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PRESS RELEASE: The Unified Family Court

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Beginning January 25, 2010, the Fifth Judicial District's Family Division, having expanded from thirteen to fifteen Judges, launched a Unified Family Court. This initiative is designed to promote and implement the "One Judge, One Family" concept as a best practice reality for our Court and the people it serves. The Unified Family Court also promotes cross-training and cross-competencies for our Judges, and bridges the divide between adult and juvenile judicial cultures.

Each Judge is now able to hear, and will hear, all types of cases. The Judges are divided into five teams of three Judges each. Each Judge is now designated as either Unified Juvenile (UJ), Unified Adult (UA) or 50/50. Each of the five teams has one Judge from each category. This designation determines what types of cases each Judge will hear most often. The five UJ Judges will focus mostly on dependency and delinquency issues but will hear domestic relations matters as well. The five UA Judges will focus mostly on divorce, support, custody and protection from abuse (PFA) matters but will hear dependency and delinquency matters as well. The five 50/50 Judges will split their time relatively equally between all matters.

This new model will allow each Family Division Judge to maintain his or her supervision of a case no matter what path that case follows. A family will no longer need to appear before multiple Judges depending upon what issue the family is attempting to resolve. The Judge most familiar with each case and family will be able to preside over all matters. Our Family Division will promote and implement "One Judge, One Family"

and cross-competencies among our fifteen Judges without sacrificing the individual expertise and experience that Judges have accumulated over time.

This UFC initiative will help to better serve families, a goal that remains constant in our Division. It grows from a consensus-driven collaboration among our Family Division Judges and draws upon both our experiences here in Allegheny County and the “One Judge, One Family” best practice model recognized nationwide.