

Friend of the Court 20th Circuit Court Ottawa County Now Offering Online Dispute Resolution for Parenting Time Issues

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Grand Haven, Michigan – Thanks to the Friend of the Court, families in Ottawa county can now resolve parenting time matters online. Instead of having to take their issue to the courthouse, parents can access caseworkers at the 20th Circuit Court using their smartphone, tablet, or computer. This program is an opportunity for the parties to make their own decisions regarding their family division court cases.

Chief Judge Judge Van Allsburg indicated “This platform extends the court to people where they are and will help them reduce conflict and save time and money, which will benefit their children. We are proud to offer this option to Ottawa families.”

The Friend of the Court assists families with custody, parenting time, and child support issues. They have long used a dispute resolution process where a caseworker will meet with parents in-person to help them come to an agreement. Since the COVID pandemic, Friend of the Court caseworkers have continued to work with families remotely by telephone or ZOOM. Now, the Friend of the Court is extending the option of online dispute resolution (ODR) to parenting time disputes.

Jennell Challa, Ottawa County Friend of the Court said “We are committed to helping people resolve their issues outside of the courtroom. It is simpler for parents and more efficient for court staff, Referees and Judges. This platform helps us provide court services in an “easy to access” yet powerful manner.”

How it Works

Families will be invited to the online platform by their caseworker. They will work together with the caseworker on their parenting time issue, just like they would in-person. Throughout the online dispute resolution process, people receive email and text messages that update them on the status of their case. If they reach an agreement, the caseworker will prepare the legal document for all parties to review and sign. Then, the agreement will be submitted to the court for review and approval by the Judge. The parties need not come to court to finalize the agreement. This process is similar to in-person dispute resolution, free of charge and convenient for people who cannot come to court for various reasons, including work, school, health, or quarantine. Matt Schmid, Assistant Friend of the Court: Field Services Division, coordinated the development of this ODR solution with the vendor, Court Innovations, and noted “Right now, the challenges our families are facing are compounded by the economic, health, and safety pressures of this pandemic. Now, more than ever, we seek to remove barriers to connecting to services.”

The platform is powered by Court Innovations software known as Matterhorn, an online dispute resolution provider. Matterhorn launched in three courts in Michigan in 2014 and has expanded year after year. To date, court users have handled over 100,000 cases online via Matterhorn and adoption of the platform continues to grow.

“Congratulations to the 20th Circuit Court! We have been proud to power their child support compliance system and are proud to work with the court to expand dispute resolution options for families in Michigan,” says Court Innovations CEO, MJ Cartwright.

About the Ottawa County Friend of the Court

Visit miottawa.org/Courts/FOC for additional FOC information and services.

About Court Innovations

Court Innovations is based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Its online dispute resolution platform Matterhorn increases access and saves time and money for the public and the courts. Matterhorn is in over 100 courts in sixteen states. Courts have used Matterhorn to resolve more than 100,000 tickets and disputes online. For more information about the Matterhorn technology and how it works, visit getmatterhorn.com.

Visit courtinnovations.com/MIC20 to see the platform.