

Summary

Custody and parenting time investigators contribute a valuable service to the court, families, and attorneys by gathering and evaluating information the court and the parents need to make decisions involving the care, custody, and support of a child. Completing a report and recommendation is a complex task, which requires the investigator to understand applicable law when analyzing information and applying it to issues related to the family. Recognizing the challenges required to complete these investigations, the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) developed the SCAO Custody and Parenting Time Investigation Manual.

The purpose of this manual is to provide friend of the court investigators with a resource that can be referred to when completing an investigation. This manual provides:

- Factors from the Child Custody Act, and other statutory considerations.
- Interpretations of the factor based on legal analysis drawn from appellate court decisions.
- Considerations for the investigator when evaluating the factors.
- Practice Tips for obtaining information during the investigation.

In addition, specific sections of the manual are dedicated to common informational gathering techniques and report preparation. Sample forms, sample contact letters, and sample reports, along with the Michigan Judicial Institute's Publication on Domestic Violence & Personal Protection Orders, can be found in the appendices of this manual.

Before referring to this manual, investigators should become familiar with the local court and office policies and procedures regarding custody and parenting investigation. This manual is intended to supplement those policies and procedures, as well as to assist local offices and courts in determining whether the local policies and procedures should be modified. Friend of the court offices are encouraged to include local policies and procedures within this manual so that investigators can refer to a single source. Once an investigator becomes familiar with the materials in the manual, it may only be necessary to refer to it for specific issues that emerge during an investigation.

For all investigations, the quality of the report and recommendation is a direct reflection on the investigator and the court. Providing a quality report should always be the investigator's goal.

NOTE: This manual addresses requirements for investigations as they exist at publication. The SCAO will be providing updates to the manual as changes occur in statutes, court rules, and user's needs.