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International Academy of Family Lawyers
IAFL
USA Chapter

THE IAFL USA CHAPTER

Newsletter

CONNECTION, COMMUNITY, AND FUN NEWS!

Introduction From the USA Chapter President

By Katharine Maddox

This will be my final newsletter as president of the USA Chapter of the IAFL, and I hope each of you has enjoyed the newsletters during my term and found them informative. For this final edition, I am including guest pieces from each of the other Chapter presidents recapping the highlights of their chapters. Special thanks to Lisa Kallemeyn, who has taken the lead on the majority of the newsletters since September 2025; to Kara Roberts of Jaffe, who has kept us on track and pulled each edition together; to Sue Moss, who without fail contributes her Selfies with Sue; and to CBIZ for their engaging contributions to each edition.

If you are interested in joining the joint USA–Canadian Chapter meeting this December for some Fun in the Sun just as the cold winter months set in, make sure to register! One event has already sold out, and we have expanded capacity twice; **importantly, our hotel room block is almost sold out.** We are fortunate to be staying at the Conrad Hotel, right on Fort Lauderdale Beach and within walking distance of several fabulous restaurants, boutiques, and some adorable local galleries. Every room is a suite with water views, at a base rate of only $349 per night. You can register using the below link; shortly after registering, you will receive a separate link to reserve your hotel room: https://www.iafl.com/events/events/fort-lauderdale-2026/

President's Letter

By Katharine Maddox

This will be my final President's Letter as president of the USA Chapter. Fear not, however — I will continue keeping Fellows informed in my new role as Newsletter Editor under Fred Siegel during his term as president of the USA Chapter.

At the commencement of my term, I set out several personal goals, hoping to make a positive impact on our chapter during my one-year term:

Transitioning between Association Management Companies (AMCs)
My first goal was to successfully transition the USA Chapter from our prior AMC to Jaffe Management. I am pleased to report that this has been a resounding success. I hope and believe that the efforts we have made in terms of AMC leadership and organization will benefit the USA Chapter for many years to come, both administratively and in meeting planning.

Keeping Fellows connected between meetings
Since my term commenced in September 2025, the USA Chapter has made many efforts to keep our fellowship engaged.

In November, we hosted a recruitment event at the annual AAML meeting in Chicago. Many current Fellows attended a Happy Hour, along with a significant number of potential recruits from around the country.

We then opened 2026 with an Introduction to International Family Law conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — a location chosen for its place in American history and in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The program brought together leading family law practitioners from around the world to introduce prospective candidates to the IAFL, covering Hague Convention and UCCJEA issues, interviews with established Fellows, the enforcement of prenuptial and postnuptial agreements across borders, jurisdictional differences among U.S. states and countries, and the impact of U.S. executive orders on international family law practice. On separate evenings, attendees were welcomed with a dinner and a social event, giving them a firsthand sense of IAFL congeniality.

Additionally, Fellows in several jurisdictions organized dine-arounds pairing current Fellows with prospective applicants, with notable gatherings in Los Angeles, Boston, and a combined Virginia–Washington, D.C.–Maryland event.

Finally, the Chapter offered a range of webinars for Fellows, including sessions on common errors in business valuations and on child marriage and forced marriage in the United States.

Creation of an onboarding guide for new members of the USA Chapter Executive Committee

Serving on the Executive Committee can be quite a lot of work, but it is incredibly rewarding. Much of the challenge lies in learning what is expected — how things work, and the applicable policies and procedures. For the first time, we now have a formal onboarding guide, which is circulated to all members of the Executive Committee. The guide provides an overview of the Chapter's leadership structure — the Executive Committee, its officers, and its sub-committees — along with the role and confidentiality obligations of the Admissions Committee, the Chapter's relationships with Jaffe Management and with Global, and practical guidance on chapter meetings, financial management and succession planning. It is accompanied by the key governing documents every member of the Executive Committee should be familiar with including the Global and USA Chapter Bylaws, the IAFL Admissions Policy, and the IAFL Meeting Planning Guide.

