

Sunday, 26 April 2020

Family Court list dedicated to COVID 19 parenting issues important initiative to keep families and children safe

All comments to be attributed to Law Council of Australia President, Ms Pauline Wright.

Today's announcement that the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia are establishing a court list dedicated to deal exclusively with urgent parenting-related disputes including those involving issues of family violence arising from the COVID-19 pandemic is an initiative welcomed by the Law Council of Australia.

The COVID-19 List is designed to quickly identify and deal with the cases that need urgent attention due to the COVID-19 crisis. It will also support the work already being conducted by the judiciary.

Although most families are trying their best to be reasonable and flexible during these unusual times, for some families this has not been possible. There have also been increased reports of domestic violence. This has resulted in a significant rise in the number of urgent applications filed in the courts over a four-week period in March and April.

Applications that are eligible to be dealt with through the COVID-19 List, especially those involving issues of risk and family violence, will receive immediate attention and will be triaged by a dedicated Registrar who will assess the needs of the case and allocate it to be heard by a judge within 72 hours of being assessed.

During these unprecedented times, court staff and judges have worked to ensure that the courts can still operate during the pandemic, making changes to registry services and implementing online mediation and virtual hearings amongst other measures.

The newly announced COVID-19 List, to commence on 29 April 2020, is another example of how the judiciary are responding to the needs of the community during these extraordinary times

The COVID-19 List is a very welcome initiative.

Innovative measures by the family law courts such as this will be of great assistance to families during the current crisis but it is essential that the chronic underfunding of the family law system by successive governments over many years be addressed to ensure that the courts are properly equipped for the recovery phase.

ENDS

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