

Appellate Review in Domestic Relations Cases: The Elusive Final and Appealable Order in Light of the *Gutman* Decision

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This article examines the cases behind the appellate courts' ever-shrinking ability to review domestic relations when issues remain pending with the trial court. The genesis for this article was an August 2000 Illinois Bar Journal article authored by Gunnar J. Gitlin and Chris S. Haaff. This article has now been updated and expanded.

I. Introduction

When domestic relations lawyers consider an appeal of a trial court's judgment, the most difficult issue to determine is when a court order is a final order and thus appealable. While Supreme Court Rule 304(a) requires that the underlying judgment resolve all of the claims to be a final order, Illinois case law has not held this to be a bright-line rule.

Once in each of the past four decades, the Illinois Supreme Court has decided a significant case addressing final and appealable orders relating to family law cases. In the 1970s, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled in *Deckard v Joiner*¹ that claims that are incidental to the ultimate rights sought to be determined by the underlying petition do not render an order nonfinal.

In the 1980s, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled in *Marriage of Leopando*² that even if the trial court's custody order contains a special finding per Supreme Court Rule 304(a) – that there is no just reason to delay enforcement or appeal of the custody portion of a divorce judgment – the judgment for dissolution of marriage is still not final when the financial issues have not been addressed. In the 1990s the Illinois Supreme Court, in *Franson v Micelli*,³ addressed what types of claims might be considered incidental to the ultimate rights sought to be determined so a parentage case may be considered final and appealable. This decade (in November 2008) the Illinois Supreme Court in *IRMO Gutman* again took a strict construction of Supreme Court Rule 304(a) as it applied to contempt petitions and other post-decree matters.

As the following review of the cases shows, it appears that if the trial court reserves virtually any significant issue that should have been ruled upon when the divorce or parentage judgment was entered and that issue has not been finalized, the judgment will not be final and appealable.

II. Leading Illinois Supreme Court Cases

Four major Illinois Supreme Court family law cases have addressed appeals under Rule 304(a) and restricted the circumstances under which a case might be considered final despite

¹ 44 Ill 2d 412, 255 NE2d 900 (1970).

² 96 Ill 2d 114, 449 NE2d 137 (1983).

³ 172 Ill 2d 352, 666 NE2d 1188 (1996).

reservation of any underlying issues. Until *Franson v Micelli*, the leading case on appealable orders in parentage proceedings was *Deckard v Joiner*.

A. Deckard v Joiner (1970)

In *Deckard v Joiner*, brought under an earlier version of the Illinois Paternity Act,⁴ the mother sought child support and payment of her expenses directly resulting from her pregnancy. An acknowledgment of paternity signed by the defendant was on file. An order entered in 1962 found the defendant was the child's father and found him liable for support and birth expenses but reserved determination of the precise amount of support and birth expenses. An order entered in 1963 directed the defendant to pay doctor and hospital bills, plus support of \$15 per week.

In 1967, the defendant filed a motion to vacate the 1962 paternity order and the 1963 support order and sought other relief. The trial court denied the defendant's 1967 motion. After numerous other motions by the defendant were denied in 1968, he filed a notice of appeal under which he planned to appeal every order entered from 1962 through 1968. The *Deckard* court ruled that the March 1962 paternity order was not final and appealable because it reserved ruling on the substantial issue of the amount of support and expenses for which the defendant was liable. However, the 1963 order resolved those issues and constituted a final determination of the parties' ultimate rights. Therefore, the 1968 appeal was untimely.

B. Marriage of Leopando (1983)

The supreme court addressed the applicability of Supreme Court Rule 304(a) to divorce proceedings in the 1983 case of *Marriage of Leopando*.⁵ *Leopando* held that the "issues raised in a dissolution-of-marriage case are not separate claims and therefore not appealable under Rule 304(a)."

In *Leopando*, the trial court dissolved the marriage in December 1981 and six days later awarded the husband permanent custody of the parties' minor child. The custody order recited "that there is no just reason to delay enforcement or appeal of this Order," and reserved for future consideration the issues of maintenance, property division, and attorney fees. The mother appealed from the custody award. At the Illinois Supreme Court, the father questioned the custody order's appealability under Rule 304(a). The high court agreed with the father, finding no final and appealable order because the custody issue was not a separate, appealable claim from the issues upon which the trial court reserved ruling.

The *Leopando* court stated the reason it allowed leave to appeal: "It seems clear that the law at the time of the instant appeal implied that custody orders, containing the requisite Rule 304(a) language by the trial court, were immediately appealable." *Leopando* held a custody order is not appealable, even if the "magic language" of Rule 304(a) is present, because a custody order does not constitute a separate claim in a divorce proceeding.

