

# FACTS: Monitoring legal personnel for the community

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<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/local/facts-monitoring-legal-personnel-for-the-community/kHSq3JatHRVfx7uej6Z28M/>



Members of Families Against Court Travesties (FACTS) participate in the Court Watches program, whose goal is to evaluate the performance of the judge or magistrate, lawyers and other professionals while taking notes during hearings for family and dependency court cases. CONTRIBUTED

## What does Families Against Court Travesties do?

We attend hearings, primarily involving high-conflict child custody family court cases. Based on reports obtained at these hearings, we write up evaluations of the judges and lawyers. Judges are aware of our services, and several have expressed appreciation. We maintain a hotline, conduct, monthly membership meetings, and educate people about what they might expect in the family court system.

Our most important task is to show litigants there are people who care about their situation and families. When we sit in a courtroom taking notes and expecting justice and fairness, litigants feel confident and supported. In addition, we've given testimony to the Florida Supreme Court about fairness and diversity in the courts. We've witnessed the Judicial Nominating Committee in action and contributed feedback to its members.

During the 1990s, the South Palm Beach County Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) developed a system of court watches, primarily for providing a presence in criminal trials of rape, murder or domestic violence.

NOW has been contacted by mothers (and some fathers) who endured a dysfunctional family court system, starting about 20 years ago. FACTS was created to address their issues. Some of their stories can be seen online, at [factscourtwatch.com/our-stories/](http://factscourtwatch.com/our-stories/).

## How does your agency benefit the community?

Our presence in the courtroom during hearings encourages professional, family-friendly actions from lawyers, judges, professional witnesses and other court personnel involved in the family court system. Our actions try to protect families, and especially children, from the negative effects of court indifference to family well-being.

## What is your agency's focus for the future?

- Continuation of court watches in family court and dependency court. Recently, we have been called to promote professionalism in Dependency Court as well; we are in the process of helping several Dependency Court litigants create their own court watch group, centering in Broward County.
- Utilization of existing electronic devices for recording of family court hearings. Currently, litigants must pay for professional court reporters and transcripts if they want documentation, which is vital in contested cases and for appeals.
- Advancing our impact by obtaining grants, enabling us to hire a full-time administrator and part-time court watch supervisor.
- Development of workshops and literature for litigants in family court and dependency court.

## How can the community help?

We need volunteers in Palm Beach and Broward counties such as:

- Court watch volunteers, who would be trained to learn what to observe at hearings, how to write up a report, and to understand the judicial system; after completing this court watch training, volunteers will attend hearings at litigants' request.
- Social media volunteers are needed to spread awareness, both in the general public and among litigants struggling with the system, for our [Facebook page](#) and [website](#).
- Professionals and interns to mediate support group meetings with the litigants and their families.
- Funding for expenses involved in promoting our goals.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Families Against Court Travesties, Inc.'s (FACTS) mission is to assist families who face a crisis in the family courts or other government agencies. By implementing a court-monitoring and reporting system, our goal is to ensure that the best interests of the child prevail in family court and that due process and equity are the norm. We are also committed to educating the public on these issues.

## KEY PROGRAMS

**Court Watches:** Primarily in family court, but lately also in dependency court, members take notes during hearings, and evaluate the judge/magistrate, lawyers and other professionals involved in each case.

**Education:** Members attend a variety of community programs, distributing literature and describing our efforts to individuals attending.

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