



Family Law Counts™

Maryland Family Law Information for Clients & Professionals

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FREDERICK L. KOBBI, ESQUIRE

fkobb@wcslaw.com
Direct 410.659.1348

MOLLIE G. CAPLIS, ESQUIRE

mcaplis@wcslaw.com
Direct 410.659.1325

OUR PRACTICE INCLUDES:

Divorce & Separation
Child Custody
Child Support
Paternity
Domestic Violence
Adoption
Guardianship

► **Mollie's Corner**
Grounds For Divorce
Simplified

As of October 1, 2011, Maryland's "no-fault" ground for divorce will require a one-year separation period, reduced from two years. In conjunction with that change, the ground for divorce based on a one-year mutual and voluntary separation will be eliminated. The practical effect of this change is to make it easier to prove the grounds for divorce when

Welcome

We are pleased to present the inaugural issue of *Family Law Counts*, a Wright, Constable & Skeen e-newsletter that contains original material written by us. The newsletter will cover topics that relate to our family law practice. In this issue, we describe a typical initial consultation, which we thought was apropos for the first issue. Future issues will cover such diverse subjects as how retirement is treated in divorce, parenting plans, looking for hidden assets and unreported income, estate planning after separation, divorce and bankruptcy, access issues for infants, and relocation after divorce. As in the current issue, we will also pass along recent developments in Maryland's family law. We know your time is valuable, so we will strive to keep the newsletter relevant and concise.

If you would prefer not to receive future issues of *Family Law Counts*, feel free to click the *SafeUnsubscribe* button below. We'll understand. If you know anyone who might benefit from getting the newsletter, please let us know and we will send it to them, or you can forward it yourself.

Thanks—Fred and Mollie

What to Expect at an Initial Divorce Consultation

Meeting with a family law attorney doesn't have to be unpleasant and stressful. The more you know about what to expect at the initial consultation, the more comfortable and prepared you'll be for it.

The goal of the initial consultation is to identify the issues in your case, discuss your objectives, and help you make a plan to best reach your goals. An initial consultation will last about an hour and a half. Given that we provide information and advice during this time, we charge a modest fee for the consultation. Before the meeting, think about how you will explain why your marriage is in trouble. You may draw comfort from the fact that we are used to hearing about a couple's private affairs. You should also review your financial records so you can provide information about your and your spouse's incomes, expenses, assets, and debts. If you have children, we will inquire about their ages, schools, particular health issues, and how they're coping with the marital strife or separation. If a court case has already been initiated, you should bring all the court papers you have received in the case. They will help us understand the nature of the issues in your case and pinpoint the posture of the litigation.

After obtaining this information, we can identify and assess the relevant issues. They might include whether alimony will be a factor, what is to become of your assets, how retirement and investment accounts may be divided, a range of possible child custody arrangements, and the appropriate amount of child support. We may also recommend that you consult with other professionals, such as an appraiser to value assets, a forensic accountant to look for unreported income or hidden assets, a health care professional to evaluate custody issues, or a vocational counselor to assess your or your spouse's employability or earning capacity.

based on a one-year separation, which has historically required that the separation be "mutual and voluntary." With the change in the law, a divorce based on a separation will still require that the parties have been separated for a year, but the reason for the separation will be immaterial.

We will also discuss your objectives and offer our thoughts about possible outcomes in your case. Depending on the degree of cooperation or level of acrimony between you and your spouse, or whether there is a reason to seek emergency relief from a court, we may recommend immediately filing for divorce, referring you and your spouse to a mediator, or engaging us to prepare a comprehensive settlement agreement. Finally, we will also discuss our fees, billing practices, retainer policy and estimate the cost of our representation. These will vary depending on what course of action you choose to take.

If we have done our job, you will walk away from the initial consultation with an understanding of the issues facing you, the process of resolving those issues, and the range of possible outcomes. Hopefully, getting this information will reduce your anxiety about what to expect.

www.wcslaw.com

BALTIMORE OFFICE

100 North Charles Street, 16th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201

TOWSON OFFICE

220 Bosley Avenue
Towson, MD 21204

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