

Legislative Innovation in the Last Frontier Resolving Guardianships, Adoptions, and Custody Matters Under the Umbrella of the Dependency Case

House Bill 200 passed the Alaska State Legislature last session and will take effect on January 1, 2017. It will serve to end the legal fiction that a family involved in a dependency matter often has “separate” cases which impact the resolution of the dependency matter, but may be heard by different judges.

The bill provides authority for the dependency judge to hear guardianship, adoption, and custody matters “as part of” the existing dependency case. The bill also creates a “proxy” mechanism to request an adoption or guardianship, in lieu of initially filing a formal petition.

Parent attorneys, and other case participants, hope that this comprehensive, innovative approach will help to shorten the length of time children are in care and expedite resolution of all pending legal matters for the family.

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