



Self-Represented Parties Can Resolve Family Law Cases Free of Charge on Peter Johnstone Day

ALBUQUERQUE, April 5, 2019—Self-represented parties working through family law issues such as divorce, child custody and timesharing have a chance to settle their cases free of charge at the Second Judicial District Court’s Peter H. Johnstone Pro Se/Pro Bono Mediation Day.

On Friday, April 12, 2019, roughly 65 to 70 family law attorneys will be at the Second District Courthouse serving as volunteer mediators for parties who want to resolve their differences through negotiation rather than litigation.

The Second District Court has been hosting the Pro Bono Family Law Mediation Day for several years. Peter H. Johnstone, a family law attorney in Albuquerque, was one of the early organizers, and the event was named in his honor following his death in 2013.

Meredith Johnstone, Peter’s daughter who also is a family law attorney, said this day represents two of her father’s firm beliefs:

- The legal profession should always strive ensure that people with limited financial resources have access to the system; and,
- Attorneys should, as much as possible, work in collaborative fashion to resolve cases rather than in engage in drawn-out, expensive litigation.

“My dad was very much a supporter of Pro Bono services, and as I worked with and learned from him, he made sure that I supported those types of services as well,” Meredith Johnstone said. “He also believed that having attorneys work in collegial fashion actually improved the level of service they provided to clients. That is why I love this day so much. It brings the family law community together around those two ideas.”

On average, 80% of the parties who participate in Peter Johnstone Day reach a full settlement of their cases by the end of the mediation session. Typically, an additional 10% to 15% reach at least a partial settlement.

“It’s always better—especially when children are involved—for parents to resolve issues on their own terms, rather than have solutions forced on them by the court,” said Judge Debra Ramirez, Presiding Judge of Family Court. “We are fortunate to have attorneys in our community who are willing to help people who can’t afford legal representation find creative ways to resolve their cases.”

There two requirements for parties wishing to participate in a Peter H. Johnstone Pro Se/Pro Bono Mediation event:

- Neither party can be represented by an attorney.
- Cases must be referred by the Family Court.

Parties can be referred to the event by submitting a request to the judge presiding over a current case, or by making the request when opening a new case. The court's Center for Self Help and Dispute Resolution can provide information for how to submit those requests for future Peter Johnstone Day events.

The Center for Self Help and Dispute Resolution is located on the first floor of the Second Judicial District Courthouse at 400 Lomas Blvd., NW, in Albuquerque. The center is open 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM Monday through Friday.

The Center for Self Help and Dispute Resolution can be reached by telephone at 505-841-6702.

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