

## Melissa L. Neckers

SENIOR COUNSEL

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Melissa Neckers is an attorney at Miller Johnson in the Grand Rapids office and Chair of the Family Law Practice Group. She has been practicing law for almost 25 years and her practice areas include family law, mediation, adoption, assisted reproduction and gestational surrogacy.

### Family Law Practice

Ms. Neckers helps individuals with divorce, parenting disputes, domestic conflict, and family law matters. She represents clients in divorce, custody, parenting time and support cases. She is a zealous advocate and will fight for them in court if necessary. However Ms. Neckers is also committed to not creating additional conflict and helping parties settle their issues amicably if possible.

### Domestic Mediation

Domestic mediation offers couples an option to traditional divorce family law proceedings and requires fairness and equal treatment of both spouses. Ms. Neckers assists parties jointly by acting as a neutral mediator. In direct domestic mediation, Ms. Neckers' role is to facilitate productive discussions, help move both parties to a desired end,

### Practice Areas

- [Adoption, Assisted Reproduction and Surrogacy](#)
- [Child and Spousal Support, Custody, and Parenting Time](#)
- [Divorce](#)
- [Family Law](#)
- [Mediation and Arbitration](#)
- [Personal Legal Services](#)
- [Litigation](#)

### Education

- J.D., Marquette University Law School, 1998
- B.A., Hope College, 1995

### Bar Admissions

- Michigan, 1998
- Wisconsin, 1998

and, if settled, draft a written agreement. Reaching an agreement is to the benefit of all involved, including children and dependents. Through her mediation, Ms. Neckers helps divorcing spouses by reducing stress and costs associated with going to trial, and keeping perspective on the welfare and well-being of both parties.

### **Adoption Practice**

Ms. Neckers is also the chair of Miller Johnson's Adoption, Assisted Reproduction and Surrogacy Practice Group. She works closely with birth parents or prospective adoptive parents and also works closely with adoption agencies. She reviews the Michigan adoption laws and procedures, explains birthparent or adoptive parent rights, advises on legally permissible adoption costs, reviews and negotiates adoption contracts, and advises on options for post-placement arrangements. She represents adoptive couples, single parents, step parents and guardians.

### **Assisted Reproductive Technologies/Surrogacy/Gestational Carrier**

Ms. Neckers also works with parties in the area of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and gestational surrogacy. She is able to help clients work through the complex legal issues that are often involved and satisfy requirements of fertility centers. Ms. Neckers also helps clients determine or establish parental rights once pregnancy occurs.

Melissa Neckers has been on the frontlines of helping change Michigan Surrogacy Law. She represents the intended parents of a widely publicized case in which biological parents were forced to adopt their



biological children born via surrogate which drew national attention to Michigan's outdated surrogacy law. She is also working tirelessly with Michigan Legislators to change the law to insure that other Michigan families don't have to go through the same difficult process in the future. In September 2022 a package of bills were passed in the Michigan Legislature. The legislature adjourned for the year without advancing the bills but they are expected to be reintroduced.

- <https://www.mlive.com/galleries/KGWME7INRAEBCEXGLDDKXYURU/>
- <https://people.com/human-interest/mich-couple-who-adopted-biological-twins-reveal-they-wouldnt-change-a-thing/>
- <https://abovethelaw.com/2022/10/will-proposed-bills-reverse-michigans-hostile-surrogacy-laws/>
- <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/family/video/michigan-couple-fights-gain-custody-twins-born-surrogate-81368247>
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/michigan-surrogacy-law-couple-denied-parental-rights-to-biological-twins/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/31/us/michigan-surrogacy-law.html>
- <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/surrogate-parents-legal-rights-biological-b1792383.html>
- <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/kent/gr-family-celebrating-small-victory-in-gaining-full-legal-rights-to-biological-twins>
- <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2021/01/parents-to-adopt-own-biological-babies-in-surrogate-controversy.html>



- <https://www.woodtv.com/news/target-8/w-mi-parents-denied-legal-rights-to-their-babies-due-to-outdated-law/>
- <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/kent/gr-couple-denied-legal-rights-to-biological-twins-due-to-outdated-michigan-fertility-laws>
- <https://www.wzzm13.com/article/life/family/couple-parental-rights-surrogate-twins/69-80939f26-8b3b-4039-9753-ca24062e0526>
- <https://ktvz.com/news/national-world/2021/01/28/couple-denied-parental-rights-after-using-gestational-carrier/>
- [https://www.wnem.com/news/michigan-couple-denied-parental-rights-after-using-gestational-carrier/article\\_dcf2e012-5d16-11eb-be3a-3f9402c7bc17.html](https://www.wnem.com/news/michigan-couple-denied-parental-rights-after-using-gestational-carrier/article_dcf2e012-5d16-11eb-be3a-3f9402c7bc17.html)

### **Professional Affiliations, Activities and Honors**

Ms. Neckers is involved in several leadership positions at Miller Johnson including the Women's Initiative Network Steering Committee, the firm's Pro Bono Committee and she chairs the litigation section of the firm's pro bono initiative Project Giveback. In 2022, Ms. Neckers was the recipient of Miller Johnson's Cumiskey Spirit of Service Award recognizing her significant and outstanding contributions to the community through volunteering.

Ms. Neckers has been recognized as a 2024 *Best Lawyers* for Family Law Arbitration.

Ms. Neckers is a Fellow of the Michigan State Bar Association and is a member of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. She also belongs to the Grand Rapids Bar Association and State Bar of



Michigan where she is a member of the Family Law and Children's Law Section and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Section. In 2015, Ms. Neckers was appointed to the Michigan Court Forms Committee's Adoption Work Group for a second three year term.

Ms. Neckers is the past President of the board of directors of Legal Aid of Western Michigan and is a Fellow of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, which recognizes distinguished lawyers and supports the Foundation's public service efforts. She also worked for Legal Aid of Western Michigan from 1998 through 2001.

Ms. Neckers was a Law Clerk for the Honorable Patrick Snyder and the Honorable James Kieffer with Circuit Court, Civil Division in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

### **Articles, Interviews and Presentations**

In addition to the articles listed above, Ms. Neckers has authored, presented or been interviewed for several articles including:

- [“Mich. Couple Forced to Adopt Their Biological Twins Reveal They ‘Wouldn’t Change a Thing’ About Legal Fight,”](#) People Magazine, January 20, 2023
- [“Michigan the ‘worst’ for couples seeking surrogacy,”](#) WOODTV8, November 20, 2019
- [“Adoption, ART and paternity,”](#) ICLE, Feb. 2016 and 2019
- [“Joint legal custody nixes adoption by stepparent,”](#) *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*, April 24, 2013
- [“Starting the Adoption Process,”](#) Divorce Lawyers blog, Dec. 2012



- “The Murky intersection Between Family Law and Bankruptcy,” *Michigan Family Law Journal*, co-authored with Rachel Hillegonds, 2010
- “Family Matters, Too,” *Priority Read – Business Law Update*, Winter 2004

### **Community Activities**

Ms. Neckers is very involved with her kids’ schools and is the Clerk of the Consistory at her church. She performs pro bono work through the Pro Bono Program of Western Michigan, Michigan Immigrant Rights Center and Dispute Resolution Center West Michigan helping refugees new to the United States.

Ms. Neckers is a past board member of several community organizations.

### **Education**

Ms. Neckers received her law degree from Marquette University Law School in 1998 and her B.A. degree from Hope College in 1995.

