



FAMILIES AGAINST COURT TRAVESTIES, INC. (FACTS)

PO Box 7322, Delray Beach FL 33482

800-201-5560

www.FactsCourtWatch.org

FactsCourtWatch@gmail.com

[Facebook.com/FamiliesAgainstCourtTravesties](https://www.facebook.com/FamiliesAgainstCourtTravesties)

NEW MEMBERS PACKET

- 1. FACTs Mission and Goals**
- 2. FACTS Basics**
- 3. FACTs Welcome List**
- 4. Online links to New Member Form, New Litigant Form, and Court Watch Request Form**
- 5. Helpful Hints for Pro se Litigants**
- 6. Instructions for Court Watch Volunteers**
- 7. Family Court Watch Report Form**
- 8. Family Court Terminology**
- 9. Reimbursement Request Form**

A SOCIETY PUTTING CHILDREN AND FAMILY NEEDS FIRST



FAMILIES AGAINST COURT TRAVESTIES, INC.

a 501(c)(3) Corporation

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MISSION

The **Palm Beach County Chapter of the National Organization for Women** developed **FACTS**, a Court Watch system of volunteers who observe courtroom proceedings, review the behavior of the judges and attorneys, and plan actions to address any problems. This was in response to the tremendous upsurge in cries for help from parents, with numerous calls asking for assistance and support concerning family law custody issues.

GOALS

- **Educate** and hold the Justice System accountable for its actions
- **Judges** who keep children's welfare above all
- **Lawyers** who encourage speedy, equitable resolution of their cases
- **Parents** who restrain their impulse for revenge
- **Children** who are allowed to maintain positive contact with both parents
- **Family** courts which adhere to the rules of evidence, due process and constitutional rights
- **Judiciary** that is independent, implements court orders consistently and supports financial equity

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Families Against Court Travesties, Inc. (FACTS) has had a solid impact on individual cases, in both Family and Dependency courts; it has inspired judges to be more humane, more family-friendly, more protective of children. Our presence has motivated lawyers and professional witnesses to behave more professionally. It has helped beleaguered parent-litigants cope with trauma and count their blessings.

Here is a list of what FACTS helps with:

Finding, securing, and empowering volunteers:

- To become courtwatchers willing to write up their observations.
- To listen to stressed parent-litigants, thus providing informal moral and emotional support to them.

Giving litigants the opportunity:

- To connect with family court activists.
- To observe other court hearings as a courtwatcher, thus providing a chance to “give back” and/or get a perspective on their own family court proceedings.
- To meet other individuals with difficult court cases.

Our Membership:

- Collects information across multiple cases and takes that to lawmakers and the media.
- Provides information on potential resources in the community to help parents and/or their children cope.
- Provides reimbursement for litigants and courtwatchers who incur small expenses related to court cases.
- Educates the community, legislators and political candidates on abuses in family, dependency and guardianship courts.
- Publishes guest editorials and letters to the editor in local newspapers.
- Helps other NOW chapters in Florida and throughout the nation create their own court watch systems.

FACTS does not help with:

- Giving legal advice
- Providing financial assistance for legal fees
- Providing financial assistance for personal expenses beyond very small amounts
- Protesting for one specific case

FACTs Welcome List

In order to help us help you, the following information is being provided:

1. Intake sheets need to be filled out and given to a board member, so that you will automatically be sent pertinent emails.
2. If you are currently involved in litigation, please fill out the Court Watch Request form also.
3. Court Watch volunteers - Notices of upcoming hearings will be sent via email. If you plan to attend, please notify us. We all wear white shirts and a pink Court Watch sticker. You will be given a form to fill out for that particular hearing. It is most important that you write an evaluation. It doesn't have to be long, but it needs to address any bias or misconduct the judge or any court-appointed expert shows. FACTs Court Watchers try to be a dignified presence in the court. This information needs to be reviewed before attending:
 - A. Helpful Hints for Pro se Litigants
 - B. Court Watchers Guide
 - C. Complete Family Court Watch Report –IMPORTANT! Sign and hand to, or forward to a board member.
 - D. Family Court Terms.
4. Court Watch litigants - Go to as many Court Watches as possible, and you will find that in return, your hearings will have better Court Watch attendance.
5. Court Watch litigants - Give us as much lead time as possible to post upcoming hearings. Make sure a Court Watch Report is filled out and submitted for each hearing/trial.
6. You are welcome to come to monthly FACTs meetings if you are interested in promoting court watches.
7. Make use of our website and keep up with the email. All notices, calendars, and pertinent news will be sent to you via email once you have provided the necessary information. Unauthorized copies of emails are not to be forwarded or distributed in any manner.
8. Our group has spent an enormous amount of time contacting the media and continues to do so. All media questions and comments pertaining to FACTs are to be referred to our appointed media person. ***Under no circumstances is anyone, other than specifically designated persons, authorized to speak for FACTs.***
9. We also picket the courthouses, thereby obtaining media coverage. Many of us have met with our local politicians and candidates and are constantly trying to bring our issues to the forefront. Our cause has been adopted and supported by Florida State NOW and PBCNOW, and a member of our organization is on the National NOW Family Law Advisory Committee which puts out a newsletter on the National website 2 or 3 times a year.
10. By listening and becoming familiar with our goals and activities, newcomers at meetings and demonstrations will learn a lot about what works and what doesn't. What we do need are proactive members. Volunteer for an action, make a difference!!