Leopando is often cited as authority, and has often been the springboard, for other cases dealing with a divorce judgment's finality when not all of the issues have been resolved. This is probably because of the broad language used in the *Leopando* opinion:

⁴ Ill Rev Stat 1961, ch 106 3/4.

⁵ 449 NE2d at 140.

A petition for dissolution advances a single claim; that is, a request for an order dissolving the parties' marriage. The numerous other issues involved, such as custody, property distribution, and support are merely questions which are ancillary to the cause of action. They do not represent separate, unrelated claims; rather, they are separate issues relating to the same claim. In fact, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which the issues are more interrelated than those involved in a dissolution proceeding. Should the trial court decline to grant the petition for dissolution, no final relief may be obtained relevant to the other issues involved. On the other hand, where a dissolution of marriage is granted, a determination as to which party receives custody will necessarily affect how much, if any, support and maintenance are paid. Practically speaking, then, until all of the ancillary issues are resolved, the petition for dissolution is not fully adjudicated. [Citation omitted.]

C. Franson v Micelli (1996)

Until 2008, the last significant Illinois Supreme Court case dealing with final and appealable orders in a domestic relations setting was *Franson v Micelli*,⁶ a parentage case. The putative father in *Franson* appealed a judgment entered upon a jury verdict finding him to be the father of the plaintiff's child. The appellate court opinion did not address whether the trial court's judgment was final and appealable.⁷

The Illinois Supreme Court in *Franson* found that while the trial court ruled on prospective child support, the record did not indicate if the trial court ruled on the mother's request for retroactive child support and health insurance for the child. The Illinois Supreme Court in *Franson* determined that the trial court's failure to rule upon retroactive child support and the putative father's health insurance obligation rendered the trial court's decision unappealable because it was not a final order.

The *Franson* court tried to, but could not, find a way to support the appellate court judgment, which was faulty because the trial court's judgment was not final. The *Franson* court noted the duty to provide health insurance is an "integral part" of a parent's current and future support obligations. Under Illinois law, the matters are intertwined.⁸ The court in *Franson* found that even when the trial court enters a support order in a parentage action, the case is not final and appealable if the trial court reserved retroactive child support or reimbursement to the mother for pregnancy and delivery expenses.

D. IRMO Gutman (November 20, 2008)

Gutman is the most recent Supreme Court case addressing the timing of appeals in family law cases. This case involved a denial of a motion to vacate an order granting the former husband's petition to terminate maintenance. 29 days later the mother moved to vacate that judgment and after the court denied the mother's motion, 35 days later she filed a motion to reconsider. Despite the fact that the ex-wife's petition for civil contempt had been still pending, the appellate court ruled that the trial court's judgment granting the petition to terminate the

⁶ 666 NE2d 1188.

⁷ *Franson v Micelli*, 269 Ill App 3d 20, 645 NE2d 404 (1st D 1994).

⁸ See 750 ILCS 5/505.2.

maintenance was the final judgment as to all "claims for relief" in the divorce action. Accordingly, the appellate court held that the ex-wife's appeal was not timely.

The Supreme Court stated:

The appellate court below held that a contempt petition, although a "part" of the underlying action, does not raise a "claim for relief" in that action within the meaning of Rule 304(a). 376 Ill. App. 3d at 763. Therefore, according to the court, the order terminating maintenance was a final order as to all "claims" in the dissolution action and required no Rule 304(a) finding to be final and appealable. We disagree.

The Supreme Court explained:

The appellate court held that the pending contempt petition in this case is entirely separate from the dissolution proceeding. In so doing, the court departed from two previous decisions in which the opposite conclusion was reached. See *In re Marriage of Colangelo*, 355 Ill. App. 3d 383, 388-89 (2005) (absent a Rule 304(a) finding, a party could not appeal the denial of a civil contempt petition while a postdissolution petition to increase child support was pending); *In re Marriage of Alyassir*, 335 Ill. App. 3d 998 (2003) (absent a Rule 304(a) finding, a party could not appeal a judgment on a postdissolution petition to increase child support while a civil contempt petition was pending).

The appellate court held that "[a]lthough a civil contempt petition is a part of the underlying action, it is nevertheless 'an original special proceeding, collateral to, and independent of, the case in which the contempt arises.'" 376 Ill. App. 3d at 762, quoting *Kazubowski v. Kazubowski*, 45 Ill. 2d 405, 415 (1970). In relying on the *Kazubowski* decision, however, the appellate court ignored language immediately preceding and following the quoted statement. What we actually held in *Kazubowski* was: "ordinarily an **adjudication** in a contempt proceeding is final and appealable because it is an original special proceeding, collateral to, and independent of, the case in which the contempt arises **where the imposition of the sanction does not directly affect the outcome of the principal action.**" (Emphases added.) *Kazubowski*, 45 Ill. 2d at 414-15.

