



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **New Statewide Task Force Appointed to Improve Fairness, Efficiency in California Family Law Cases**

San Francisco—William C. Vickrey, Administrative Director of the Courts, today announced the appointment of members to the Elkins Family Law Task Force, a new statewide panel that will strive to improve efficiency and fairness in family law proceedings.

To be chaired by Associate Justice Laurie D. Zelon of the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District (Los Angeles), the task force will conduct a comprehensive review of family law proceedings and recommend changes to increase access to justice, ensure due process, and provide for more effective and consistent rules, policies, and procedures.

“The diverse membership of this impressive group will permit a thoughtful and thorough review of the many challenges involved in family law proceedings,” stated Chief Justice Ronald M. George. “The courts and public we serve will greatly benefit from improvements to the administration of justice in this important area.”

“In the lives of the parties, the significance and importance of family law cases cannot be overstated,” Mr. Vickrey observed. “The courts have a vital role to play in these cases, where critical issues are involved. The parties deserve policies and procedures that can be understood and navigated, and the rules must ensure due process and the opportunity to be heard to ensure the trust and confidence of parties involved in family law proceedings.”

Justice Zelon noted, “I look forward to working with this impressive group of family law experts and to hearing from the many interested groups and individuals who care about improving the way we handle family law cases. It is my hope that this task force, as a group, will quickly come to understand the challenges faced by litigants in family

(over)

court. More importantly, we will then determine how we can put in place rules, practices, and procedures to better serve the people of California.

“The Supreme Court and the Judicial Council have asked us to deal with important and challenging issues, and I am confident that we will discharge our responsibilities well,” Justice Zelon continued. “We need to ensure that the interests of all parties in family law cases can be served and that justice and due process for all remains paramount. In recent years, the number of parties who are self-represented in family law proceedings has increased dramatically. This fact adds complexity to the issues, but also creates an opportunity for innovation and new approaches.”

The task force was appointed in response to a California Supreme Court opinion, *Elkins v. Superior Court*, 41 Cal.4th 1337, filed August 6, 2007. Authored by Chief Justice George, the unanimous opinion held that marital dissolution trials should proceed under the same general rules of procedure that govern other civil trials.

The ruling further provided: “We recommend to the Judicial Council that it establish a task force, including representatives of the family law bench and bar and the Judicial Council Advisory Committee on Family and Juvenile Law, to study and propose measures to assist trial courts in achieving efficiency and fairness in marital dissolution proceedings and to ensure access to justice for litigants, many of whom are self-represented. Such a task force might wish to consider proposals for adoption of new rules of court establishing statewide rules of practice and procedure for fair and expeditious proceedings in family law, from the initiation of an action to postjudgment motions. Special care might be taken to accommodate self-represented litigants. Proposed rules could be written in a manner easy for laypersons to follow, be economical to comply with, and ensure that a litigant be afforded a satisfactory opportunity to present his or her case to the court.”

Members of the legal community and public who wish to share ideas with the Elkins Task Force may do so by writing this e-mail: [Elkinstaskforce@jud.ca.gov](mailto:Elkinstaskforce@jud.ca.gov).

The membership roster is attached.

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*The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.*

## **Elkins Family Law Task Force**

As of May 22, 2008

**Hon. Laurie D. Zelon, Chair**

Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,  
Second Appellate District, Division Seven

**Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack**

Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Sacramento

**Ms. Tulin D. Acikalin**

Managing Attorney  
Bay Area Legal Aid

**Ms. Linda D. Daeley**

Family Law Manager  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Orange

**Hon. Sue Alexander**

Commissioner of the Superior Court of  
California, County of Alameda

**Ms. Julie Dodge**

Self-Help Center Attorney  
Family Law Facilitator  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Stanislaus

**Hon. Lorna A. Alksne**

Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of San Diego

**Ms. Patricia Foster**

Director, Family Court Services  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Tulare

**Hon. Irma Poole Asberry**

Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Riverside

**Ms. Ana Maria Garcia**

Supervising Attorney  
Neighborhood Legal Service of  
Los Angeles County

**Ms. Kathy Banuelos**

Counsel  
California Senate Judiciary Committee

**Mr. Richard Barry**

Attorney at Law  
San Rafael

**Hon. Michael Gassner**

Commissioner of the Superior Court of  
California, County of San Bernardino

**Hon. Louise Bayles-Fightmaster**

Commissioner of the Superior Court of  
California, County of Sonoma

**Hon. Barry P. Goode**

Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Contra Costa

# **Elkins Family Law Task Force**

As of May 22, 2008

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

**Ms. Judy Louie**  
Director, ACCESS Center  
Superior Court of California,  
County of San Francisco

**Mr. Vahan Hovsepian**  
Director  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Butte

**Hon. Patricia M. Lucas**  
Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Santa Clara

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

**Mr. Mark E. Minyard**  
Attorney at Law  
Newport Beach

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

**Ms. Suzanne Clark Morlock**  
Family Law Facilitator  
and Self-Help Center Director  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Tuolumne

**Hon. Mark A. Juhas**  
Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Los Angeles

**Ms. Sandra Morris**  
Attorney at Law  
San Diego

**Mr. Lawrence E. Leone**  
Attorney at Law  
Los Angeles

**Ms. Lorie S. Nachlis**  
Attorney at Law  
San Francisco

**Mr. Drew Liebert**  
Chief Counsel  
California Assembly Judiciary Committee

**Hon. Kimberly J. Nystrom-Geist**  
Judge of the Superior Court of California,  
County of Fresno

**Dr. Margaret Little**  
Senior Administrator  
Family Law and Probate  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Los Angeles

**Ms. Rebecca Prater**  
Staff Attorney  
Office of the Family Law Facilitator  
Superior Court of California,  
County of San Diego

# **Elkins Family Law Task Force**

As of May 22, 2008

**Hon. Vance W. Raye**

Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal,  
Third Appellate District

**Mr. Peter M. Walzer**

Attorney at Law  
Woodland Hills

**Mr. Stephen B. Ruben**

Attorney at Law  
San Francisco

**AOC LEAD STAFF**

**Ms. Diane Nunn**

Director  
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Administrative Office of the Courts

**Ms. Caron Caines Smith**

Family Law Case Coordinator Attorney  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Ventura

**AOC STAFF TO THE COMMITTEE**

**Hon. Nancy Wieben Stock**

Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of  
California, County of Orange

**Ms. Bonnie Rose Hough**

Managing Attorney  
Center for Families, Children & the Courts  
Administrative Office of the Courts

**Mr. Hugh Swift**

Executive Officer  
Superior Court of California,  
County of Amador

**Ms. Patricia Rivera**

Administrative Coordinator  
Center for Families, Children & the Courts  
Administrative Office of the Courts

**Hon. B. Scott Thomsen**

Commissioner of the Superior Court of  
California, County of Nevada

**Ms. Julia Weber**

Supervising Attorney  
Center for Families, Children & the Courts  
Administrative Office of the Courts