Bias
- ✓ Accountability.

AI will not replace mediators—but with thoughtful regulation and ongoing education, it will help them navigate the complexities of modern family law more effectively.

*\*Andy Flink is a family law mediator and arbitrator based in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the founder of Flink ADR, the only family law ADR firm in metro and surrounding counties with a team of seven expert neutrals, providing a one-stop shop for booking mediations, arbitrations, and case evaluations. Well known throughout the family law community, he is recognized as a dedicated and committed ADR professional and a frequent speaker at family law ADR events.*



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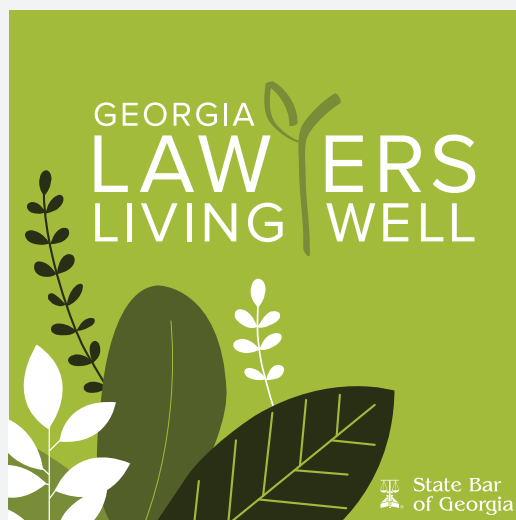


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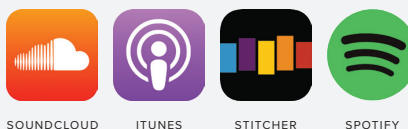
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STATE BAR OF GEORGIA

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