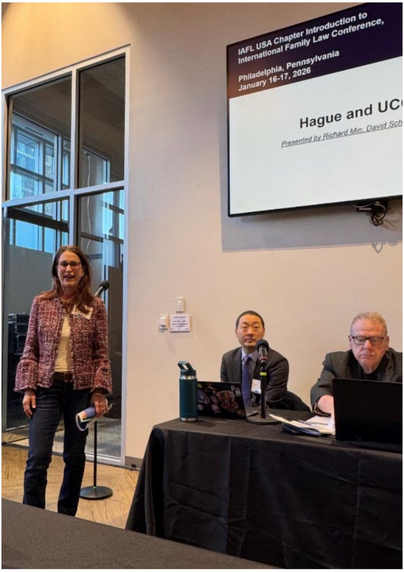
Meeting planning

During my term, we have been hard at work planning a total of four meetings: the Philadelphia meeting referenced above; the Florida meeting taking place in December 2026; the New York City meeting scheduled for May 2027; and the Whistler, Canada meeting scheduled for February 2028. The NYC and Whistler meetings are still in the preliminary planning stages, but we have fabulous venues lined up for both, and I am confident that each will be a great success. We are also working with our Canadian counterparts to select the location of the December 2029 meeting, so stay tuned for details.

We hope you will join us this December for our first chapter meeting in 18 months — this is guaranteed to be a fabulous time, especially if you crave warmth during the cold winter months and love the feel of sand beneath your feet, endless ocean views and views of the many canals of this glorious part of Florida.

Below are some of the photos from our Introduction to International Family Law in Philadelphia as well as some photos from our various dine-arounds:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 16-17, 2026
Hague and UCCJEA Issues
Presented by Richard Min, David Schaffer, Patricia Apy and Larry Katz
EXIT


IAFL USA Chapter Introduction to International Family Law Conference,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 16-17, 2026
Hague and UC
Presented by Richard Min, David Sch

International Academy of Family Lawyers
USA Chapter
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Hague and UCCJEA Issues

Fellow News

If you have served as a speaker, participated in an interesting international case, have photos attending an IAFL event, etc., feel free to send me updates and photos for possible inclusion in future newsletters. We love to highlight our fellows!

It has been my absolute pleasure to serve the USA Fellowship as chapter president since September 2025. As some of you may know, my mother served as USA Chapter president in 2009 and 2010, and I assisted her in an administrative capacity during both years (back then, the IAFL did not have an association management company!) as well as in planning both meetings during her two-year term. It has been a joy to carry on the IAFL torch; I am only sad that Mom did not live long enough to see this, as I know it was one of her dreams for me. I owe so much to those who came before me and mentored me, including my mother Marcia Maddox, Ed Thomas, Nancy Zalusky Berg, Joy Feinberg, Marlene Moses, Wendy B. Crew, and Peter Buchbauer, just to name a few. I follow in the footsteps of many IAFL legends, and it has been the privilege of my career.

Thank you for your trust in me, and for the opportunity.

With all best wishes for the continued success of the USA Chapter and of the IAFL,

Katharine Maddox

Legal Updates

By Melissa Kucinski*

Hague Conference on Private International Law

Recognition of Domestic Violence Protection Orders

The Council on General Affairs and Policy (CGAP) approved a Working Group on the Recognition and Enforcement of Protection Orders, which will meet for the first time in London in November 2026.

U.S. Government

U.S. Department of State Compliance Report

The U.S. Department of State issued its annual compliance report on international parental child abduction in April 2026. The countries that are listed as exhibiting a "pattern of noncompliance" are: Argentina, The Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, Honduras, India, Jordan, Korea, Peru, Poland, Serbia, and the UAE.

