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**TOP FAMILY LAWYERS SURVEYED ACROSS US:
BUSINESS IS DOWN BUT IT'S TEMPORARY.
CONFLICT IS UP.**

A survey of top family lawyers across the United States reveals that family lawyers are coping with declining business, as are many other professionals, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), a group of 1586 Fellows who are family lawyers located in every one of the 50 states. AAML attorneys have to complete a robust application, pass tests and undergo a comprehensive peer and judicial review to gain entrance to the organization. About 40% of the members participated in the survey.

“In a sense,” explains Susan Myres, president of the Academy, “the results came as a surprise. The Fellows in our group are known as the cream of the crop, top practitioners in their field. Yet they have been as hard hit as any other professional group.

“However,” she adds, “if you read the survey carefully, it becomes quite clear that the demand is there. Clients are calling and indicating their intention to divorce—or to split up, if they are living together and not married. But current circumstances—court closures, income reduction, temporary reduction in

the value of property and stock—all make it difficult for them to pursue the divorce right now.”

Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that business had decreased during the pandemic, versus 16% who said business had increased. Some attorneys reported that they had heard more than once that a potential client was interested in talking about divorce but couldn't make the call because of the presence of the other party.

Of the business that does exist, 51% of the lawyers responding reported receiving calls that concerned existing visitation orders. Fifty-eight percent reported receiving calls from individuals desiring to proceed to a divorce. Thirty-six percent of those reporting received calls dealing with the need to modify child support, and 22% reported calls from unmarried individuals initiating suits for parenting rights and duties.

Ninety-five percent of participants reported that there was a “shelter in place” order in their area; yet 86% reported that courts in their jurisdiction are still able to accept and process court filings. When asked about the use of video sessions by local courts, participants gave answers that varied wildly.

Overall, 22% responded that video sessions were not in use at all in their jurisdictions, but this varied from 46% in the West who said there was no use of video sessions to only 7% in the South. Thirty-two percent of total respondents said video sessions were in use for emergency cases only, but 30% said video sessions were available for emergencies and when all parties agreed. Thirteen percent said video sessions were available for all parties, regardless of urgency or agreement. The general availability of video sessions was most prevalent in the South (20%), Midwest (20%) and in the Southwest (22%). AAML Fellows who

are experienced with video court sessions are currently networking and advising Fellows in areas where video court sessions are just being introduced.

“We expect that pent-up demand will be growing throughout this crisis,” explains Susan Myres. “There was certainly a spike in divorce filings in China as people emerged from prolonged isolation together. Our members are likely to see a significant upswing in demand, once the current crisis is resolved. We are also likely to see parents with current orders for shared custody in court trying to litigate disagreements over visitation and child support, as a result of actions taken during the pandemic that could not be resolved in court at the time. There is no question in my mind that our lawyers will be needed even more than before the pandemic occurred.”

About the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) was established in 1962 and is the preeminent organization for family law practitioners. The AAML is comprised of 1,586 Fellows who are located in every state. The AAML is headquartered in Chicago, IL. For more information go to aaml.org or contact Executive Director Jill C. Peña at jill@aaml.org.

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