

4250. (a) The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(1) Child and spousal support are serious legal obligations.

(2) The current system for obtaining, modifying, and enforcing child and spousal support orders is inadequate to meet the future needs of California's children due to burgeoning caseloads within local child support agencies and the growing number of parents who are representing themselves in **family** law actions.

(3) The success of California's child support enforcement program depends upon its ability to establish and enforce child support orders quickly and efficiently.

(4) There is a compelling state interest in creating an expedited process in the courts that is cost-effective and accessible to families, for establishing and enforcing child support orders in cases being enforced by the local child support agency.

(5) There is a compelling state interest in having a simple, speedy, conflict-reducing system, that is both cost-effective and accessible to families, for resolving all issues concerning children, including support, health insurance, custody, and visitation in **family** law cases that do not involve enforcement by the local child support agency.

(b) Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to: (1) provide for commissioners to hear child support cases being enforced by the local child support agency; (2) adopt uniform and simplified procedures for all child support cases; and (3) create an Office of the **Family** Law Facilitator in the courts to provide education, information, and assistance to parents with child support issues.

4251. (a) Commencing July 1, 1997, each superior court shall provide sufficient commissioners to hear Title IV-D child support cases filed by the local child support agency. The number of child support commissioners required in each county shall be determined by the Judicial Council as prescribed by paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Section 4252. All actions or proceedings filed by the local child support agency in a support action or proceeding in which enforcement services are being provided pursuant to Section 17400, for an order to establish, modify, or enforce child or spousal support, including actions to establish paternity, shall be referred for hearing to a child support commissioner unless a child support commissioner is not available due to exceptional circumstances, as prescribed by the Judicial Council pursuant to paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) of Section 4252. All actions or proceedings filed by a party other than the local child support agency to modify or enforce a support order established by the local child support agency or for which enforcement services are being provided pursuant to Section 17400 shall be referred for hearing to a child support commissioner unless a child support commissioner is not available due to exceptional circumstances, as prescribed by the Judicial Council pursuant to paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) of Section 4252.

(b) The commissioner shall act as a temporary judge unless an objection is made by the local child support agency or any other party. The Judicial Council shall develop a notice which shall be included on all forms and pleadings used to initiate a child support

action or proceeding that advises the parties of their right to review by a superior court judge and how to exercise that right. The parties shall also be advised by the court prior to the commencement of the hearing that the matter is being heard by a commissioner who shall act as a temporary judge unless any party objects to the commissioner acting as a temporary judge. While acting as a temporary judge, the commissioner shall receive no compensation other than compensation as a commissioner.

(c) If any party objects to the commissioner acting as a temporary judge, the commissioner may hear the matter and make findings of fact and a recommended order. Within 10 court days, a judge shall ratify the recommended order unless either party objects to the recommended order, or where a recommended order is in error. In both cases, the judge shall issue a temporary order and schedule a hearing de novo within 10 court days. Any party may waive his or her right to the review hearing at any time.

(d) The commissioner shall, where appropriate, do any of the following:

(1) Review and determine ex parte applications for orders and writs.

(2) Take testimony.

(3) Establish a record, evaluate evidence, and make recommendations or decisions.

(4) Enter judgments or orders based upon voluntary acknowledgments of support liability and parentage and stipulated agreements respecting the amount of child support to be paid.

(5) Enter default orders and judgments pursuant to Section **4253**.

(6) In actions in which paternity is at issue, order the mother, child, and alleged father to submit to genetic tests.

(e) The commissioner shall, upon application of any party, join issues concerning custody, visitation, and protective orders in the action filed by the local child support agency, subject to Section 17404. After joinder, the commissioner shall:

(1) Refer the parents for mediation of disputed custody or visitation issues pursuant to Section 3170 of the **Family Code**.

(2) Accept stipulated agreements concerning custody, visitation, and protective orders and enter orders pursuant to the agreements.

(3) Refer contested issues of custody, visitation, and protective orders to a judge or to another commissioner for hearing. A child support commissioner may hear contested custody, visitation, and restraining order issues only if the court has adopted procedures to segregate the costs of hearing Title IV-D child support issues from the costs of hearing other issues pursuant to applicable federal requirements.

(f) The local child support agency shall be served notice by the moving party of any proceeding under this section in which support is at issue. Any order for support that is entered without the local child support agency having received proper notice shall be voidable upon the motion of the local child support agency.