Uniform Law Commission

The ULC held its annual meeting in July 2026 in Chicago, Illinois. During the meeting, the commission considered amendments to the Uniform Transfer to Minors Act, and drafts of the Uniform State Indian Child Welfare Act, and the Uniform Conflict of Laws in Trusts and Estates Act. All three acts were passed by the body, and are now available for enactment in U.S. states. Also at the annual meeting, the Commission considered the Uniform Child Digital Entertainers Act. This act was not scheduled for a final reading, yet, and the Drafting Committee will continue its work. This adds to the body of family law acts, including the 2025 adoption of the Uniform Judicial Interview of Children Act.

Finally, for international family law practitioners everywhere, the ULC's Joint Editorial Board on Uniform Family Laws published an excellent Memorandum on the distinction between custody jurisdiction under the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act and return proceedings under the Hague Abduction Convention, replete with hypotheticals.

Cases

The Role of a Child's Voice in Hague Abduction Convention Cases

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit affirmed a district court order denying the return of a child under the Hague Abduction Convention. The child was age 8 at the time of trial, and the district court, after a deposition and in-camera interview of the child, concluded that he was mature and had a particularized objection to returning to Finland (where he no longer spoke the language, and would have to fall back a year in school). While the child had been coached, the district court did not find the coaching to be dispositive of the child's views. The Court of Appeals applied a clear error standard of review. (Boa-Bonsu v. Owusu, 22 June 2026)

U.S. Military Families and Habitual Residence in Hague Abduction Convention Cases

The U.S. Supreme Court provided guidance in Monasky v. Taglieri, 25 February 2020, as to how courts, deciding whether to return a child pursuant to the Hague Abduction Convention, should assess a child's habitual residence, finding it to be a fact-bound determination. For highly mobile families, like U.S. military families, the analysis can be extensive. The U.S. District Court for the W.D. of Kentucky examined whether a child, age 14, who had lived in various U.S. states, and multiple other countries, over the course of his life, moving for his family's military service, was habitually resident in Germany, where he had been from January 2021 through May 2025. Considering the child's schooling on the military base, his time in the USA each summer, his inability to speak German, the transience of his friends, and his Mother's unilateral extension of her assignment, the Court concluded the Mother did not meet her burden to prove a German habitual residence. (White v. White, 8 July 2026). Also, see the AAML Newsletter Article on this Topic.

The Role of Immigration in a Hague Abduction Convention analysis

The U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada, on reviewing a Magistrate Judge's recommendation to return a child to Israel under the Hague Abduction Convention, chastised the Magistrate for disproportionate weight being placed on the child and Mother's lack of legal status in the United States. The family had entered the U.S. on six-month tourist visas, but the Mother argued they always intended to remain permanently. The Judge, on review, found there was no "immediate, concrete threat of removal" and cited to rather old statistics about the volume of immigrants living and working in the United States without legal status, and never being placed in removal proceedings. The Judge felt that immigration status is only one consideration when determining a child's habitual residence, and that overly focusing on the Mother's decision to overstay was putting more focus on the parent than the child in the analysis. (Kaslasi v. Abergil, 17 July 2026).

The Standard of Review for Hague Abduction Convention Now Settled Defense

While the U.S. Supreme Court denied a petition for writ of certiorari in a case where the trial judge had concluded the minor child was settled in Texas, but the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed, focusing heavily on the child's unsettled immigration status in the U.S., it provided a multi-page opinion with its denial. The Fifth Circuit had applied a *de novo* review of the child's settlement, which apparently three circuits apply. Two other circuits have found the child's settlement to be fact-based and review a trial judge's findings for clear error. Justice Sotomayor, in denying the petition for writ of certiorari (because the child was already back in Venezuela), opined, albeit in dicta, that a child's settlement is much like the analysis for a child's habitual residence, which, in the case of Monasky v. Taglieri, the Supreme Court found to require a review for clear error. (Castro v. Brito Guevara, 20 April 2026).

