

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 16-03**

**Establishing the Program for Agreement and Cooperation
(Supersedes Administrative Order 07-06)**

WHEREAS, a large number of cases filed in the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia involve litigants proceeding without assistance of counsel;

WHEREAS, a significant number of cases filed in the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia involve complaints for custody as well as complaints for contested divorce and legal separation where custody is at issue;

WHEREAS, a national model for educating parents on the impact of high conflict custody proceedings on children has been developed to provide parents and other caretakers involved in contested custody litigation with education, skills, and mediation services to: (1) understand the harm conflict causes children, (2) understand the importance of insulating children from conflict, (3) help the parties develop conflict-free ways to communicate, (4) help the children cope with the emotional stress and practical consequences of a separated family, and (5) foster healthy co-parenting relationships;

WHEREAS, the Domestic Relations, Paternity and Support Subcommittee of the Family Court Implementation Committee created a pilot project in December 2006 known as the Program for Agreement and Cooperation in Contested Custody Cases (PAC) that includes educational seminars for parents and other caregivers and, at an age appropriate level, for children based on the national model; and

WHEREAS, the PAC pilot program concluded in December 2009 after a comprehensive program evaluation recommended that the PAC program be made permanent and be expanded to include enhanced services;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is, by the Court,

ORDERED, that the Program for Agreement and Cooperation in Contested Custody Cases (PAC) is hereby established in the manner set forth below:

1. The PAC program will be established as an operating program within the Family Court;
2. The PAC program will be mandated on all Domestic Relations Calendars that handle divorce, custody, and legal separation cases in the Family Court;
3. The PAC program will apply to all litigants involved in cases that have custody or visitation as a contested issue on those calendars. In cases involving domestic violence, parents and other caretakers will be screened to determine the manner of participation in the PAC program;

4. The Domestic Relations judge who presides over a custody dispute will assign the case to the PAC program when the Initial Hearing for the case is held. At that time, the parties will be scheduled to attend a parenting education seminar and an intake appointment for mediation with the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, unless the parties provide proof of participation in private mediation, collaborative law or some other form of alternative dispute resolution;
5. Parties in PAC program cases will be required to attend a parenting education seminar, at the same time their children attend a separate, age appropriate children's seminar;
6. Participation in the PAC program will occur without prejudice to the ability of any party to seek and obtain child support or emergency relief prior to completion of the education and mediation process;
7. Apart from procedures necessary to accommodate the education seminars and mediation sessions, cases in the PAC program will be subject to all of the provisions of law and rules of procedure otherwise applicable.

SO ORDERED.

BY THE COURT

Date: March 14, 2016

/s/
Lee F. Satterfield
Chief Judge

Copies to:

Judges
Presiding Judge, Family Court
Senior Judges
Magistrate Judges
Executive Officer
Clerk of the Court
Director, Family Court
Director, Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division
Program Director, PAC
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