4252. (a) The superior court shall appoint one or more subordinate judicial officers as child support commissioners to perform the duties specified in Section 4251. The child support commissioners' first priority always shall be to hear Title IV-D child support cases. The child support commissioners shall specialize in hearing child support cases, and their primary responsibility shall be to hear Title IV-D child support cases. Notwithstanding Section 71622 of

the Government **Code**, the number of child support commissioner positions allotted to each court shall be determined by the Judicial Council in accordance with caseload standards developed pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), subject to appropriations in the annual Budget Act.

(b) The Judicial Council shall do all of the following:

(1) Establish minimum qualifications for child support commissioners.

(2) Establish minimum educational and training requirements for child support commissioners and other court personnel that are assigned to Title IV-D child support cases. Training programs shall include both federal and state laws concerning child support and related issues.

(3) Establish caseload, case processing, and staffing standards for child support commissioners on or before April 1, 1997, which shall set forth the maximum number of cases that each child support commissioner can process. These standards shall be reviewed and, if appropriate, revised by the Judicial Council every two years.

(4) Adopt uniform rules of court and forms for use in Title IV-D child support cases.

(5) Offer technical assistance to courts regarding issues relating to implementation and operation of the child support commissioner system, including assistance related to funding, staffing, and the sharing of resources between courts.

(6) Establish procedures for the distribution of funding to the courts for child support commissioners, **family** law facilitators pursuant to Division 14 (commencing with Section 10000), and related allowable costs.

(7) Adopt rules that define the exceptional circumstances in which judges may hear Title IV-D child support matters as provided in subdivision (a) of Section 4251.

(8) Undertake other actions as appropriate to ensure the successful implementation and operation of child support commissioners in the counties.

(c) As used in this article, "Title IV-D" means Title IV-D of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 651 et seq.).

4253. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, when hearing child support matters, a commissioner or referee may enter default orders if the defendant does not respond to notice or other process within the time prescribed to respond to that notice.

Handout 2

CALIFORNIA CODES
FAMILY .CODE
SECTION 10000-10015

10000. This division shall be known and may be cited as the **Family** Law Facilitator Act.

10001. (a) The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(1) Child and spousal support are serious legal obligations. The entry of a child support order is frequently delayed while parents engage in protracted litigation concerning custody and visitation. The current system for obtaining child and spousal support orders is suffering because the **family** courts are unduly burdened with heavy case loads and do not have sufficient personnel to meet increased demands on the courts.

(2) Reports to the Legislature regarding the **family** law pilot projects in the Superior Courts of the Counties of Santa Clara and San Mateo indicate that the pilot projects have provided a cost-effective and efficient method for the courts to process **family** law cases that involve unrepresented litigants with issues concerning child support, spousal support, and health insurance.

(3) The reports to the Legislature further indicate that the pilot projects in both counties have been successful in making the process of obtaining court orders concerning child support, spousal support, and health insurance more accessible to unrepresented parties. Surveys conducted by both counties indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the services provided by the pilot projects.

(4) There is a compelling state interest in having a speedy, conflict-reducing system for resolving issues of child support, spousal support, and health insurance that is cost-effective and accessible to families that cannot afford legal representation.

(b) Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to make the services provided in the **family** law pilot projects in the Counties of Santa Clara and San Mateo available to unrepresented parties in the superior courts of all California counties.

10002. Each superior court shall maintain an office of the **family** law facilitator. The office of the **family** law facilitator shall be staffed by an attorney licensed to practice law in this state who has mediation or litigation experience, or both, in the field of **family** law. The **family** law facilitator shall be appointed by the superior court.

10003. This division shall apply to all actions or proceedings for temporary or permanent child support, spousal support, health insurance, child custody, or visitation in a proceeding for dissolution of marriage, nullity of marriage, legal separation, or exclusive child custody, or pursuant to the Uniform Parentage Act (Part 3 (commencing with Section 7600) of Division 12) or the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 6200)).

10004. Services provided by the **family** law facilitator shall include, but are not limited to, the following: providing educational materials to parents concerning the process of establishing parentage and establishing, modifying, and enforcing child support

and spousal support in the courts; distributing necessary court forms and voluntary declarations of paternity; providing assistance in completing forms; preparing support schedules based upon statutory guidelines; and providing referrals to the local child support agency, **family** court services, and other community agencies and resources that provide services for parents and children. In counties where a **family** law information center exists, the **family** law facilitator shall provide assistance on child support issues.

10005. (a) By local rule, the superior court may designate additional duties of the **family** law facilitator, which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Meeting with litigants to mediate issues of child support, spousal support, and maintenance of health insurance, subject to Section 10012. Actions in which one or both of the parties are unrepresented by counsel shall have priority.

