

DOMESTIC RELATIONS HEARING OFFICERS IN COOK COUNTY

For the many parents who never married, these issues are also decided in court. Both parents must be "known to the court"—that is, legally acknowledged as the child's parents. A father named on a birth certificate or the man married to a woman at the time the child is born are assumed by the court to be the child's father; if the father has signed a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity form; if none of these things are true, the first step is a legal declaration of paternity: DNA test or VAP.

Child support payments, children's living and care arrangements, and the allocation of parenting time and responsibilities (holiday schedules, school expenses, religious instruction, and similar issues) are often resolved in domestic relations court by a judge, or are referred by the judge for resolution to the domestic relations hearing officer.

A HEARING OFFICER-ASSISTED PROCESS FOR RESOLVING CASES QUICKLY HAS BEEN PART OF THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISION OF THE COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT SINCE THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PARENTAGE AND DIVORCE/DOMESTIC RELATIONS COURTS IN 2017.

THE GOAL OF THE HEARING OFFICER PROGRAM IS THE SPEEDY RESOLUTION OF SIMPLE OR NON-CONTENTIOUS CASES.



Hearing officers are skilled attorneys and officers of the court with the authority to conduct certain business on behalf of the judge. Hearing officers draft orders and submit recommendations to the judge. The goal is to have an agreed order, but the officer has the authority to submit an order which is proper without agreement. The orders are reviewed by the judge and may be entered by the judge

They handle all issues which might come before a Domestic Relations judge related to divorce, parenting, parentage, child support, and pensions or maintenance. Cases are screened for family violence issues as those cases generally don't go to hearing officers. Both cases with and without attorneys may go to the hearing officer.

HEARING OFFICERS CAN...

- + SWEAR YOU IN, TAKE TESTIMONY, AND MAKE "FINDINGS OF FACT"
- + DRAFT PROPOSED FINAL ORDERS AND FACILITATE CHILD SUPPORT, PARENTING PLANS, AND DIVORCE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS
- + EXPLAIN THE LAW AND PROCEDURES

HEARING OFFICERS CANNOT...

- + REPRESENT EITHER PERSON NOR OFFER LEGAL ADVICE; HOWEVER, THE HEARING OFFICER HAS TIME AND DISCRETION TO WORK WITH YOU TO RESOLVE SIMPLE ISSUES AND END YOUR CASE QUICKLY

RETURN DATES HAVE BEEN REDUCED FROM 5 MONTHS TO ABOUT 2-3 MONTHS. HEARING OFFICERS ARE COMPLETING OVER FOUR DIVORCES PER DAY AND HEARING OVER 30 CASES (DIVORCE, PARENTAGE, IV-D AND NON-IV-D, PARENTING TIME AND SUPPORT ISSUES BEYOND ORDER FOR CHILD SUPPORT) PER WEEK.