

Medina County Common Pleas Court

PROBATE AND JUVENILE DIVISIONS

93 PUBLIC SQUARE, ROOM 104, MEDINA, OHIO 44256

Kevin W. Dunn
Judge

MEDIA RELEASE

November 26, 2013

Judge Kevin Dunn Uses Skype with Solider Overseas for Adoption Hearing

When an active duty sergeant in the Ohio National Guard had to be deployed to Afghanistan, Judge Dunn decided to utilize a common video chatting program to ensure the hearing would go forward on time

MEDINA – It was 10 months and eight days since an Ohio couple began their adoption process for a baby boy born in January of this year. They filled out applications, completed months of background checks, interviews and home studies, all in preparation for Monday, November 25, 2013. This would be the day, if all went according to plan, that Judge Kevin Dunn would declare them the legal parents at their petition for adoption hearing.

But eight months before their hearing, K.B., an active duty sergeant in the Ohio National Guard, found out he was being deployed to Afghanistan.

His wife, M.B., said they tried to get his deployment delayed until after the hearing, but there was nothing they could do. In an adoption case, both parents have to be present at the hearing, otherwise finalization of the adoption would have to be set out for a later date.

That is when Judge Dunn, the couple and their attorney, Richard Marco, and the Court's Network Administrator Mike Stiles devised the plan to utilize the technology available to the Court.

The Judge said this was a special circumstance. K.B. wanted to be physically present, but it was beyond his control. Judge Dunn said he didn't want to make the couple wait any longer, so he planned to use the common video chatting program Skype to contact K.B. overseas from a courtroom set up with a monitor and microphone so that he could be present and conclude the adoption.

"We always knew there would be a chance he would have to leave," M.B. said. "That's why we talked with our attorney and Mike and had contingency plans in place."

The Judge had never performed a hearing using Skype before, but Stiles assured him it could be done. Stiles simply created a Skype account for the Court and completed a test with K.B. in Afghanistan the week before the hearing be sure there were no glitches.

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“Judge Dunn is really aware of today’s technology and how we can use it in our Court,” Stiles said. “We had backup options but we chose Skype because of the simplicity and the fact that there was no cost to the Court.”

Apart from a slight delay, the picture was perfectly clear. K.B. initially noted some disturbances in the sound, but it was quickly resolved after M.B. and their attorney moved closer to the microphone, making the baby boy in her arms center screen with grandparents watching from the back of the courtroom.

“This was a group effort with the parents to make sure this would work,” Stiles said. “I don’t think it could have gone better.”

After a quick photo with the Judge in front of the screen, Court staff and Marco left the room so the family could spend some time speaking with K.B. alone.

“That was absolutely cool,” Judge Dunn said. “It’s so nice that we were able to reach out and give this benefit to one of our country’s service members.”