



CENTER FOR JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE

ALAMEDA COUNTY FAMILY LAW HEARING
Family Court Crisis:
A closer look at problems & solutions

Thursday, June 11, 2009
Alameda County Conference Center
10AM – 6PM

The goals of this event are to educate the Alameda County community about challenges within the family law system, to discuss best practices, and to encourage an ongoing dialogue about safeguards and solutions.

AGENDA

10:00–10:05

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Supervisor Gail Steele
Alameda County Board of Supervisors

10:05–10:10

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY LAW

Meera Fox, Esq.
Family Law Attorney & Event Moderator

10:10–10:25

FILM SCREENING

Family Court Crisis: Our Children at Risk
INTRO – ***Kathleen Russell***, *Producer & Co-Director*
Staff Consultant, Center for Judicial Excellence

10:25–11:05

PANEL DISCUSSION

A Look at the Crisis

Nancy Lee Grahn
General Hospital Actress & Family Court Survivor

Alison Urdan, M.A.
Marriage & Family Therapist

Barbara A. Kauffman, Esq.
Family Law Attorney & Founder, Justice California

Sarah
Courageous Kid & Family Court Abuse Survivor

11:05–11:45

PANEL DISCUSSION
Solutions, Reform & Best Practices

Nancy Lemon, Esq.
Professor, Berkeley Law, UC Berkeley (Boalt)

Ken Theisen, Esq.
Domestic Violence Advocate, Bay Area Legal Aid

Robin Yeamans, Esq.
Family & Appellate Law Attorney

Connie Valentine
President, California Protective Parents Assn.

12:00–1:00

LUNCH (Brown Bag)

* 12:00–12:30

PRESS CONFERENCE *

* 12:15–1:00

FULL-LENGTH FILM SCREENING *
Family Court Crisis: Our Children at Risk

1:00–3:00

PUBLIC TESTIMONY
4 minutes each

3:00–5:00

INTERACTIVE PANEL
Ask the Experts

Tara Flanagan, Esq.
Supervising Attorney, Family Violence Law Center

Kim Robinson, Esq.
Family Law Attorney

Meera Fox, Esq.
Family Law Attorney

Robin Yeamans, Esq.
Family & Appellate Law Attorney

5:00–6:00

PUBLIC TESTIMONY
(Continued from 1:00pm session, as needed)

PANELISTS – *in order of appearance*

Supervisor Gail Steele – HOST – *District 2 Supervisor, Alameda County*

Since she was elected to the *Board of Supervisors* in 1992, Gail has been an advocate for children in Alameda County and beyond. In her 17 years as a County Supervisor, Gail has addressed a variety of issues impacting Alameda County youth. She is the current chair of the *Children's Advocacy Committee*, and is the founder of OUR KIDS – a collaborative project for kids at risk in the Oakland/Hayward schools. Prior to joining the *Board of Supervisors*, Gail served on the *Hayward City Council* for eight years and was director of the *Eden Youth Center*. Gail has spent much of her career advocating for children and Alameda County's most needy.

Meera Fox, Esq. – MODERATOR – *Executive Director, Child Abuse Solutions, Inc.*

Meera represented juvenile wards of the Dependency court as an attorney for *Children's Law Offices* before becoming a successful sole practitioner representing Protective Parents of sexually abused children in Family Court custody proceedings. After a three-year stint as director of new programs at the *Child Abuse Forensic Institute*, Ms. Fox now serves as the Executive Director of *Child Abuse Solutions, Inc.* Ms. Fox regularly speaks at conferences and trains professionals on various aspects of child abuse and the law.

Nancy Lee Grahn – *Family Court Survivor & Star of TV's General Hospital*

An Emmy award winning actress, Nancy has starred on the soap operas *Santa Barbara* and *One Life To Live*, and she currently plays the role of attorney Alexis Davis on ABC's *General Hospital*. Nancy is a single mother to her daughter Katherine, and has experienced the crisis in our family courts through her own custody battle. Nancy is a spokeswoman for the *National Organization to Protect Children*, where she has become a tremendous advocate for children. Most recently, Nancy provided testimony to the California Assembly Judiciary Committee where she urged the committee to pass AB 612 – a bill that would outlaw the use of non-scientific theories in our state's family courts.

Alison Urdan, M.A. – *Marriage and Family Therapist*

Alison is a licensed marriage and family therapist who has worked in the Domestic Violence field for over 20 years. Alison has lead support groups for both victims and batterers, as well as women recovering from drug and alcohol abuse. Alison has worked with *STAND! Against Domestic Violence*, and is a member of the *California Safe Child Coalition* where she plays a key role in organizing litigants around the state to advocate for family court reform.

Barbara Kauffman, Esq. – *Family Law Attorney & Founder, Justice California*

Well-known as an outspoken advocate for social justice, Ms. Kauffman began her law career at *Pillsbury Madison & Sutro* in San Francisco, practicing bankruptcy, real estate and political law. She has practiced family law exclusively since 1995, primarily in Marin County since 1999. She has become an advocate for social justice and judicial excellence, and she donates a considerable portion of her practice to causes and cases that represent her highest ideals. She graduated from Stanford University with a degree in journalism, and completed her law degree at Santa Clara Law School, where she graduated cum laude.

