

Number of family law practitioners on the rise, but where does that leave Michigan families?

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By Liisa R. Speaker

Reports from around the state—both documented and anecdotal—indicate that an increasing number of attorneys are becoming family law practitioners. It is no surprise that more attorneys are practicing in the family law arena. Family law cases occupy two-thirds of all filings in Michigan circuit courts. Among legal professionals, it seems to be one of the few growth areas (or at least stable) for attorneys starting to practice law or attorneys who are changing practices areas. These new family law practitioners include former insurance defense and personal injury attorneys who have been displaced from their typical fields due to Michigan's current legal landscape, which has made it difficult or impossible for injured persons to pursue their claims in Michigan courts. Michigan's harsh economic climate (bad real estate market, collapsing automotive industry, to name a couple) has also sent many attorneys packing from their traditional fields into family law.

With all of these relatively new family law practitioners, Michigan families need attorneys who are on their game. There are many intricacies of family law that require an attorney who knows his way around the court room, the referee's office, the family law statutes (which often involve an interplay with other statutory schemes such as juvenile, probate, and real estate, to name a few), the court rules, and case law. Family law issues are wide ranging and include among its topics child custody, child support, spousal support, property division, adoption, grandparenting time, paternity, domestic violence, abuse and neglect, and mental health issues.

There is a way for new (and veteran) family law practitioners to get up to speed and/or stay on top of family law issues. Attorneys who practice any amount of family law should join the **SBM Family Law Section** (a membership form accompanies this article). The many benefits to joining the Family Law Section include a subscription to the Family Law Journal, access to the family law listserv (an electronic forum for attorneys to exchange information and ideas on their family law cases), discounts at ICLE events, Special Issue Journals, notification of upcoming Section events, family law mentor roundtables (held throughout the State), and a members' only portion of the Family Law Section's website which includes a wiki (an online collaboration of family law attorneys, allowing them to choose topics of interest and add and edit the content collectively). The Family Law Section hosts numerous seminars every year (often in conjunction with ICLE) to help practitioners better represent their clients, which includes the acclaimed Family Law Institute (a two-day seminar filled with education and camaraderie and attended at full capacity). The Family Law Section also hosts two out-of-town seminars every year: the Mid-Winter Seminar (usually held in a tropic climate) and the Mid-Summer Seminar (boasting an up north resort). As an added bonus, members of the family law section are generally a great group of people!

If your practice includes any portion of family law, you should consider joining the SBM Family Law Section. Also, ICBA has an active Family Law Section—the next meeting is March 12.



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