



The Letter of the Law



THE SHAFER LAW FIRM

LAWYERS WHOSE PRACTICES HAVE BEEN BUILT ONE REFERRAL AFTER ANOTHER

Family Law Mediation and Arbitration



James R. Irwin
The Pennsylvania State University, 1968
Duquesne University School of Law, 1977
Member – Crawford County, Pennsylvania and American Bar Association

by James R. Irwin

Did you know that over **50%** of Pennsylvania marriages end in divorce or that the figure rises to **64%** if either of the parties had been married before? The erosion of the institution of marriage is an American tragedy, but as tragic as the divorce statistics are, even more tragic is the manner in which many of these marriages end. Years of litigation, thousands of dollars in legal fees and court costs, and worst of all, irreparable emotional scars caused by endless court battles often is the end result.

Thousands of people hope to avoid this type of ending, but do not know how. What is fair, when it comes to dividing property that was acquired over years of hard work? Will I have to pay alimony? Who should pay the court costs and legal fees? How much should be paid for child support? Does it matter that I didn't cause the break-up? Should I change the locks now that he or she has left? What is a proper custody arrangement for my children?

These questions often confront people when they are under tremendous emotional and mental stress. Anxious and faced with an uncertain future, most people have absolutely no idea what to do or how to protect themselves, their children or their property. So they turn to the legal system and before they know it, they are involved in litigation over divorce, child support, child custody, property, alimony, attorney's fees, court costs and many other issues.

There are alternatives to litigation in family law and other areas of the law that are growing in popularity and usage

throughout Pennsylvania and the rest of the United States.

Two of the most widely utilized alternatives are **mediation** and **arbitration**.

In **mediation**, the parties (with or without the assistance of their own separate legal counsel) utilize the services of an experienced mediator, who is knowledgeable in the law to help them make the necessary and reasonable compromises required to come to a fair and just resolution to their marital problems. The mediator **does not** make the decision, the parties **do**. The mediator's function is to help both parties understand each other's respective positions, the applicable rules of law and facilitate settlement.

Arbitration is the other commonly used alternative dispute resolution technique now gaining popularity in this country. In **arbitration**, the parties agree to be bound by the decision of a third party, called the arbitrator. Unlike mediation, where the parties make their own decision, in arbitration the final decision making authority is in the hands of an impartial, experienced individual whose job is to render a fair and just decision.

The Shafer Law Firm is very pleased to be introducing to Crawford County arbitration and mediation services in the family law area. Shafer Law, through Attorney James R. Irwin, an attorney who has practiced in the family law area in Crawford County for over 26 years, now offers family law mediation and arbitration services to the residents of Crawford County as an alternative to the emotionally and economically draining process of family law litigation.

If you are interested in learning more about these services, **Just Call Jim at 724-4540 extension 230.**

James R. Irwin is a member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, Family Law Section.

A major emphasis in Jim's practice is the domestic relations area, which includes counseling in such matters as divorce, child custody, alimony, child support, protection from abuse proceedings, and adoption proceedings. Jim's experience and diligent work have earned him the reputation as a leader in representing clients in this area. In addition, Jim represents injured victims in personal injury matters.

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The Shafer Law Firm

Our Mission: The Shafer Law Firm is a team of professionals whose goal is to provide quality legal services to our clients. Our mission is to deliver reliable and cost-effective legal representation to all types of clients in our community – individuals, partnerships, corporations, and government bodies and authorities. By utilizing the knowledge and experience of all members of the firm, we undertake to represent our clients as we would want to be represented. Our team concept allows each attorney to provide the client with the collective wisdom, skill, and experience of the team.

Our History: The Shafer Law Firm has been in existence for more than thirty-nine years, since its inception in 1965 when Paul Thomas and Charles Swick joined with Raymond Shafer, Paul D. Shafer, Jr. and Robert Dornhaffer. The Shafer Law Firm enjoys a fine reputation and has a tradition of quality professional legal services.

Our Community: Providing quality legal services to its clients is not the sole purpose of the attorneys who practice law

at the Shafer Law Firm. Committing themselves to the betterment of our community, members serve on boards for many non-profit organizations, donate time to charitable causes, and provide legal services on a pro bono basis. They worship in our local churches and serve as positive role models for our youth through their coaching and teaching activities. Their pride in, and dedication to, the community fosters an environment that makes this the best place one can live, work and raise a family.

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