Analyzing the Role of a Remote Officiant on an International Wedding

In late 2019, a couple traveled from their home in Maine to Dubai for a religious marriage ceremony. Instead of using a religious official in Dubai, their Maine imam officiated over their wedding remotely from a mosque in Maine. This imam gave them a certificate of religious marriage. The couple then had a wedding reception in Turkiye with two witnesses, who signed the certificate. They then returned home to Maine, and never participated in a civil ceremony. Years later, one of the spouses sought to divorce in Maine, while the other filed a motion to dismiss, arguing they were not legally married. The Supreme Court of Maine applied the law of the place where the marriage was concluded (i.e., Dubai), even though the parties argued Maine law applied (i.e., the law of the most significant connection), which would have carved out an exemption for some religious officiants. In that the parties did not put forth evidence of the law in Dubai, and the court could not assess whether the marriage was legal under the law of Dubai, and because Maine does not recognize common law marriages, the marriage was not valid, and the Maine divorce dismissed. (Aldarraji v. Alolwan, 23 April 2026)

The Tricky Mess that is Recognizing Foreign Child Support Orders

A Father was ordered to pay child support in 2016 by a court in the Dominican Republic. In 2021, the DR court ordered him to pay arrears. The Mother and child then moved to the United States, ended up in New York, and registered the child support orders there in June 2024. She then sought to modify the support amount in New York. The Father fought the child support orders' registration, prevailed, and the Mother objected. Her objections were denied in January 2025, and she then appealed to the Supreme Court. The opinion itself is devoid of useful information, but what is clear is this - the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act, as enacted in NY, is what applies in this case, and to make an assessment, the court would need to determine how to qualify the DR so it applies the correct provisions in UIFSA. There are four ways for the DR to be assessed a foreign country - a foreign reciprocating country, a Hague treaty partner, a bilateral relationship between NY and the DR, or having substantially similar laws to NY. The NY Supreme Court said that the DR was a foreign reciprocating country. If you look at the Hague Conference's website right now, the DR is a Hague Child Support Convention partner with the United States.

But, this Convention was not in place prior to March 23, 2025, and the relevant child support orders here predated the effective date. But, how did the court conclude that prior to March 23, 2025, the DR was a foreign reciprocating country? It's unclear, and the reality is, it wasn't. It's unclear whether, if the court did the correct analysis, it would have ultimately reached the same conclusion - that the Father didn't meet his burden to argue a delineated reason for contesting the DR order. (Matter of Alvarez v. Rubiera, 24 June 2026).

***Melissa has been an IAFL fellow since 2017. You can learn more about her unique practice, and read her international family law blog, at www.mkfamily.law.**

Updates from IAFL Chapter Presidents

Update from the Canadian Chapter President, Caroline Harnois

We are grateful for the opportunity to share news from the Canadian Chapter in the US Chapter newsletter. Strengthening cross-border connections and expanding our Fellowship across Canada remain key objectives of the Canadian Chapter Management Committee, and the past few months have been particularly active on both fronts.

The IAFL Canadian Chapter was pleased to hold an Introduction to Family Law Meeting in Montreal on June 12, 2026. The event reached its target attendance, with 51 participants in total. This included 20 Fellows from Canada, Europe, and the United States, as well as 31 prospective Fellows - 28 from across Canada, two from France and one from the US. We were particularly encouraged by participation from provinces where IAFL has historically been under-represented, including Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The meeting was a great success, and we are hopeful it will lead to a strong number of new Fellowship applications in the coming months.

As of the preparation of this newsletter, many Canadian Fellows, including most members of the Canadian Chapter's Management Committee, were attending the National Family Law Program in Kelowna, British Columbia, from July 13–16, 2026. This biennial program is a cornerstone event for Canadian family law practitioners and judges, and we intended to use our presence to further promote IAFL and to connect with potential new Fellows.