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Welcome to FACTS Courtwatch! I hope we can help you through this tough time with some support in the courtroom. To request a courtwatch on your hearing or to be registered in our system for future hearings, you'll need to complete one or more of these forms:

1. [FACTS New Member Form](#) This is for anyone joining us, volunteers and litigants. You will only need to fill this out once.
2. [FACTS New Litigant Form](#) This is for litigants needing help. Again, you will only need to fill this out once.
3. [Courtwatch Request Form](#) Anytime you'd like us to attend a hearing, you will need to fill this out.

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FACTS HELPFUL HINTS FOR PRO SE LITIGANTS

These suggestions would be helpful for litigants with an attorney as well. Even though you may have paid for legal expertise, no one is perfect and many of our opponents' attorneys are very underhanded. No one knows your case better than you do. Always keep this in mind.

Here are some hints:

1. When filing a motion for a hearing, include all the evidence you intend to submit and a list of witnesses, i.e. pages from transcripts, medical records, expert documentation. The more the better.
2. Have 3 copies of documentation with you at the hearing, one for the judge, one for opposing counsel and one for yourself.
3. Don't expect the Judge to allow a counter-petition at the same time. He has the discretion to dis-allow this.
4. Try to run your motion past someone in the group who has had a lot of experience with hearings. They usually know what will fly and what won't.
5. Ask for permission to bring an assistant with you to help with the paperwork.
6. Do not agree to any court appointed GAL's, psychologists, evaluators, accountants. Stipulate that you would like to obtain background information on these people and maybe submit the name of someone of your choosing.
7. If you are motioned for deposition, try to have both parents' depositions done on the same day. This will save you lots of grief.
8. If financials are requested, ask to have them exchanged on the same day also, preferably before the hearing, so that you have time to review them.
9. To avoid risk of damaging your case, refrain from talking in restrooms and elevators.

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR COURT WATCH VOLUNTEERS

Courtwatchers are a vital tool for securing professional conduct in the courtroom! Judges, lawyers and other professionals perform on their “best behavior” when faced with several citizens neatly dressed with similar attire (white tops), sporting badges like the one above, pens and clipboards at the ready. Use the instructions below to create your own courtwatch; for more information, see “Family Court Terms” and “Helpful Hints for Pro se Litigants.”

1. Wear a white top.
2. Wear a COURT WATCH badge; if you don't have one, make one using a name tag, or just plain paper pinned to your top. Or you may print the tag at the bottom.
3. Take notes, preferably using the “Court Watch Evaluation Form” which is also available online at <https://factscourtwatch.com/report-form/>. Notes on plain paper are fine if signed and attached to the form, or at least include the names of the plaintiffs, date, courtroom, judge, and your name as an observer.
4. Take notes; these can be straight reporting, or they can be filled out using our form “Court Watch Evaluation Form” which is also available online <https://factscourtwatch.com/report-form/>.
5. The day before, double check that the hearing is still scheduled. For this reason, it is very important that all courtwatchers, confirmed and tentative, have the phone number of the litigant involved or her/his associate (lawyer, friend, etc.), and that the litigant have their phone numbers.
6. It might be wise to bring a sweater in case the room is too cold.
7. Above all, present a dignified, silent presence in the courtroom. **Courtwatchers need to be taken seriously.** This means no “making faces”, chewing gum, or other inappropriate actions. If you must communicate to a courtwatcher sitting nearby, do so by writing notes, NOT whispering.



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FAMILY COURT WATCH REPORT FORM

(recently replaced with an online system, but this can be used if preferred)

Names of Litigants: _____
Judge: _____ Case No: _____
Court: _____ Room No. _____
Date: _____ Time: _____
Children and Ages: _____
Attorney for mother: _____
Witnesses for mother: _____
Attorney for father: _____
Witnesses for father: _____
Purpose of Hearing or Trial: _____

Observers, please write an evaluation on the back of this paper, and fill in the judicial evaluation below.

