

August 27, 2026

Illinois Supreme Court Rules Committee
222 North LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Submitted via: RulesCommittee@illinoiscourts.gov

Re: Proposal 26-07 (P.R. 000357) Amends Supreme Court Rule 906 (Attorney Qualification and Education in Child Custody and Visitation Matters)

These comments are submitted on behalf of The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence (“The Network”). The Network is a collaborative partnership dedicated to improving the lives of those impacted by gender-based violence in the state of Illinois. For the past 40 years, The Network has worked tirelessly to end our society’s tolerance of gender-based violence through public policy and advocacy work, community education, connecting the public to services, and by providing centralized resources to service providers in the gender-based violence community. Additionally, The Network provides immediate connection to direct service providers with availability to support survivors in need through the Illinois Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline (“Hotline”). In [2025](#), survivors called the Hotline in record-breaking numbers seeking support. Newly released data shows that the Hotline received a total of 69,748 contacts, (calls, texts, and chats), with nearly 40,000 of those contacts coming from Cook County.

We at The Network are in writing in support of [Proposal 26-07](#), to require four hours of continued legal education courses on domestic violence related issues for counsel who are appointed to the court to participate in child custody, parenting responsibilities, visitation and parenting time matters related to domestic violence. The proposal includes training topics like family violence, coercive control, the impact to children who witness intimate partner violence, the impact of violence on survivors, post-separation intimate partner abuse, and more.

According to surveys by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 1 in 3 women have experienced physical violence, stalking and/or rape by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Given the high rates of domestic and sexual violence, this means cases with domestic violence history are regularly being litigated in our circuit courts, and we must have court systems that are thoroughly trained to respond to these survivor litigants.

In recent years, The Network has provided training to guardian ad litem and other appointed counsels within the Domestic Relations Division in the Circuit Court of Cook County on such matters. The goal of such trainings has been to encourage stronger understanding of domestic violence, how it shows up in court settings, the impact on children from witnessing abuse, and how to screen for signs of possible domestic violence within cases counsel are appointed to.

Anecdotally, we continue to see that more often than not, guardian ad litem or child representatives are regularly appointed in Domestic Relations cases in Cook County with higher levels of perceived “conflict” between the parties. In fact, what comes across as conflict may actually be intimate partner abuse by one litigant against another, and the court system can be a place of continued abuse. Abusive litigants can use the court as a tool of abuse by filing excessive and inappropriate motions to lengthen proceedings and torment the other party, requesting numerous hearings over parenting time arrangements, making false reports of child abuse or neglect, or taking other legal actions within Domestic Relations court. The ramifications of these actions drain the livelihoods and bank accounts of survivors by requiring them to engage more with the abusive party, potentially lose access and parenting time with their children, and create more financial burdens as survivors navigate high fees for appointed counsel, mental health evaluations, cost of transcripts, and more. By requiring more training, appointed counsel may better identify cycles of abuse, how litigation abuse is showing up in court, communicate this accurately and thoroughly to judges, and ideally, prevent further harm against the survivor and their children and the use of the court as a tool of abuse.

We urge the Rules Committee to adopt Proposal 26-07, and require more training for appointed counsel in child custody, allocation of parental responsibilities, visitation and parenting time matters, given the high rate of domestic violence experienced by litigants who access our court system and how it presents in family law cases.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Behr (she/her/hers)
Director of Policy & Systems Advocacy
The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence
Mbehr@the-network.org