



RECOMMENDED FIRST STEPS IN YOUR CUSTODY GUARDIAN AD LITEM (CGAL) CASE

- Submit a proposed appointment order to the Court, as described in our case placement e-mail. (A sample is attached to your case placement e-mail.)
- Once appointed, file and serve a Praecipe of appearance. (A sample is attached to your case placement e-mail and also available on [CLC's model pleadings page](#).)
- Obtain a copy of the case file. Go to the Family Court Clerk's office, room JM-300, to request a copy of the case file and a printout of the case "docket." The fees should be waived if you show your appointment order.
- Once you have been appointed, we recommend that you contact the parties to introduce yourself. If any parties are represented, remember to contact counsel first to schedule any meetings and to request permission to speak directly with the represented party, including the custodial caregivers.
- We suggest that you schedule a time to meet with the custodial and noncustodial caregivers (possibly with counsel, if represented) without the children present to interview them about the case.
- Seek releases of information from the legal custodian(s) of the child.
- We also recommend that you arrange through the custodial caregiver(s) or their counsel to meet with the child(ren). Establish a relationship with the child by consistently and respectfully communicating with the child in a developmentally appropriate manner. Remember this may take time, so be patient. We encourage you to consult [CLC's training resources](#) and [CLC mentors](#) if you need guidance on this issue.
- It is best practice to observe the child(ren) in their natural environment and in each caregiver's home, if possible.
- It is best practice that all contact with the child(ren) be made through the custodial caregivers (or their counsel), as they are the legal decision makers for the child(ren). If you encounter difficulty scheduling meetings with the child(ren) through the custodial caregivers, contact a [CLC mentor](#) to talk through possible strategies.

- Investigate the parties' positions and your client's thoughts by, e.g., interviewing collateral information sources and witnesses, gathering and reviewing documentary evidence (e.g. social, medical, educational (academic and attendance) records), and running criminal, civil and domestic violence checks in DC and other jurisdictions where the parties live or have lived.
- Obtain a copy of any home studies or psychological evaluations conducted on the case by requesting them from chambers. If these studies have not been conducted, consider whether requesting a home study and or an evaluation by motion is necessary for you to develop your position on the case or determine the child's best interests.
- We at CLC engage in motions-based CGAL practice, and do not generally file reports. Instead, we file pleadings containing factual proffers and positions that the CGAL could prove up at a trial or evidentiary hearing. [Sample CGAL pleadings](#) are located on our website. If you are struggling to determine what type of pleading would be appropriate in any given circumstance, contact a [CLC mentor](#).
- As the case proceeds, [CLC's training resources](#) for pro bono attorneys and [mentors](#) can provide you any assistance you need.
- Your CGAL case will typically close after the entry of a permanent custody order. Pursuant to DC Superior Court Domestic Relations Rule 101(e)(4), a CGAL appointment ends after the appeal period has run on the issuance of a final order (10 days after a Magistrate Judge's order; 30 days after an Associate Judge's order). Although the termination of appointment is automatic pursuant to Rule 101(e)(4), consider whether filing a Praecipe at that time, noting the termination of your appearance would provide clarity for the parties.
- We suggest that in a developmentally appropriate manner, you discuss case closure and the final order with the child(ren). If you wish to discuss strategies for accomplishing this, feel free to contact a [CLC mentor](#).
- Please let a [CLC mentor](#) know if you believe that the trial court's decision is contrary to the child(ren)'s best interest or if a notice of appeal is filed by any party (including you). CLC may be available to assist with appellate strategy.
- Please notify CLC when your case closes by completing our short case closure form, available on CLC's pro bono page.

REMINDER: eFiling is mandatory in most DC Family Court cases, including custody cases. There is an [Administrative Order](#) outlining the eFiling requirements and procedures for Family Court. If you have an active case, in order to receive orders and participate in eFiling you must **REGISTER** with the CaseFileXpress system. A few additional reminders: (1) if a party is not required to and not participating in eFiling (e.g. pro se litigants) you must serve that party traditionally by paper; (2) filing and eFiling fees are waived for guardians ad litem by using the "dccourtapprovedgal" code; and (3) pro bono attorneys who are not DC-barred and are practicing under Rule 49 should use "999999" in place of the required bar number. If you are new to eFiling, we strongly suggest that you access the [CaseFileXpress training materials](#). The eFiling Support Team is available to assist you by phone at 877-433-4533, by email at info@casefilexpress.com, or by live [chat](#) online.