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FACT SHEET

August 2008

Elkins Family Law Task Force

The Elkins Family Law Task Force, chaired by Associate Justice Laurie D. Zelon of the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District (Los Angeles), was appointed in May 2008 to conduct a comprehensive review of family law proceedings and recommend to the Judicial Council of California proposals that will increase access to justice, ensure due process, and provide for more effective and consistent rules, policies, and procedures.

Committed to Equal Justice and a Collaborative Process

The Elkins Family Law Task Force was appointed in response to an August 2007 California Supreme Court opinion, *Elkins v. Superior Court* (2007) 41 Cal.4th 1337, which held that marital dissolution trials should “proceed under the same general rules of procedure that govern other civil trials” (*id.* at p. 1345). The charge of the task force is to propose measures to improve efficiency and fairness in family law proceedings and ensure access to justice for all family law litigants.

Family law cases are critically important to litigants, children, and families, as well as the community at large. The increasing demands on courts dealing with family law cases include complex legal issues, the high volume of cases, and staggering numbers of self-represented litigants—in many communities, over 75 percent of family law cases have at least one self-represented party.

At its initial meeting in June 2008, the task force defined values that will guide its work and recommendations:

- Ensuring justice, fairness, and due process in family law;
- Ensuring meaningful access for all litigants;
- Using innovative techniques to promote effectiveness and efficiency;
- Improving the status of, and respect for, family law litigants and the family law process; and
- Securing adequate resources, including existing, reallocated, and new resources.

The task force will seek input from all stakeholders, including litigants, attorneys, judicial officers, and court staff.

Diverse Membership With Extensive Expertise

The 38-member task force includes appellate court justices, judges, court commissioners, private attorneys, legal aid attorneys, family law facilitators, self-help center attorneys, court executives, family court managers, court administrators, and legislative staff. Members have extensive experience in all aspects of family law and represent courts and diverse cultural and economic communities from throughout the state. A roster of members is included at pages 4–6.

The Elkins Family Law Task Force will complete its work over the next two years. Four initial working groups will focus on:

- Research and best practices
- Representation
- Process improvements
- Improving the status of, and respect for, family law litigants and family law

Input Sought Through Several Channels

The task force will be seeking input in a variety of ways, including:

- Focus groups conducted across the state;
- Research on best or promising practices both within and outside of California;
- Panel presentations from task force members and other experts about different aspects of the court process;
- Public hearings;
- A survey of bar members;
- Public comment, solicited via the Web, e-mail, and regular mail; and
- Circulation of draft recommendations for consideration by the public and the courts.

The Elkins Family Law Task Force welcomes written comments and specific suggestions from interested stakeholders. Please e-mail: elkinstaskforce@jud.ca.gov.

Elkins Family Law Task Force

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Additional resources:

General court information, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_12courtssupct.htm;
Supreme Court, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/

Roster of the Elkins Family Law Task Force

Chair

Hon. Laurie D. Zelon
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,
Second Appellate District, Division Seven*

Members

Ms. Tülin D. Açıkalın
*Managing Attorney
Bay Area Legal Aid*

Hon. Sue Alexander
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Alameda*

Hon. Lorna A. Alksne
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego*

Hon. Irma Poole Asberry
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Riverside*

Ms. Kathy Bañuelos
*Counsel
California Senate Judiciary Committee*

Mr. Richard Barry
*Attorney at Law
San Rafael*

Hon. Louise Bayles-Fightmaster
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Sonoma*

Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Sacramento*

Ms. Linda D. Daeley
*Family Law Manager
Superior Court of California,
County of Orange*

Ms. Julie C. Dodge
*Family Law Facilitator
Self-Help Center Attorney
Superior Court of California,
County of Stanislaus*

Ms. Patricia Foster
*Director, Family Court and Special Services
Superior Court of California,
County of Tulare*

Ms. Ana María García
*Supervising Attorney
Neighborhood Legal Services of
Los Angeles County*

Hon. Michael J. Gassner
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of San Bernardino*

Hon. Barry P. Goode
*Judge of the Superior Court of California,
County of Contra Costa*

Mr. José Octavio Guillén
*Executive Officer
Superior Court of California,
County of Imperial*

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*Director, Family and Children Services
Superior Court of California,
County of Butte*

Hon. Joan K. Irion
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,
Fourth Appellate District, Division One*

Hon. Irwin H. Joseph
*Commissioner of the Superior Court of
California, County of Santa Cruz*

Hon. Mark A. Juhas
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Presiding Judge of the
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