



The Benefits of Joint Appointments

Money is often a core issue in family law cases. So the idea of saving money by hiring one valuation expert for both parties is becoming increasingly popular around the country.

These arrangements, called “joint appointments,” typically happen one of two ways. Sometimes the court will engage an expert to offer impartial advice to the court itself — to present an opinion that will help the judge make a decision. The court hires the expert, but both parties must agree upon the choice and pay for the expert’s services.

In other cases, the parties themselves agree on one expert to hire. They also must agree to the scope of the engagement. Either way, a joint appointment streamlines the process, saving money and time.

One Head Better Than Two?

When jointly retained, the valuation expert seeks input from both parties but advises neither. Often the expert can interview and communicate with both parties simultaneously, creating an open environment which may ease tension and move the process along.

Some people believe that this joint communication enhances the expert’s impartiality and objectivity because he or she isn’t having to “choose sides.” On the other hand, critics of joint appointments contend that these arrangements diminish private conversation between expert and client so much that the expert’s ability to get the full story is diminished as well.

Typically the engagement agreement includes a clause

prohibiting the expert from representing either party in court if a settlement can't be reached. This ensures that the expert has nothing to gain from the engagement in the future.

While not standard practice everywhere, joint appointments are gaining acceptance. This trend is likely to continue as clients look for ways to save time and money in legal disputes.

If you are considering a joint appointment, please let us know.