Sarah – *Courageous Kids Network*

Sarah is a founding member of the *Courageous Kids Network*, a growing group of young people whose childhood was shattered by biased and inhumane court rulings. Sarah was forced to live with an abusive parent, while she was restricted from contact with her loving and protective mother. Now that Sarah is safe, she has become an advocate for children of abuse, and routinely tells her story in the hope that it will educate the community and bring about needed reforms.

Nancy Lemon, Esq. – Professor of Law, Berkeley Law, UC Berkeley

A leading authority on domestic violence for more than 20 years, Nancy pioneered the study of DV in law schools and is the author of *Domestic Violence Law*, the premiere textbook on the subject. She has been teaching the Domestic Violence Seminar at Boalt – the first law school class of its kind – since 1988, and also directs the *Domestic Violence Practicum*. Nancy has specialized in domestic violence law as an advocate and practicing attorney, working both with victims of domestic abuse, and police and public agencies charged with responding to domestic crime. As Director of the *Domestic Violence Unit* of Alameda County's *Legal Aid Society* in 1981, Nancy trained attorneys, shelter workers and Oakland police officers, and was instrumental in creating the *Southern Alameda County Domestic Violence Law Project*. Nancy has served as Coordinator of the *Mid-Peninsula Support Network* and was Legal Program Director of *Battered Women's Alternatives*, now *STAND Against Domestic Violence*, in Contra Costa from 1983 to 1987. She has also worked as a Staff Attorney and Volunteer Coordinator for Alameda County's *Family Violence Law Center*.

Kenneth J. Theisen, Esq. – Domestic Violence Educator & Advocate, Bay Area Legal Aid

Since 1981, Kenneth J. Theisen has served as an advocate against domestic violence for *Bay Area Legal Aid*, and its forerunner *San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation*. Ken was one of the co-founders of the *San Francisco Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic (CROC)* in 1983. CROC has helped several thousand women obtain restraining orders, custody, and safe visitation orders since its creation. Since 1981, Ken has helped train thousands of staff and volunteers at various agencies and groups that assist survivors of DV. Ken worked to raise public awareness about domestic violence in his role as Communications Director at *Bay Area Legal Aid*. He has written articles, op-eds, and letters to the editor on DV issues, and has been responsible for over one thousand other articles, and TV and radio spots regarding DV.

Robin Yeamans, Esq. – Family and Appellate Law Attorney

Robin is a graduate of Stanford University Law School (1969) and currently practices as a family and appellate law attorney. She has been a California lawyer since 1970 and a Family Law Specialist since 1980. In that time she has become one of the foremost experts in the field, especially regarding custody psychological evaluations and family law appeals. Since 2004, Robin has been an Appellate Law Specialist, making her one of only a handful of California attorneys who specialize in both family law and appellate law. Robin was a key contributor to the Santa Clara County *Komar Commission*, which was instrumental in bringing about needed family court reforms.

Connie Valentine – President, California Protective Parents Association (CPPA)

Connie Valentine, M.S. is the president of *California Protective Parents Association*, an organization that assists non-abusive parents and their abused children in custody disputes through research, education and advocacy. She is the conference coordinator for the annual *Northern California Child Sexual Abuse Awareness Conference* in Davis, CA and has presented at many conferences on the topics of child abuse and problems protecting abused children in custody disputes.

Tara Flanagan, Esq. – Supervising Attorney, Family Violence Law Center

Tara Flanagan is the Supervising Attorney for the Family Violence Law Center where she provides legal, support, and crisis intervention services to over 7,000 women and their families in Alameda County.

Kim Robinson, Esq. – Bio unavailable

EAST BAY FILM PREMIERE

CJE produced a 42-minute documentary addressing the serious systemic breakdown of our family courts in partnership with Kathleen Russell Consulting and Ludlow Media in 2007. The film features interviews with individuals whose lives have been destroyed by the dysfunctional family law system, along with expert analyses from attorneys and experts about how the system has veered so far from its statutory emphasis on protecting the best interests of children in family court proceedings.

Family Court Crisis: Our Children at Risk has won multiple awards and was screened in a host of venues in 2008, including state, national and international conferences. Educational distributor *Intermedia, Inc.* has secured educational distribution rights, and it can also be purchased directly from CJE by visiting www.centerforjudicialexcellence.org.

EAST BAY PHOTO EXHIBIT PREMIERE

Produced in partnership with photojournalist James Hall in 2008, this moving collection of photos and stories reveals the life altering – and often unbelievable – experiences of 14 families who have survived traumatic family court ordeals in eight different states. Their courageous stories represent a snapshot of a growing national and international epidemic.

It is our sincere desire that this exhibit and related booklet will put a human face on the systemic breakdown of our family courts. Visit the Center for Judicial Excellence online to learn more – www.centerforjudicialexcellence.org.

EVENT CO-SPONSORS

Berkeley Law, UC Berkeley (Boalt)
California Protective Parents Association
California Safe Child Coalition
Child Abuse Solutions
Incest Survivors Speakers Bureau
Justice for Children

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you for taking the time to join us today for this important event. We know how busy your lives are. The countless children who are suffering through this crisis need our advocacy and support, and your attendance here today is a sign of encouragement to so many. CJE would like to extend a special thanks to Alison Urdan and Meera Fox for their tireless work in helping make this event possible. And of course, this event would not have been possible without the tremendous vision and undying commitment of Alameda County Supervisor Gail Steele, a true champion of our children's rights.