

FAMILY LAW

Families form the building blocks for society, and the future of society as a whole often rests upon the stability of individual family units. When a divorce or paternity suit tears a family apart, the emotional conflict can take its toll on everyone involved. A competent family law attorney can help you understand your rights, provide effective guidelines to deal with issues and help to resolve conflicts. Our attorneys at the Law Offices of Dennis E. Cuomo represent clients in number of family law practice areas that include, but are not limited to, these categories:

Divorce

The difficulties encountered in divorce are as varied as the people involved. Some degree of strife is usually present in divorce, even when a couple is able to agree on issues and resolve their matters amicably outside of court.

At the Law Offices of Dennis E. Cuomo, our attorneys assist clients in approaching divorce in the manner most suited to their situation. We sit down with our clients and review the important aspects of their marriage, explain legal options and how the divorce process works as well as ensure that all their questions are answered so they can make informed decisions about how to handle their divorce. We provide negotiation, mediation, and also take cases to trial when it serves the best interests of our client and is necessary to protect their rights. We hold our client's matters confidential and treat them with dignity and respect, giving them the personal attention they deserve.

Child Custody

Pivotal to any child custody arrangement is the consideration for what is best for the child. Maryland courts weigh many factors when arriving at child custody decisions, such as the couple's willingness to share custody, the child's relationship with parents, the child's preference, a parent's employment and financial status, the age of the child, the number of children involved, the child's ability to be stable in school and socially as well as benefits to the parents. Parental responsibilities are categorized into legal custody and physical custody.

Legal custody - the responsibility for making major childrearing decisions such as religious upbringing, education, healthcare, discipline and social activities.

Physical custody - the daily living arrangements and responsibility for physical care including food, clothes, proper hygiene and supervision.

Custody may be joint, where the parents share responsibilities in legal and/or physical custody. On the other hand, custody may be determined as the responsibility of one parent, which is called sole custody. In sole custody one parent has legal and/or physical custody of the child, and the child would live with the parent that has sole physical custody. The other parent would be granted rights to visitation.

Child Support

Child support payments are based on State of Maryland guidelines and calculations that regulate child support. Child support is a monthly payment for the care of the child that is paid when parents separate or divorce. Custody arrangements, income, assets, debts, disabilities and state of health of the parents as well as the child's medical, dental, educational and other expenses are taken into consideration when determining child support.

Having a family law attorney assist and advise you on legally acceptable child support amounts can often expedite your ability to reach a child support agreement and make the whole process go more smoothly. Our attorneys at the Law Offices of Dennis E. Cuomo draft child support agreements, negotiate settlements and also represent clients in court when disputes over child support require litigation.

Adoption

Building a family through adoption brings excitement and the anticipation of childrearing. There are various avenues for adopting, some of which may include the following:

Private Adoption - Adoption is arranged directly with the biological mother.

Agency Adoption - Adoption is arranged through a public or private agency that places children.

Foreign Adoption - State and federally regulated through the INS, adopting children from other countries is arranged privately or through an agency.

Stepparent adoption - Adoption of a child is arranged with a new spouse when a previous parent remarries.

Because the adoption process can involve legal complexities, it is wise to obtain an attorney to avoid difficulties. Experienced in adoption laws, a family law attorney can mean the difference between a rough and drawn out adoption and one that goes smoothly. In any type of adoption there's no substitute for a knowledgeable lawyer who is sensitive to what is best for the children.

Guardianship

In a guardianship, the court awards legal custody of a child to someone other than the child's biological parents. Guardians may be relatives, friends or people who know the child. The guardian lives with the child and supervises the child's healthcare, education and social activities, such as after school programs as well as the daily care of the child. A guardianship can last until the child is 18 years of age, or until a different guardian is assigned, or until the guardianship is ended and the child is returned to the parents. Also, in a guardianship, a child remains related to his or her birth parents, unlike adoption, where the parents relinquish their parental relationship as well as legal rights to the child.

Juvenile

A juvenile is a child who is under the age of 18. The Juvenile Court System focuses on rehabilitating rather than punishing juveniles for the commission of crimes, which is referred to as juvenile delinquency. Operating under a different structure than the court system that tries adults, Juvenile Court cases are heard by a judge, not a jury. Juveniles enjoy many of the same civil rights as adults, which include the right to an attorney, 5th amendment rights against self-incrimination and the right to confront and cross-examine their accusers.

At the Law Offices of Dennis E. Cuomo, our attorneys represent juveniles in court proceedings and during police questioning. If the alleged crime is not serious, the juvenile may be allowed to return home to his parents. When accused of a serious crime; however, the child may be held in custody until arraignment and bond is set. Our firm recommends legal representation for juveniles unless charges are being brought for a very minor offense.

Paternity

Paternity refers to establishing the identity of a child's father. When a child is born both parents can sign an acknowledgement of paternity while the mother is in the hospital, which is the ideal time to establish paternity. Social security benefits, health care, veteran's benefits as well as child support are based on paternity. Paternity is also vital information to be included in a child's medical records and may factor into future diagnosis and healthcare for the child.

In the event of divorce, disputes regarding paternity sometimes arise. DNA testing accurately determines parentage and may be required to resolve paternity suits.

At the Law Offices of Dennis E. Cuomo, our attorneys represent clients in a variety of family law issues and welcome the opportunity to serve you. Please phone us at **410-675-7900** or contact us directly online to arrange a consultation.