New Jersey Senate Unanimously Passes The NJ Family Collaborative Law Act

TRENTON, NJ, June 26, 2014 – Today, the New Jersey State Legislature took a major step forward toward empowering families to divorce with dignity and self-esteem, without resort to conventional litigation. The Senate unanimously (40-0) approved and on June 23, the General Assembly unanimously passed 78-0, A-1477, the New Jersey Family Collaborative Law Act. The bill was unanimously released by the Assembly Judiciary Committee on June 12th. S-1224, the Senate counterpart to A-1477 was unanimously released by the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 24th and the Senate Budget Committee on June 5th.

This extraordinary showing of support for the collaborative law process represents a paradigm shift in thinking within the State Legislature, and paves the way further expansion of collaborative practice in New Jersey.

The bills have received widespread bipartisan support throughout the State Legislature, as well as the endorsement of the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals (IACP), New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA), New Jersey Law Revision Commission (NJLRC), and all five New Jersey Uniform Law Commissioners.

The New Jersey Council of Collaborative Practice Groups spearheaded the efforts toward passage of the act with the support of its eight practice groups, consisting of hundreds of collaboratively trained professionals throughout New Jersey. Asm. Patrick Diegnan, Esquire (D-14) (Pictured at the far right in the above photograph), the Assembly bill’s prime sponsor, strongly praised the Council’s efforts in swiftly
advancing the legislation.

Speaking at the Assembly Judiciary Committee meeting, Council Co-Chair Linda Piff, Esquire said, “My colleagues and I were determined to change the way people divorce in New Jersey. We started with a small group of ten like-minded individuals and the movement has grown throughout the State. The Bill will empower families to divorce with privacy and dignity and avoid the emotional and financial strain of conventional litigation. Collaborative law is a powerful idea whose time has come.”

Speaking on the Disqualification Clause in the bill, Council Co-Chair, Anna Maria Pittella, Esquire, said, “This bill creates an obligation on an attorney to focus solely on negotiations and to use problem solving skills to break an impasse. It provides for team building that is needed to address all three parts of any divorce: legal, financial and emotional. The client disqualifies the attorney should the client wish to litigate.”

Finally, Council Co-Chair, Shireen Meistrich, LCSW, IACP President-Elect said, “I truly believe that the collaborative process is an agent of social change as it has the ability to truly shift the way we think about conflict and how we resolve it.”

Other Council members speaking in support of the bill at the Assembly Judiciary Committee included, John Caroli, CFP, Patricia Carney, Esquire, and Joesph Noto, Esquire. Jeralyn Lawrence, Esquire, Chair of NJSBA’s Family Law Section and Laura Tharney, Esquire, NJLRC Executive Director, rounded out vigorous testimony in support of the bill.

A-1477 is now pending the Governor’s signature.

New Jersey Council of Collaborative Practice Groups
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