FAMILY COURT JUDGE

PERFORMANCE RATING: E - EXCELLENT | S - SATISFACTORY | N - NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

E	S	N	JUDICIAL EVALUATION BY FACTS COURT WATCH
			Knowledge & application of law
			Impartiality (freedom from bias & prejudice)
			Diligence & preparedness
			Judicial demeanor & courtesy to lawyers
			Judicial demeanor & courtesy to male litigant
			Judicial demeanor & courtesy to female litigant
			Judicial demeanor & courtesy to pro se litigants
			Control of courtroom
			Punctuality & timeliness in rendering rulings & decisions
			Enforcement of professionalism standards
			Common sense (use of practical consideration in decision making)
			Adherence to rules of due process (allows reasonable evidence)
			Consideration of the best interest of the child when ruling

- Submitted by: _____
Email: _____ Phone: _____
- Email to FactsCourtWatch@gmail.com or mail to PO Box 7322, Delray Beach FL 33482

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FAMILY COURT TERMS

Attorney ad litem	Attorney, usually court appointed, for the child.
Commissioner (or Magistrate)	An appointed position. Conducts hearings and usually makes recommendations to the judge
Court appointed mediator	Paid by the litigants, sometimes unqualified, personally biased, or favors the attorney he/she is friendly with.
Court appointed psych evaluator	Paid by the litigants, sometimes unqualified, personally biased, or favors the attorney or judge he/she is friendly with.
Court appointed psychologist	Usually paid by the litigants, sometimes unqualified, personally biased, or favors the attorney he/she is friendly with.
Due process	The right to proper and adequate notice of a hearing and a full opportunity to present witnesses and evidence, cross examine and to be heard in court. A legal concept that ensures the government will respect all of a person's legal rights, not just some, before the government deprives a person of life, liberty or property.
Ex parte	An ex parte decision is one decided by a judge without requiring all of the parties to the controversy to be present.
Financial Affidavit	A statement made under oath of an individual's income, assets, liabilities, and expenses. .
Forensic audit	A financial affidavit typically performed by a CPA, for purposes of use in court.
GAL (Guardian ad litem)	Trained volunteers or paid lawyers who is supposed to be the child's advocate. Their recommendations are usually taken seriously by the judge.
Garnishment	Deducting child support from the pay check and automatically sending it to the other parent or to the state for disbursement
JA	Judge's Assistant. Sometimes very influential with the judge.
Joint Custody or Shared Parental Responsibility	Both parents have equal parental rights in making decisions for the child, i.e. school, medical treatment, religious upbringing, etc. It does not mean the child splits his/her time between both parents; that is at the judge's discretion.
PAS	Parental Alienation Syndrome: N.J. psychiatrist Richard Gardner MD, coined the term in 1987 to describe a parent who tries to turn his or her children against the other parent. It was promoted by the Fathers' Rights Groups to convince the court that whatever claims the mother makes about abuse in court, are considered a tactic to turn the child against the father. The ultimate goal is removal of the child from the home of the mother, and awarding full custody and child support to the allegedly abusive father.
Pro bono	Latin meaning for the Good. A lawyer who does not charge for services.
Pro se	Litigant without a lawyer, representing herself
Purge	Penalty for non-payment of child support, backed up by threat of imprisonment. If imprisoned, she must be allowed to purge herself from imprisonment.
Residential Custody	The parent with whom the child is assigned to live by the court.
Sole Custody	Only one parent has the right to make these important decisions.
Standard visitation.	Usually means the non-custodial parent is allowed to see the child one evening every week and every other weekend.
Visitation Supervisor	Stays with the non-custodial parent during visitation. Usually paid for by both parents.

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REIMBURSEMENT REQUEST FORM

Name: _____

Date: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

City of residence: _____

Location of expense (court & city): _____

If a court watcher, give name of litigant(s) : _____

Purpose of request: _____

Amount: _____

Will the reimbursement of these costs make a difference for you? _____

If so, how?: _____

Note these are the rules for reimbursement:

1. Receipts are necessary when money is spent.
2. Courtwatchers and litigants qualify for reimbursement of expenses.
3. Cap of \$100 per year; otherwise, it is up to the board to decide on individual exceptions.
4. Reimbursement will typically be for:
 - a. Parking fees
 - b. Automobile expense, @ 14¢ a mile (state beginning and ending of route)
 - c. Court recordings and transcripts, if available, from the court records department, not from a paid, independent court transcriber or reporter

Signature and date: _____

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