

## **SOCIAL EARLY NEUTRAL EVALUATION ("SENE")**

- Is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
- Is an expedited, voluntary, and confidential evaluative process designed to facilitate prompt dispute resolution in custody and parenting time cases.
- May only be ordered by the court at the Initial Case Management Conference.
- Offers the evaluative impressions of experienced attorneys and professionals to the parties based on case presentations and a limited amount of information gathered at the SENE session.

### **BENEFITS OF AN SENE:**

- Both parties will hear a neutral opinion from experienced professionals as to the likelihood of success at trial of each parent's request for custody and parenting time.
- SENE helps parties focus on the critical issues they face in a confidential, non-confrontational, and settlement-oriented environment.
- Cases can be resolved quickly and can save money in attorneys' fees and court costs.

### **THE SENE PROCESS:**

- A male/female ENE team ("the evaluators") of experienced attorneys or professionals is assigned to the case. The first meeting with the evaluators typically occurs within three weeks of the ICMC. The parties will present the important issues in the case to the evaluators.
- The evaluators, if deemed necessary, may gather additional information by re-interviewing the parties, interviewing their child/ren, and gathering limited collateral data. In this situation, a second meeting with the evaluators will be held. Once the evaluators have sufficient information, they will provide immediate feedback about the parties' case and settlement possibilities will be explored.
- Evaluators may not be called as witnesses. The recommendations of the evaluators and any statements of settlement or compromise made in the SENE process are confidential and may not be communicated to the court. The evaluators may communicate with the court during the SENE for the limited purpose of facilitating case management, and obtaining direction from the court on how to address issues that may require further assessment. If a full or partial settlement is reached, the evaluators will notify the court of the same.
- If the case does not settle through the ENE process, the evaluators may identify important issues that require additional study. The evaluators will inform the court that the case did not settle, but *will not* report the content of the ENE to the court. With the parties' written consent, the evaluators may suggest another ADR process to the court.
- If the SENE is unsuccessful, a scheduling order will be issued by the court.