

Article 39A.

Custody and Visitation Mediation Program.

**§ 7A-494. Custody and Visitation Mediation Program established.**

(a) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall establish a Custody and Visitation Mediation Program to provide statewide and uniform services in accordance with G.S. 50-13.1 in cases involving unresolved issues about the custody or visitation of minor children. The Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts shall appoint such AOC staff support required for planning, organizing, and administering such program on a statewide basis.

The purposes of the Custody and Visitation Mediation Program shall be to provide the services of skilled mediators to further the goals expressed in G.S. 50-13.1(b).

(b) Beginning on July 1, 1989, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall establish in phases a statewide custody mediation program comprised of local district programs to be established in all judicial districts of the State. Each local district program shall consist of: a qualified mediator or mediators to provide mediation services; and such clerical staff as the Administrative Office of the Courts in consultation with the local district program deems necessary. Such personnel, to be employed by the Chief District Court Judge of the district, may serve as full-time or part-time State employees or, in the alternative, such activities may be provided on a contractual basis when determined appropriate by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The Administrative Office of the Courts may authorize all or part of a program in one judicial district to be operated in conjunction with that of another district or districts. The Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts is authorized to approve contractual agreements for such services as executed by order of the Chief District Court Judge of a district court district; such contracts to be exempt from competitive bidding procedures under Chapter 143 of the General Statutes. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary and appropriate for the administration of the program. Funds appropriated by the General Assembly for the establishment and maintenance of mediation programs under this Article shall be administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts.

(c) For a person to qualify to provide mediation services under this Article, that person shall show that he or she:

- (1) Has at minimum a master's degree in psychology, social work, family counselling, or a comparable human relations discipline; and
- (2) Has at least 40 hours of training in mediation techniques by a qualified instructor of mediation as determined by the Administrative Office of the Courts; and
- (3) Has had professional training and experience relating to child development, family dynamics, or comparable areas; and
- (4) Meets such other criteria as may be specified by the Administrative Office of the Courts. (1989, c. 795, s. 15.)