(2) Drafting stipulations to include all issues agreed to by the parties, which may include issues other than those specified in Section 10003.

(3) If the parties are unable to resolve issues with the assistance of the **family** law facilitator, prior to or at the hearing, and at the request of the court, the **family** law facilitator shall review the paperwork, examine documents, prepare support schedules, and advise the judge whether or not the matter is ready to proceed.

(4) Assisting the clerk in maintaining records.

(5) Preparing formal orders consistent with the court's announced order in cases where both parties are unrepresented.

(6) Serving as a special master in proceedings and making findings to the court unless he or she has served as a mediator in that case.

(7) Providing the services specified in Section 10004 concerning the issues of child custody and visitation as they relate to calculating child support, if funding is provided for that purpose.

(b) If staff and other resources are available and the duties listed in subdivision (a) have been accomplished, the duties of the **family** law facilitator may also include the following:

(1) Assisting the court with research and any other responsibilities that will enable the court to be responsive to the litigants' needs.

(2) Developing programs for bar and community outreach through day and evening programs, video recordings, and other innovative means that will assist unrepresented and financially disadvantaged litigants in gaining meaningful access to **family** court. These programs shall specifically include information concerning underutilized legislation, such as expedited child support orders (Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 3620) of Part 1 of Division 9), and preexisting, court-sponsored programs, such as supervised visitation and appointment of attorneys for children.

10006. The court shall adopt a protocol wherein all litigants, both unrepresented by counsel and represented by counsel, have ultimate access to a hearing before the court.

10007. The court shall provide the **family** law facilitator at no cost to the parties.

10008. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b), nothing in this chapter shall be construed to apply to a child for whom services are

provided or required to be provided by a local child support agency pursuant to Section 17400.

(b) In cases in which the services of the local child support agency are provided pursuant to Section 17400, either parent may utilize the services of the **family** law facilitator that are specified in Section 10004. In order for a custodial parent who is receiving the services of the local child support agency pursuant to Section 17400 to utilize the services specified in Section 10005 relating to support, the custodial parent must obtain written authorization from the local child support agency. It is not the intent of the Legislature in enacting this section to limit the duties of local child support agencies with respect to seeking child support payments or to in any way limit or supersede other provisions of this **code** respecting temporary child support.

10010. The Judicial Council shall adopt minimum standards for the office of the **family** law facilitator and any forms or rules of court that are necessary to implement this division.

10011. The Director of the State Department of Social Services shall seek approval from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, to utilize funding under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act for the services provided pursuant to this division.

10012. (a) In a proceeding in which mediation is required pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 10005, where there has been a history of domestic violence between the parties or where a protective order as defined in Section 6218 is in effect, at the request of the party alleging domestic violence in a written declaration under penalty of perjury or protected by the order, the **family** law facilitator shall meet with the parties separately and at separate times.

(b) Any intake form that the office of the **family** law facilitator requires the parties to complete before the commencement of mediation shall state that, if a party alleging domestic violence in a written declaration under penalty of perjury or a party protected by a protective order so requests, the mediator will meet with the parties separately and at separate times.

10013. The **family** law facilitator shall not represent any party. No attorney-client relationship is created between a party and the **family** law facilitator as a result of any information or services provided to the party by the **family** law facilitator. The **family** law facilitator shall give conspicuous notice that no attorney-client relationship exists between the facilitator, its staff, and the **family** law litigant. The notice shall include the advice that the absence of an attorney-client relationship means that communications between the party and the **family** law facilitator are not privileged and that the **family** law facilitator may provide services to the other party.

10014. A person employed by, or directly supervised by, the **family** law facilitator shall not make any public comment about a pending or impending proceeding in the court as provided by paragraph (9) of subdivision (B) of Canon 3 of the **Code** of Judicial Ethics. All persons employed by or directly supervised by the **family** law

facilitator shall be provided a copy of paragraph (9) of subdivision (B) of Canon 3 of the **Code** of Judicial Ethics, and shall be required to sign an acknowledgment that he or she is aware of its provisions.

10015. The Judicial Council shall create any necessary forms to advise the parties of the types of services provided, that there is no attorney-client relationship, that the **family** law facilitator is not responsible for the outcome of any case, that the **family** law facilitator does not represent any party and will not appear in court on the party's behalf, and that the other party may also be receiving information and services from the **family** law facilitator.

Handout 3

COMPONENT 13- FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR'S OFFICE

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed: