The Role of Child?s Legal Representatives in Colorado Family Law

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In family law, few roles are as pivotal?and as misunderstood?as that of the Child?s Legal Representative (CLR). In a new in-depth article titled ?How to Work with a Child?s Legal Representative (CLR) in Family Law Cases?, Krista Nash of Children First Family Law aims to demystify this critical position and provide clarity for parents, attorneys, and reporters who cover custody and divorce matters involving children. Drawing on her extensive experience representing families throughout Colorado?including in Denver, Lakewood, Arvada, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Greeley, and Pueblo?Nash offers a practical guide for working effectively with CLRs to protect the best interests of children during high-stakes family law disputes.

A Child?s Legal Representative is appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child?not the preferences of either parent?in cases involving parenting time, decision-making authority, or potential endangerment. Unlike Child and Family Investigators (CFIs) or Parental Responsibilities Evaluators (PREs), CLRs serve as ongoing advocates who maintain an active presence in a case and can fully participate in court proceedings. Their scope includes conducting direct interviews with children and parents, reviewing key legal documents, coordinating therapeutic services, and even cross-examining witnesses during trial. Yet despite their central role in shaping the outcome of a case, many parents are unclear about what CLRs do, when they?re appointed, and how to engage with them productively.

Krista Nash stresses the importance of early CLR appointment. In the article, she explains that bringing a CLR into a case before final orders are entered?or even pre-decree?can help prevent entrenched conflict, reduce the risk of repeated court filings, and minimize emotional harm to children. When high-conflict parenting issues arise after a divorce decree, or when sudden crises such as emergency motions or protection orders are filed, courts often turn to a CLR to help navigate the situation. Nash emphasizes that a CLR?s goal is not simply to recommend parenting time allocations but to help families avoid litigation fatigue, establish healthier dynamics, and focus on the long-term emotional well-being of the children involved.

The step-by-step process of working with a CLR begins with formal appointment by court order, typically outlined through documents like JDF 1319 and JDF 1320 in Colorado. These documents define the issues

the CLR is expected to address?ranging from substance abuse to decision-making authority?and provide legal clarity to all parties. Once appointed, CLRs review court records, speak with therapists, counselors, and school staff, and conduct in-person home visits to observe family dynamics firsthand. Their goal is to gather a complete picture of the child?s environment and any ongoing issues, particularly in situations where one parent alleges that the child resists or refuses contact with the other parent.

Nash describes how direct engagement with the child allows CLRs to assess the child?s emotional state, relationships, and stress levels in a way that written reports or legal motions often fail to capture. CLRs are not passive observers; they are active participants in shaping case outcomes, especially through mediation and informal negotiation. A strong CLR can help parents find common ground by suggesting temporary stipulations, adjusting visitation schedules, or initiating therapeutic interventions without waiting for a court hearing. They also maintain ongoing communication with the court through regular status conferences, allowing for updates and incremental progress without prolonged litigation.

One of the most critical aspects of a CLR?s role is in facilitating therapy?particularly parent-child conflict therapy. When relationships are strained, the CLR often identifies and coordinates specialized therapeutic services aimed at repairing emotional bonds and building healthier communication patterns. Nash explains that this can be especially important in cases involving parental alienation claims or longstanding disputes where trust between parent and child has eroded. The CLR monitors progress in these therapeutic relationships and communicates regularly with providers, adjusting recommendations as needed to ensure children are receiving the support they need.

In situations where collaborative resolution is possible, the CLR plays a central role in preparing for mediation or settlement conferences. Nash emphasizes that success in these cases is not defined by equal parenting time or technical custody outcomes. Instead, she encourages families and attorneys to view success through the lens of improved relationships, reduced emotional strain on the child, and the ability to resolve future issues without repeated court involvement. The CLR?s presence brings stability to the process and ensures that children's long-term well-being remains a guiding principle rather than an afterthought.

The article also touches on a delicate but important topic: balancing a child?s growing autonomy with parents? legal rights. Nash explains that while older children may express preferences about living arrangements or visitation, it is the CLR?s job to interpret those preferences through the lens of Colorado family law. The CLR ensures that children are heard without placing the burden of legal decision-making on them. For adolescents, this often includes helping them understand the structure and limitations of the legal system while still advocating for their emotional needs.

Krista Nash concludes the article by encouraging families to view the CLR not as another obstacle or opponent in the legal process, but as an ally who can help reduce stress, promote healing, and resolve disputes with the child?s best interest at the center. By working collaboratively with CLRs, parents can create more positive and stable environments for their children?both during and after the legal process. Nash?s insights offer a roadmap for families and professionals alike to engage with CLRs more effectively, and for journalists covering family law issues to deepen their understanding of this often-overlooked but essential role.

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Children First Family Law

Child First Family Law is a family law office with a child-centered approach that provides services as a Child?s Legal Representatives (CLR), Mediators, Parenting Coordinator/Decision-Makers (PC/DM), and Attorney Representing Parents.

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