



Hamilton County Juvenile Court

800 Broadway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1332
www.juvenile-court.org

KARIL BLOOM
Administrative Judge

Liz Igoe
Court Administrator
(513) 946-9381

**STACEY
DEGRAFFENREID**
Judge

NEWS RELEASE

Date: Sept. 19, 2023

Hamilton County Clerk of Courts & University of Cincinnati College of Law Expanding Legal Assistance to Include Juvenile Court Custody Cases

Many people lack the means to afford legal representation in Court. Advice and guidance from an attorney can make a huge difference in the outcome of a case, especially for children whose parents are involved in a custody situation.

Of the nearly 20,000 cases filed in Juvenile Court in 2022, more than two-thirds involved a child support or custody issue.

A collaboration between the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts and UC Law School is expanding to include local parties involved in custody and support cases, such as shared parenting, shared custody and changes in sole custody, in Hamilton County Juvenile Court (HCJC).

The collaborative resource, **The Hamilton County Help Center**, is located in the Hamilton County Courthouse. Two attorneys, employed by UC Law, two paralegals employed by the Clerk of Courts, and UC Law student interns, currently provide low-income residents with free education, information, and limited advice pertinent to legal issues in Municipal Court involving housing, debt collection, small claims, and judgment collection.

An additional attorney, also employed by UC Law, is now located on the first floor of HCJC. Hope Finney joined the Help Center in late August as a full-time attorney to assist parents with child custody cases.

"I am honored and proud to take on this new role, assisting children and families in the community where I grew up," said Finney. "What could be more important than working to ensure that children are well cared for, happy and safe?"

Finney earned her law degree from Western Michigan University Cooley Law School in 2020. Her professional experience includes working for the Ohio Unemployment Compensation Review Commission, Ohio Justice & Policy Center, and Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center.

"Unlike the other cases we hear in Juvenile Court, parties to private custody cases do not have a Constitutional right to an attorney," said Administrative Judge Kari Bloom. "People are allowed to hire an attorney, but there are lots of reasons that they don't. The lack of legal assistance can hurt children because the cases often become complicated, take longer to resolve, and give an unfair advantage to one party over another. Hope's job is to work with the parties to make sure the child or children come first."

"The University of Cincinnati College of Law is excited to be part of the expansion of the Clerk of Courts Help Center to the Juvenile Court," said Haider Ala Hamoudi, Dean and Nippert Professor of Law, University of Cincinnati College of Law. "From its inception, the Help Center has been a wonderful collaboration between UC Law and the Clerk's Office. In giving our students the opportunity to assist families who appear before the court, the Help Center allows UC Law to advance our mission of educating and inspiring lawyers who pursue justice and advance the role of law in society."

Clerk of Courts Pavan Parikh said, "The Help Center has provided an invaluable service to the community over its first six years of existence, and we are pleased to be able to expand these services to Juvenile Court, which will enable us to assist even more people in Hamilton County. The legal system can be intimidating, and Hope will provide families with education, information and limited legal advice to empower families navigating the complicated custody court processes."

The Help Center is located at the Hamilton County Courthouse, 1000 Main St. Room 113, 513-946-5650. The satellite office for custody issues is located inside Hamilton County Juvenile Court, 800 Broadway, first floor, 513-946-9442.

####