The Canadian Chapter will hold a 40th Anniversary Webinar, *Five Hot Topics in Canadian Family Law*, on September 9, 2026. The program will be presented by Karon Bales and Aaron Franks, with Shelley Hounsell KC serving as moderator. While the session will focus on Canadian developments, many of the issues and emerging trends are likely to be of practical interest to Fellows across jurisdictions, and we therefore encourage colleagues, including from the US, to attend.

Finally, the Canadian Chapter continues to work closely with our US counterparts on planning for the upcoming joint meetings of the US and Canadian Chapters, including the Fort Lauderdale meeting in December 2026. We are actively encouraging strong Canadian participation and look forward to continuing this collaboration.

Update from the European Chapter President, Emma Hatley

It has been a real privilege to serve as President of the European Chapter over the past 11 months, during which we have focused on building momentum, strengthening connections and widening our reach across jurisdictions. A particular highlight was our Barcelona conference, which brought together more than 300 Fellows from 43 jurisdictions in a meeting that combined rigorous legal discussion with genuine collegiality and collaboration, reflecting the unique character of our Academy. Alongside this, we have continued to grow our engagement with European institutions and partner organisations, reinforcing the Chapter's voice on the international stage and ensuring that our collective expertise is both visible and influential.

Beyond the headline events, much of our work has centred on education and inclusion. Our Introduction to European Family Law series has expanded into new and developing jurisdictions, helping to bring prospective Fellows into closer contact with the Academy, while our Chapter Chats and training initiatives have created accessible, practical opportunities for knowledge-sharing across borders. We have also prioritised collaboration - with organisations such as the European Judicial Network and the Union des Avocates Européens - and invested in the next generation through initiatives like the Young Lawyers' Award. At its core, the Chapter continues to be defined by a willingness to share expertise generously and to learn from one another.

Perhaps most importantly, the European Chapter remains a growing and genuinely diverse community, now spanning 36 jurisdictions and continuing to expand. With a strong programme of meetings ahead -from Tirana to Vienna and beyond - and a sound financial and organisational footing, we are well placed to continue that trajectory. For our colleagues in the USA Chapter, the message is a simple one: we remain deeply committed to collaboration across Chapters and warmly encourage you to join us at future meetings, where the combination of high-quality education, international perspective and enduring friendships is, I hope, unmistakable.

Update from the Asia Pacific Chapter President, John Spender

Outreach meeting in Shenzhen, China, in March 2026

In March, five Chapter Fellows, including me, traveled to Shenzhen, China, at the invitation of local lawyer Li Wei. My predecessor, Kai Yun Wong, had done outreach across China during her term, and as a result the Chapter now has its first Fellow in Guangzhou. On 17–18 March, Kai Yun Wong, Eleanor Lau, Rita Ku, Mingyue Gao and I met with the Justice Department in Shenzhen and then held a full-day seminar for about 35 local lawyers, covering marriage, parenting, and forum disputes across jurisdictions, plus an engaging cross-border case study prepared by Mingyue. I'm hopeful this marks the beginning of the IAFL's growth in this region.

International Family Law Symposium in Kuala Lumpur

On 19 May 2026, the Chapter and the Malaysian Bar co-hosted a Symposium in Kuala Lumpur that drew 173 attendees, including about 50 IAFL Fellows and a strong turnout of local judges and lawyers. Three local judges spoke, and the day featured three sessions — on cross-border property division, parenting matters, and jurisdiction/forum disputes — with speakers and moderators from Malaysia, Singapore, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Canada, the USA, Russia, Australia, the UAE, Japan, Hong Kong, India, and Washington State. I'm grateful to all involved and hopeful it leads to new Malaysian applications.

Manila, the Philippines

The Chapter has approval to hold a one-day Introduction to International Family Law event in Manila on 12 October 2026. We currently have no Filipino Fellows, but a judge and a local lawyer from the Philippines attended our Kuala Lumpur conference in May. With help from President-Elect Inger Blackford and Hong Kong Fellows Jaerey Velasco and Stephen Peaker, we're planning a program that will include a local Senator speaking on divorce reform, followed by three educational sessions. I'm hopeful this leads to applications from Filipino judges and lawyers.

