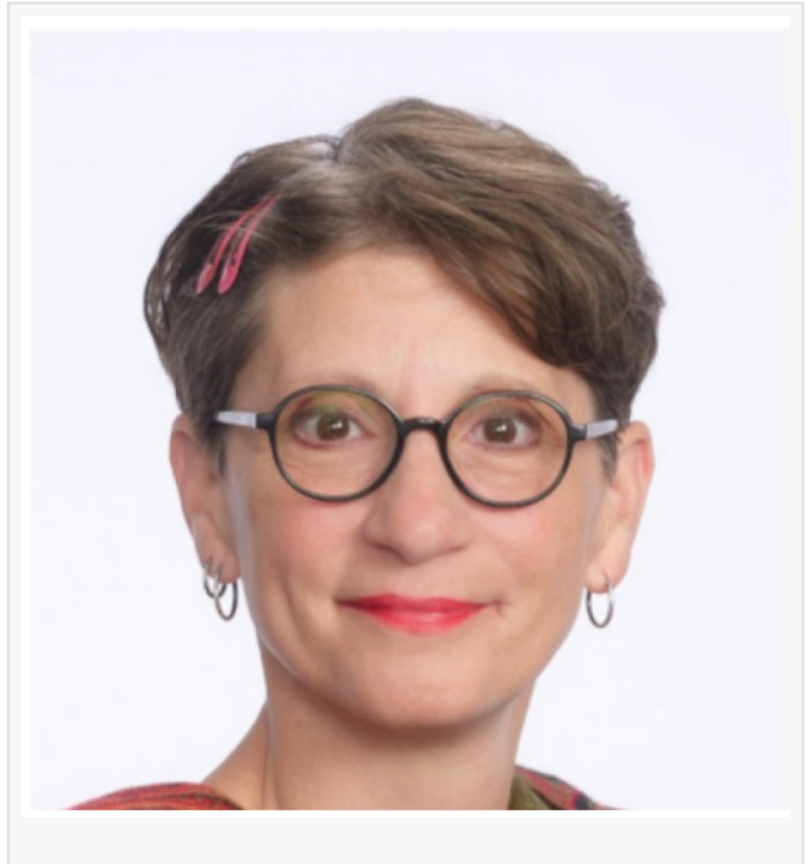


Debra Reedy: Advocating for Family Court Reform, Disability Accommodations, and Greater Access to Justice

SACRAMENTO, CA, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- McGeorge School of Law JD Candidate Combines Personal Experience, Disability Advocacy, and Legal Reform Efforts to Support Families and Self-Represented Litigants

Debra Reedy is a rising second-year evening Juris Doctor candidate at the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law, where she is pursuing a legal career grounded in advocacy, reform, and expanding access to justice for underserved individuals and families. Her path to law school was not shaped by conventional career ambitions, but rather by deeply personal experiences watching her son navigate the family court system during contentious, prolonged custody proceedings involving her granddaughter. Through this extensive contact with the courts, Debra became aware of systemic barriers facing disabled, self-represented litigants and families whose most fundamental rights are often decided without meaningful legal protection.



Those experiences ultimately sparked Debra's commitment to addressing the growing justice gap in the United States, particularly within family law. She became increasingly aware of how overwhelming and inaccessible the legal system can be for individuals already struggling emotionally and financially. Rather than stepping away from those challenges, Debra chose to dedicate her career to helping families navigate them more effectively while advocating for broader systemic reform.

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Before entering law school, Debra built a diverse professional background that included work in real estate brokerage, accounting, and legal support services. She currently works as a freelance

process server throughout the Greater Sacramento area while continuing nearly a decade of service as a disability advocate and support person for disabled litigants. In this role, she has assisted individuals with legal document preparation, courtroom accessibility concerns, and disability accommodations, often helping people who would otherwise struggle to effectively participate in legal proceedings.

An extended period away from full-time employment due to a serious health condition further transformed Debra's perspective on disability, accessibility, and systemic inequities. Living with an invisible disability gave her firsthand insight into the challenges faced by neurodiverse and disabled individuals within legal systems that often fail to recognize and accommodate their needs. These experiences strengthened her determination to advocate for reforms that better protect vulnerable populations and ensure equal access to justice.

Debra's professional focus centers on family law reform, disability accommodations, and reducing the prolonged, financially devastating litigation that often harms children and families. She plans to eventually enter private practice with a focus on appellate work while remaining deeply involved in public outreach, education, and legislative advocacy initiatives aimed at improving the legal system.

Debra views the prevailing culture of family law—rooted in an adversarial framework—as a primary driver of unnecessary distress for families and believes that this combative dynamic often exacerbates conflict rather than resolving it, creating an environment where the emotional well-being of children and parents is secondary to winning a dispute. To address this, she has cultivated a robust network of connections across the country, reaching out to judges, practitioners, state representatives, and advocates who support family law reform.

