

## **Participant Group Introductory Statement**

Thank you all for taking the time to meet with us. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

The Hennepin County court system and other organizations working with them has applied for and received a grant from the federal government to improve its response to cases. Specifically, this court system is interested in how it can do things better for custody cases in which there has been domestic violence, whether alleged or not. Information gathered from this discussion will be collected and used to better train judges, mediators, attorneys, court staff, basically anyone who touches a family court case and improve consistency in how family court cases involving domestic abuse are handled. Many participants are also involved in criminal court proceedings but these are not the focus of our questions.

If you are willing to participate in this roundtable, I would like to remind you of a couple of things before we begin:

Your participation is completely voluntary and will not affect any services you may be receiving from the court or victim services programs. We're not here to talk about specific cases, there's a different process for that.

**[Note to Facilitators: Complaints about Family Court Judicial Officers should go to Judge McKeig; Complaints about Judge McKeig should go to Judge Robben; and Complaints about Court staff should go to Katie Brey.]**

Keep in mind that if you participate, you may stop participating in the discussion at any time, you don't have to answer any question that is asked. We will keep everything you tell us and other information collected in the strictest confidence. Participants' identities will not be disclosed in any way. We will take notes during our discussion today, but names will not be included in those notes. We plan to share some of the key points that come up with our colleagues and partners on this project, but we will share those in the aggregate. We ask that as roundtable participants, you also keep the information shared confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any notes, reports or presentations on this discussion.

There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. Please be respectful of the other participants by listening as others share their views. Only one person should be speaking at a time.

Questions?

### **Questions for all Participant Groups by Topic**

When we say family court system, what does that mean to you?

Tell us about any of these experiences yourself (or someone else) have had with the family court system (custody/divorce) and Order for Protection cases in Hennepin County.

OFPs (Questions specific to your experience with Orders for Protection in Hennepin County)

Did you apply for and/or receive an OFP in Hennepin County? If so, please describe any barriers and challenges that you experienced in that process.

Were you successful and did you get an OFP? If no, why not?

Did you ask for dismissal or modification of your Order for Protection? Tell us about your experience when you made that request.

ENE/ADR (The rest of the questions refer to your experience in OFP matters AND in other family court matters including custody, parenting time, divorce, and child support)

Please describe any experience you have participating in Early Neutral Evaluations (ENE) or other Alternative Dispute Resolution (such as Mediation) processes in family court.

Tell me about any pressure you felt to make a settlement/reach an agreement in ENE or Mediation.

Were any agreements/settlements reached as part of the ENE/ADR process?

How was the ENE/ADR process was useful?

GALs

Was a Guardian ad Litem appointed to your case in the courthouse or court room? If yes, what was your experience with the Guardian ad Litem?

Financial

Were you told you could ask for financial relief as part of the order for protection process? If so, did you ask for any financial relief? Was it granted?

Describe any financial needs that you wanted the court to address. Were you able to ask for financial relief? Were you granted any financial relief?

Safety

At any point during your proceeding in family court, did anyone ask you if you had experienced domestic violence? If yes, what was that experience like? Did you have the opportunity to talk about how the domestic violence relates to your custody/PT issue?

At your hearing, describe any concerns you had about safety? Describe how these safety concerns were (or were not) addressed at the hearing. If you didn't feel safe, what would have made you feel safer?

Besides concerns about safety in the courthouse, did you have other safety concerns for yourself and/or your children that you wanted the court to address? If yes, what were those concerns? Were the concerns addressed?

At the conclusion of your proceeding, did you feel like the court listened to your safety concerns? As a result of going to court (either for an OFP or for a different family court matter) do you think that you and/or your children are safer? Why or why not?

### General Questions

Have you ever intentionally avoided going to family court? If so, why?

Describe your satisfaction with your experience in family court?

How could the Court could have better assisted you?

If you had a friend or family member preparing to go to family court for the first time, what advice would you give them?

Did you understand the Court's decision?

Is there anything we didn't cover regarding your experiences in family court that you'd like to talk about?

### **Provider Group Introductory Statement**

Thank you all for taking the time to meet with us. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

The Hennepin County court system and other organizations working with them has applied for and received a grant from the federal government to improve its response to custody/access cases. Specifically, this court system is interested in how it can do things better for cases in which there has been domestic violence, whether alleged or not. Information gathered from this discussion will be collected and used to better train judicial officers and improve consistency in how family court cases involving domestic abuse are handled.

By court system, we mean to ask about parts of the process including attorneys, intake center staff, guardians, mediators, judicial and non-judicial officers and security personnel.

No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any reports or presentations on this discussion. Questions?

### **Questions for all provider groups**

What is your experience in family court proceedings with domestic violence and orders for protection? Custody issues where there is no concurrent domestic violence related proceeding?

When you think back on your experience working with Petitioners on OFP hearings, how do you think the court managed the hearing?

Specifically, what is your experience with attempts to introduce evidence on any issue? Have you ever had problems with limitations on the scope of evidence you were permitted to offer? How did the Judge communicate the decision to disallow the evidence?

What is your experience with Petitioners' ability to get their needs for financial relief met in OFP cases? How often do you talk to parties about financial needs in OFP cases? How often do Petitioners want such relief and what happens if they request it? What barriers exist to Petitioners who need economic relief?

Do you screen your cases for domestic violence? If so, when and how? Do you use a tool or guide of any kind?

What recommendations do you have to improve screening for identification of domestic violence in non-domestic violence cases?

How would you handle a situation where you thought that domestic violence was an issue in a non-domestic violence case?

How do you identify domestic abuse, the nature and the context of the violence, determine the implications of the abuse, and account for abuse in decisions/actions (what that means for custody and parenting time)?

What is your experience working with GALs on cases where there is domestic violence?

Have you experienced pressure in family court proceedings to participate in an Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE) or other Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process when Domestic Violence is an issue? If yes, please share your experience.

Explain any concerns you had about whether the process kept you or your client safe.

If you had a colleague who was working on a family court case for the first time, what advice would you give them?

Can you think any ways that this project could support efforts to better identify and account for domestic abuse in custody cases?

Is there anything we didn't cover that you'd like to talk about?

### **Closing Statement for all Groups**

Thank you for your participation in today's roundtable. We greatly appreciate the feedback you have shared with us. This information is being collected from a number of groups and will be analyzed to help make recommendations for improvements that can be made to the family court system.