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BROWARD
COALITION
FOR
JUDICIAL
AWARENESS
P.O. Box 4135
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33338-4135

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May 16, 1991

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By way of introduction, the Judicial Awareness Coalition is a coalition that was formed and shaped out of the efforts of several organizations that are concerned with the gender bias condition that exists in the legal-judicial system. The Coalition was formed just prior to the publication of the Gender Bias Study which was commissioned by the Florida Supreme Court. The Broward Coalition for Judicial Awareness is a non-partisan group whose purpose is to create public awareness of the gender bias condition within the legal/judicial system and to publicize the Report of the Florida Supreme Court Gender Bias Study Commission. The thrust of the Coalition has been to assure that the recommendations contained in the Gender Bias Study are implemented in an expeditious way.

One of the most significant recommendations contained in the Gender Bias Study is the creation of a Family Division in the court system. Moreover, the Florida Legislature established a Commission on Family Courts in order to conduct hearings and make findings and recommendations in response to the growing inability of the judicial system to respond to the special needs in the family practice field. On March 1, 1991, the Commission issued a report recommending that the Supreme Court require each judicial circuit to submit a local rule establishing a family law division within the circuit for approval by September 1, 1991 and to implement the rule by January 1, 1992.

Five judicial circuits throughout the State of Florida have already established a Family Law Division to deal with the special concerns of Family Law. The five circuits cover over twelve counties, including Orange County, Hillsboro County, and Palm Beach County. At the present time, Broward County has no Family Law Division.

The Broward Coalition for Judicial Awareness is a non-partisan group formed to create public awareness of the gender bias condition within the Legal/Judicial system and to publicize the Report of the Florida Supreme Court Gender Bias Study Commission.

The members of the Coalition are local chapters of the following organizations: AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN (AAUW) * AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (ACLU) * BROWARD COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (BCSW) * BROWARD COUNTY WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION (BCWLA) * BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S CLUB, INC (BPW) * NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS (NAWBO) * NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN (NCJW) * NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN (NOW) * GWEN CHERRY WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS (WPC) * UNITARIAN CHURCH SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE.

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Because of the emotionally charged issues which surface in this area of law, efficiency and streamlined procedures for handling these matters are crucial. It is the position of this Coalition that Broward County is in dire need of a Family Law Division for several reasons. A Family Law Division will ensure efficiency in the system and consequently shorten the time period within which each case is tied up in the legal system.

A Family Law Division will also provide judges which become more knowledgeable in this particular area of law, and will provide a more even handed approach to the disposition of cases coming before the Family Law Division. Judges who are more knowledgeable in the area of Family Law will be able to render decisions in a shorter time period and will be able to assist in reaching creative and practical solutions to recurring problems.

Finally, a Family Law Division will enable the practitioners to handle one particular case with a number of different issues in front of the same judge rather than having the case fragmented with different issues (i.e., custody, juvenile dependency, criminal child abuse . . .) being heard by different judges in a different courtroom. Family Law Divisions are designed to deal with all issues concerning the same child or family by one judge, resulting in a more efficient, humane and intelligent disposition of the case.

The Coalition invited Chief Judge Dale Ross to speak to members of the community regarding the creation of a Family Law Division. The gathering resulted in a heightened sense of interest and awareness in the community and enabled persons in the community which would not otherwise have an opportunity to have their concerns addressed to be heard. Additionally, the Coalition is participating with other groups and Judge Dale Ross in creating a plan for a Family Court Division in Broward County.

Our Coalition will continue its efforts on the local front to monitor the progress of the creation of a Family Division in Broward County.

Please feel free to contact us if you would like our input or suggestions concerning a Family Law Division in the court systems.

Very truly yours,



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