



January 7, 2021

Mr. Ken Kelertas,
President,
Halton Law Association

Dear Mr. Kelertas,

Halton Family Case Conferences

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on court operations in 2020. This impact continues to date. Most court hearings are now conducted by virtual hearings. Court files are not accessible to the judges to prepare for the virtual hearings. Court filings are electronic which creates new and different challenges for the court operations and for judges. This is entirely a new way for judges and court operations.

I am sure these changes have been a major cultural shift for lawyers as well.

With this rapid shift to more technology for court operations and judicial hearings, the number of scheduled hearings each day were reduced to account for this new way of conducting hearings.

Back in the spring of 2020, the number of family case conferences, being heard virtually, was reduced to three. These conferences were scheduled at different times throughout the day. With the benefit of the experience, gained over the last number of months, we are re-assessing whether we can schedule more virtual family case conferences each day. I would only do so if satisfied that judges could continue to conduct meaningful hearings at family case conferences.

Having three case conferences per day has created a significant and serious backlog in scheduling new family case conferences. Right now, the next available case conference dates, in Milton for family case conferences, are June.

This puts unfortunate and undue pressure on family law litigants to have to wait many months before having a case conference.

To address this situation, in Milton, I have arranged for 1 1/2 additional judges (in addition to an already scheduled case conference judge) for the weeks of February 8 and 15, 2021 to hear family case conferences currently scheduled after April 1, 2021 ("February Conference Blitz").

Here's how it will work:

- a) Counsel and/or an unrepresented party, who have scheduled family case conferences after April 1, 2021, can contact the Trial Coordinator's Office to re-schedule a new case conference date during the weeks of February 8 and 15, 2021. The old case conference date will be vacated;
- b) Counsel and/or an unrepresented party must ensure Case Conference Briefs are filed no later than January 31, 2021. If the Case Conference Briefs are filed after this date, the conference judge will decide whether to hear the matter or simply adjourn it to the next available conference date; and
- c) Case Conference Briefs are limited to 4 pages, plus Financial Statements, plus excerpts from critical documents needed for the case conference. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in the Case Conference being cancelled administratively and not proceeding on the scheduled date.

I kindly ask for your assistance in distributing this letter to all members of the Halton Law Association.

If you have any questions or if there is anything, I can do to assist in getting this information out to your members, please let me know.

I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Leonard Ricchetti
Regional Senior Justice, Central West Region

LR/na