

HAMPDEN COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION'S
CHILDREN'S LAW PROJECT

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Children suffer emotionally, mentally and even financially when their parents engage in contested court proceedings. The Children's Law Project reduces this suffering and serves to promote the best interests of children involved in Court.

What is the Children's Law Project?

The Children's Law Project (CLP) is a program that appoints attorneys to represent children involved in contested custody and visitation matters pending in Hampden County Probate and Family Court.

The child is the attorney's client. The attorney voices the child's position when parents or guardians cannot agree on what is best for the child. The attorney is not an advocate for either parent or for the Court.

What are the Goals of The Children's Law Project?

- ◆ To give children a voice in Court Proceedings;
- ◆ To lessen the severity of a child's trauma when parents cannot agree on custody and visitation matters; and,
- ◆ To decrease the stress which is put upon children by tracking and streamlining Court proceedings.

How Does the Children's Law Project Work?

Children who have been assigned a CLP attorney have legal representation at all Court hearings. The Project requires the assigned attorney to interview the child within thirty (30) days of their appointment. In an effort to resolve legal issues more quickly, expedited Pre-Trial Conferences or Status Conferences are scheduled ninety (90) days after appointments. During this time, a Probation Officer, the child's attorney, attorneys for the parents, and the parents themselves try to resolve the matter by reaching an agreement that will be reduced to writing and formally approved by the Court. Such agreements often have a better chance of succeeding than contested Court orders.

The Role of the CLP Attorney.

Children's Law Project attorneys do not investigate pending custody or visitation matters, nor will the child's attorney testify as a witness. The Court refers cases to the CLP attorneys and provides relevant paperwork and collaterals.

Children's attorneys only represent and advocate for the children, and cannot represent or give legal advice to either parent. Their job is to convey children's needs and desires to the Court. Attorneys may occasionally make recommendations to the Court, and/or to parents, when they believe the suggestions are necessary promote the child's best interests.