Meet Our Newest USA Chapter Fellows!

Please join us in wishing a warm welcome to all USA New Fellows who have been admitted as Fellows to the IAFL since the start of the current term (September 2025 – present):

Allison W. Anders (Virginia)
Mark R. Arend (Washington)
Matthew P. Barach (Massachusetts)
Barbara Burr (District of Columbia)
Cynthia Chaing (Virginia)
Meghan Clary (Florida)
Thomas Colin (Connecticut)
Jay P. Dahlin (Illinois)
Leigh de la Reza (Texas)
David Fink (California)
Jessica Flint (Oregon)
Michael Fried (New York)
Brendan Hammer (Illinois)
Keith Jones (Oklahoma)
Ksenija Kokanovic (Wisconsin)
Randy W. Medina (California)
Lindsey Obenhaus (Texas)
Alexander Payne (California)
Aaron M. Reimer (Texas)
Christopher W. Rumbold (Florida)
Holly Schaitberger (California)
Nadia Shamsi (Illinois)

Lynn Slaathaug Moen (North Dakota)
Siobhan Stewart (New York)
Diane St. Yves Brewer (Texas)
Micaela A. Wattenbarger (Minnesota)
Andrew Wilson (Florida)
Crystal S. Wright (Georgia)

New Fellow Spotlight: Micaela Wattenbarger

What drew you to family law / how did the international dimension develop?

What drew me to family law was the human element — it's boots-on-the-ground work, it's never boring, and you get to make a real impact on the things people care about most in their lives. I spent my first 9.5 years in practice working for, and being mentored by, Valerie Arnold, a longtime IAFL Fellow. When domestic family law started feeling heavy, it was the international side — learning how the law works on the other side of the world, how people who do my job thousands of miles away live and practice, seeing the interplay between law, culture, and religion — that kept me engaged. Now I'm hooked.

What does becoming an IAFL Fellow mean to you?

I've had my eye on IAFL Fellowship for almost as long as I've been in practice, watching Valerie travel and build relationships around the world — the ability to call someone in India or Norway and work through a cross-border issue together. I wanted that kind of community, and I'm very excited to be part of it now.

What do you love to do when you're not practicing law?

I love to run, on the roughly ninety days a year Minnesota's weather and air quality cooperate. I also do puzzles and genealogical research, hike with my elderly dogs, and spend summer days at the pool with my husband and two kids (5 and 3).

Favorite place you've traveled — and what's next?

I can't pick just one — I love Mexico and Paris, for obvious reasons. But if I'm honest, my favorite place might be Two Harbors or Lutsen, up on Minnesota's North Shore. I grew up going there and I'm happier there than anywhere else. Next up: Chicago with a friend, then a week in London and Edinburgh with my mom, sister, and son.

Pets, hidden talents, or fun facts?

I'm about to play violin at a friend's wedding, which is either a hidden talent or a controlled risk, depending on how it goes. Also, at any given time I have at least three books going — audio and physical combined. Right now it's four: *Wuthering Heights*, *Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community*, *Shield of Sparrows*, and *The Anxious Generation*.

Best piece of advice you've ever received?

That we can't care more about a client's case than the client does. It's easy to take on the weight of someone else's family and choices, but doing that is a great way to burn out fast. Learning to set reasonable expectations and boundaries for myself has genuinely changed how much I enjoy this work.

CBIZ

Thank you, CBIZ, for your support of the IAFL USA Chapter Newsletter!

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Red Flags During a Divorce: Are You Watching for Clues?

By Arlen Lasinsky

Red Flags During a Divorce: Are You Watching for Clues?

Before we discuss the red flags during a divorce, let's realize what red flags are all about. Red flags are warning signs that should be addressed because they may lead to some serious issues.

Red Flags – What Are Warning Signs?