Much of Debra's drive to foster meaningful change stems from her unique journey as a self-starter and an outsider to the traditional legal world. This fresh perspective allows her to spot areas where the system could serve families better, offering insights that those deeply immersed in the status quo might overlook. Through heartfelt engagement with self-represented parents navigating custody challenges across the country, she has cultivated a deep understanding of the human stories behind the cases. This connection inspires her dedication to advocacy and education, guiding her efforts to create a more supportive and compassionate legal environment for everyone involved.

According to Debra, single fathers face unique challenges when a child is born out of wedlock. Many men will automatically agree to sign a Voluntary Declaration of Paternity, accepting parentage of the child without question. With direct-to-consumer DNA testing, sources have revealed widespread paternity fraud, indicating a high percentage of men taking responsibility for children who are not their biological offspring. Alternatively, unwed fathers can seek a court order to legally establish their paternity, requesting the court order a DNA test, but if the mother is already married, her husband may be the only presumed father, leaving the biological dad without recourse. A man's legal standing to obtain the test will likely require the advice of an

attorney. Another situation men face is finding out they have a biological child after adoption proceedings have already taken place. The emotional toll on these fathers is immeasurable. This information is important because approximately 40% of all births in the United States are to unmarried women.

Many single fathers are already stretched to their limits, making it impossible for them to shoulder the heavy burden of self-advocacy within such a complex landscape. Debra sees her role as amplifying their voices and driving reforms that prevent families from reaching critical points of exhaustion. Rather than seeking a traditional legal career defined by status or prestige, Debra is driven by a commitment to reshape the profession from within, fostering a culture where the legal process supports children's access to both parents and fosters emotional and financial stability for families.

One of the most urgent issues Debra identifies within family law is the growing justice gap. She notes that the overwhelming majority of individuals litigating cases in the United States do so without legal representation, dramatically reducing their chances of success and placing them at a severe disadvantage in proceedings involving child custody, visitation, and parental rights. She believes meaningful reforms are desperately needed to address these disparities.

Debra is particularly concerned about formal policies in states such as California that permit parties to return to court every six months following custody rulings. In her view, this creates cycles of continuous litigation that can last for years, draining families emotionally and financially while negatively impacting children caught in the middle. She advocates for legislative reforms similar to those implemented in Arizona, where laws restrict repeated custody modifications for longer periods following court orders.

She also champions the presumption of equal shared parenting. A growing number of states have moved to codify a legal presumption of equal shared parenting, reflecting a shift toward encouraging joint custody arrangements. Kentucky led this trend in 2018, followed by Arkansas in 2021, West Virginia in 2022, and Florida and Missouri in 2023. The momentum continued into 2024 with Oklahoma's adoption, and most recently, Mississippi approved similar legislation in April 2026. Early data from Kentucky, the first state to implement such a law, offers compelling insights into the potential impact of this approach. Since the law took effect, the state has observed a significant decrease in family court filings, dropping by more than 11%, alongside a reduction of nearly 700 domestic violence cases. Proponents suggest these declines stem from reduced post-divorce conflict, arguing that when the stakes of litigation are lowered by a presumption of shared responsibility, there is less incentive for disputes to escalate.

Debra is deeply committed to improving the family court experience by addressing systemic complexities that often disadvantage self-represented litigants. She notes that in bench trials, the repetitive nature of custody cases can lead to premature assumptions, and the involvement of various court-appointed professionals can create a labyrinth that is difficult for parents to navigate alone. To address this, Debra champions a grassroots effort to transform the culture of

the court and promote transparency and accountability.

Another major focus of Debra's advocacy involves improving accommodations for neurodiverse individuals within court systems. While society has made meaningful progress in understanding neurodiversity and invisible disabilities, she believes courts have lagged behind in implementing accommodations necessary for individuals to meaningfully participate in legal proceedings. She believes attorneys, judges, and court personnel often lack adequate understanding of how disabilities affect communication, participation, and comprehension within courtroom environments, and because of this, they often disregard the procedures in place to protect the rights of these litigants.

Debra sees technology and innovation as vital keys to unlocking access to justice. She envisions AI tools helping underserved families navigate the legal system, paired with structured programs where law students, paralegals, and autodidactic learners—with valuable insights from their own legal journeys—can provide guided assistance to self-represented litigants. This hybrid approach leverages both digital efficiency and human empathy to support families more effectively.

The value most important to Debra, both personally and professionally, is advocacy for those who cannot advocate for themselves. She believes her work is fundamentally about protecting children, preserving families, and ensuring parents are not financially destroyed while fighting to remain involved in their children's lives. Compassion, objectivity, and meaningful community impact remain central to her mission.

In addition to her legal studies, Debra has volunteered with Court Appointed Special Advocates and is currently writing a book focused on educating the public on court reform. Through her studies, advocacy work, and long-term reform efforts, she remains committed to building a more accessible, humane, and equitable legal process for families and individuals navigating some of life's most difficult circumstances.

Learn More about Debra Reedy:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/Debra-Reedy>

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