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**ATTORNEYS AT LAW**

**Parent Coordinators can Help in Difficult Divorces**

Michelle M. McLean

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On January 14, 2015, an amendment to the Michigan Child Custody Act went into effect which outlines the duties and scope of responsibilities of a Parent Coordinator (a "PC"), a person appointed by the court for a specified term to help implement the parenting time orders of the court and to help resolve parenting disputes. The court cannot appoint a PC unless both parties agree to the appointment.

A PC's duties in resolving disputes between parents may include any of the following: transportation and transfers of the child between parents; vacation and holiday schedules; activities and recreation; discipline; health care management; school-related issues; child care and babysitting issues; and any other matters submitted to the PC jointly by the parents. In high-conflict cases, a PC may provide a means to improved communication which may have previously been virtually non-existent between the parties.

The use of PCs is not a new concept as courts have been appointing PCs for some time to assist in high-conflict cases. However, until this recent amendment to the Custody Act, the role, responsibilities, and scope of authority of a PC were somewhat ambiguous. Now, a PC can be appointed to even have quasi-judicial authority to render final decisions in situations where the parties cannot reach agreements. Hence, PCs can theoretically keep otherwise litigious cases out of the courtroom.

PCs are not free; they are usually mental health professionals or attorneys and PC services are not covered by insurance. A PC's fee is apportioned between the parties by the court based on the parties' ability to pay. Even though the PC will cost the parties some money, these costs are typically much lower than if the parties were both paying lawyers to battle it out in court. Further, the emotional pain and stress of going to court can be greatly minimized.