Your home has circuit breakers that protect your home from overload or short circuits in the electrical system and shut off automatically when there is an issue with the electrical system. It is a safety feature in every home.

If a circuit breaker shuts off in your home, you immediately investigate the issue at the circuit breaker box to see which breaker switched off. What do you do then? Most people would just turn on the circuit breaker with no concerns. However, there is a reason why the circuit breaker tripped, and it could be a warning sign that there may be a serious problem. Hence, it should be investigated. It could be as simple as a circuit being overloaded. However, it may be something more severe, like a short circuit in the wiring hidden in the wall, which could be disastrous.

How Does This Relate to Divorce?

This same philosophy applies when you are going through a divorce. No different than a circuit breaker switching off, observations of warning signs should be pursued. However, you need to be aware of the warning signs in order to pursue them. Warning signs are just that; issues that need to be pursued. The investigation may lead to a simple explanation like an overloaded circuit, or it could mean something more serious than that and should be investigated further.

There are several red flags that can be present during a divorce proceeding. It is important to be able to recognize those red flags and know how to investigate them.
More often than not, marital dissolutions are not settled with minimal conflict. When a divorce is not settled harmoniously, spouses often feel they have an incentive to hide assets, not release all relevant financial information, or be very secretive in responding to inquiries and document production.

Different laws in each state govern the division of assets in a marital dissolution. In general, the laws provide that all relevant financial information must be delivered by each spouse.

There are many warning signs that may appear throughout a marital dissolution that should raise a spouse's antenna. Some red flags that should be considered are provided below. The list below is not intended to be exhaustive, but is intended to discuss common red flags.

1. Lifestyle changes are a very common indicator of manipulation of assets or hiding income. Expenditures for a lifestyle that is not analogous to the salary claimed by that spouse are a red flag. For example, if a spouse claims to having a salary of $60,000 in a year and is driving a luxury car, taking vacations to exotic destinations or purchasing clothing not normally acquired in the past, this is an obvious red flag, and determining how the spouse is enjoying these lifestyle enhancements often leads to hidden assets or underreported income. To be fair, the spouse may have won the lottery or inherited some money from a relative.

2. Spending behavior changes are related to lifestyle changes as described above. When one spouse is spending more money than has historically been spent, investigation could lead to hidden funds or assets concealed from the other spouse. These changes may be attributable to gambling, more travel for pleasure, or gifts to a new partner.

3. Unusual withdrawals from bank accounts or those that are larger than historically made could be a red flag. Such withdrawals may indicate transfer of funds to hidden accounts, which may be located domestically or internationally. Information on such accounts maintained internationally may be difficult to determine and the assets themselves may be problematic to retrieve. Such withdrawals may also be paid to

friends and family members to be held until the divorce is finalized and then paid back to the spouse who originally withdrew those funds. These types of transfers may be disguised as loans or merely gifting property, but the fact of the matter is that these transfers are disguising the real reason for such transfers—the manipulation of marital assets for illegitimate purposes.

4. Unusual cash withdrawals used to acquire hard-to-trace assets are a red flag and should be investigated. Such hard-to-trace assets may include, but are not limited to precious metals, artwork, cryptocurrency, high-value watches and jewelry, to name a few. The acquisitions may also be as simple as gift card purchases or prepaid debit cards. One spouse may be using marital property to convert cash to assets that could be hidden until after the divorce is finalized.

5. Changes to passwords and accounts, whether online or at financial institutions, is a strong warning sign of wrongdoing. When passwords are suddenly changed for no apparent reason, chances are the changes in the passwords are for deceitful purposes. Access to those accounts is now restricted, and the spouse who has been locked out is at a disadvantage because any activity is now hidden from scrutiny. This type of red flag is usually the impetus for assets to be concealed or transferred from marital property.

