

June 13, 2014

Dear Counsel:

As you know, several years ago, Henry County Family Court was part of a research project conducted by Praxis International, the Battered Women's Justice Project, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts aimed at determining gaps in services to those individuals who are being served by the family court and have experienced domestic abuse within their families. As a result of that project, the *Report of the Henry County, Ohio, Child Custody and Domestic Violence Safety and Accountability Audit* was issued in January 2011. If you are interested, you may find the executive summary of that report at <http://praxisinternational.org/files/praxis/files/Safety%20Audits/OHCustodyAuditExecSumFI%20NAL.pdf> and the full report at <http://praxisinternational.org/files/praxis/files/Safety%20Audits/OHCustodyAuditFINAL.pdf>.

Following the issuance of the report, the Battered Women's Justice Project was awarded an additional grant to allow for the development of tools to assist the court in identifying those cases in which domestic abuse may be present and to assist those litigants who are experiencing domestic abuse within their families to navigate the court system. To that end, Gabrielle Davis, JD, of the Battered Women's Justice Project (and formerly of the University of Toledo Law School) began working with us to develop a screening tool that would assist the court and would assist attorneys in the representation of clients to identify those cases in which domestic abuse is an issue. Obviously, if domestic abuse is identified, the manner of dealing with a case may be different than the way in which the case would be dealt with otherwise. Ms. Davis and others from BWJP met over the next two to three years with attorneys, guardians ad litem and others in this area to discuss what would be helpful to those professionals practicing in the court system in identifying abusive situations and then taking the appropriate steps to assist the families experiencing the abuse. Eventually a screening tool was developed which resulted in the court enacting a rule, effective last June that required attorneys representing clients in cases in which the allocation of parental rights and responsibilities is an issue to conduct a domestic violence screening of their clients and to certify to the court that it had been completed. In addition, in those cases in which one or both of the parties was unrepresented, the rule required that court personnel conduct the screening.

Many attorneys have found the use of the screening tool to be very helpful in working with their clients; however, some have expressed concerns with the process. Therefore, after meeting with focus groups last April and considering the feedback of local attorneys, with the assistance of Ms. Davis, the court has made several changes to our local rule and the certification form concerning domestic abuse screening.

Included with this letter, is the revised local domestic abuse screening rule as well as a revised certification for filing after screening is complete. The revised rule and certification refer to a resource and referral guide, which is attached as well. Finally, we have included the Domestic Violence Interview Guide, which sets out the screening tool and further explains the screening process and its usage.

As we move forward, please know that this is a work in progress with a goal of coming to a screening tool that may be used by various professionals working with families in the ever-challenging family court arena. Therefore, we continue to appreciate your feedback and input on this matter. Please feel free to share your thoughts and valuable perspective with the court or with Ms. Davis directly. Her email is [gdavis@bwjp.org](mailto:gdavis@bwjp.org).

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration.

Very truly yours,

Denise Herman McColley, Judge

Richard Altman, Magistrate