6. Missing bank and/or brokerage statements. The refusal to share these statements that were once shared as a normal ongoing event may be a warning sign. Such refusal may indicate that there has been transactional activity that the offending spouse does not want to show to the other spouse or that one spouse has opened up new accounts without the other spouse's name on the new account. This red flag also pertains to refusing to share income tax returns, pay stubs or any other financial documents that were once shared in the normal course of events.

7. Variance in transaction activity. When bank statements are shared and the transaction activity does not coincide with the amounts historically documented on the bank statements, this may be a red flag. For example, monthly transfers from brokerage accounts to bank accounts that are lower than historical amounts or are missing from the bank statement. Also, a lesser amount on a spouse's paycheck or the omission of a spouse's regular paycheck is a red flag. These instances should be investigated to question why this is occurring. There may be a viable explanation, but chances are it is an improper handling of the marital assets.

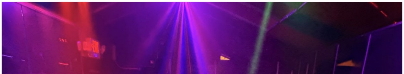
8. Significant travel to a foreign country may be an indication that certain assets may be kept in that foreign country or assets are being transferred to that country. It could also indicate income is being earned in that foreign country and not being brought back to the United States or not being reported as income.

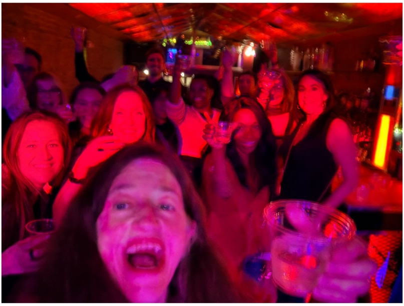
Conclusion

When in the middle of a marital dissolution, one should pay special attention to red flags that appear. Red flags should raise one's antennae. Remember that red flags are warning signs; they may not mean anything bad, but they should be pursued. Not unlike a short circuit in the wiring hidden in the wall, you do not want a red flag to be a warning sign that was not investigated and turned out to be detrimental to an equitable marital dissolution.

Selfies with Sue

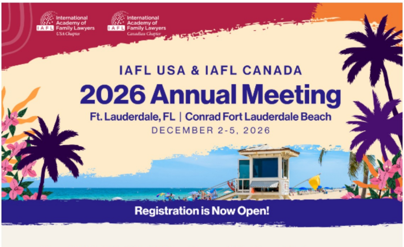
Selfies with Sue and other of Sue's photos from IAFL events including Sue's attendance at the Family Law Section of the New York State Bar Association





Member Resources

- Maximize fellowship
- IAFL Policy Handbook
- USA Chapter Bylaws
- USA Board of Managers
- USA Executive Committee Members
- Code of Conduct
- Expectations of Engagement at IAFL Events
- Green and Environmental Awareness Policy
- IAFL Code of Conduct
- IAFL Policy for Registration for, and Attendance at, Meetings


IAFL International Academy of Family Lawyers USA Chapter
IAFL International Academy of Family Lawyers Canadian Chapter

IAFL USA & IAFL CANADA

2026 Annual Meeting

Ft. Lauderdale, FL | Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach

DECEMBER 2-5, 2026

Registration is Now Open!

The official hotel of the 2026 conference is the Conrad Fort Lauderdale. The hotel room block booking link will be sent out in your conference registration confirmation email.

Learning and our outstanding education is just the beginning! We've loaded up the agenda with fun activities that go beyond the ballroom — there's truly something for everyone.

Wednesday, December 2

- Welcome Activity: Water Taxi Tour of Fort Lauderdale's Canals
- Welcome Reception at the Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach

Thursday, December 3

- Las Olas Gallery Tour
- Bike & Bonnet House Tour
- Happy Hour at Wine & Garden
- First Timer's Dinner at Del Mar
- Dine Arounds

Friday, December 4

- Mangrove Kayak Tour
- Sawgrass Mills Shopping Excursion
- MAI-KAI Dinner & Show

Saturday, December 5

- Everglades Airboat Tour
- Sailing on a Catamaran
- Presidents' Dinner at Lona Cocina & Tequileria

Register here!