The Supreme Court then stated:

The appellate court disregarded the language limiting the original and special status to an adjudication of contempt. The court unjustifiably expanded the language in *Kazubowski* to apply to the pending contempt petition in the case at bar. No other court has held a pending contempt petition to be an independent action separate from the underlying case. Rather, the rule, which this court has consistently held, is that only a contempt **judgment that imposes a sanction** is a final, appealable order.

Finally, the Supreme Court pointed out that until the entry of a contempt order imposing a sanction, a contempt petition provides no basis for obtaining immediate appellate jurisdiction over any part of the case under Rule 304(b)(5). The Supreme Court concluded that the trial court's order disposing of the maintenance petitions was not a final and appealable order.

III. Cases Applying *Deckard*, *Leopando*, and *Franson*

The progression of rulings in the Illinois Supreme Court cases previously discussed has greatly influenced other cases considering whether orders in domestic relations cases are final and appealable.

A. Several Matters Reserved

Before *Franson*, whether an order that reserved ruling on several matters was characterized as "final and appealable" depended in part on whether it was a divorce or parentage case. Reservation of several issues in a divorce case without resolving the reserved issues will render any orders as not final and appealable.⁹

One proceeding demonstrating that pre-*Franson* parentage cases were treated differently from divorce cases was the 1983 first district case of *Watkins v Martin*.¹⁰ *Watkins* held that reservation of attorney fees and costs and retroactive support made the order final and appealable because those matters were merely incidental and did not affect the ultimate parental rights. Post-*Franson* parentage proceedings have not treated parentage cases differently than divorce cases.¹¹

B. Monies Related to Children

1. Mother's Pregnancy Expenses in Parentage Cases

As noted above in *Watkins v Martin*,¹² the appellate court stated that the entry of a parentage order and a determination of support were the two basic orders actually required for "virtual completion" of a parentage case. Matters such as attorney fees and costs and pregnancy expenses, according to *Watkins*, could be determined later without interfering with the parties'

⁹ *Marriage of Mardjetko*, 308 Ill.Dec. 289, 861 N.E.2d 354 (2d D 2007) (reserved ruling on visitation, maintenance, and post-high school education expenses); *Marriage of Koch*, 119 Ill App 3d 388, 456 NE2d 644 (2d D 1983) (reserved ruling on maintenance, property, and attorney fees); *Marriage of Hirsch*, 135 Ill App 3d 945, 482 NE2d 625 (1st D 1985) (reserved ruling on wife's medical expenses and guardian ad litem fees); *Marriage of Merrick*, 183 Ill App 3d 843, 539 NE 2d 868 (2d D 1989) (reserved ruling on claim for interest on a bonus check that husband did not timely pay to wife, and also on wife's claim for attorney fees); *Marriage of O'Brien*, 243 Ill App 3d 386, 611 NE2d 1228 (1st D 1993) (reserved ruling on maintenance and attorney fees; continued certain injunctions previously entered regarding transfer of marital property; husband and daughter ordered to provide accounting for certain receipts and expenditures).

¹⁰ 115 Ill App 3d 417, 450 NE2d 866 (1st D 1983).

¹¹ *Baldassone v Gorzelanczyk*, 282 Ill App 3d 330, 667 NE 2d 639 (1st Dist 1996) (order establishing parentage was not final and appealable because trial court did not rule on current or retroactive child support or health insurance); *IDPA ex rel K.W. v Lekberg*, 295 Ill App 3d 1067, 693 NE2d 894 (2d D 1998) (trial court did not address present child support, reimbursement for pregnancy or delivery costs, health insurance, or payment for blood tests).

¹² 450 NE2d at 868.

basic rights.

The Illinois Supreme Court in *Franson* subsequently found the issue of retroactive child support to be a matter of substantial controversy. Opinions issued after *Watkins* held that reservation of pregnancy and birth expenses meant orders in those parentage cases were not final and appealable.¹³ It is therefore certain that *Watkins* is no longer good law.

2. Child Support in Parentage Proceedings

Until *Franson* was issued, a trial court's reservation of child support in a parentage case may or may not have made the case final and appealable, depending on which appellate district view was followed. The third district ruled in 1994 in *People ex rel Block v Darm*¹⁴ that an order determining the issues of parentage, current child support, and health insurance was final and appealable, even though the issue of retroactive child support was reserved, because the trial court's order contained Rule 304(a) language.

The *Block* appellate court concluded that because the trial court's order finally determined the issues of paternity, current child support, and health insurance, some definite and separate parts of the controversy between the parties were clearly disposed. Even though retroactive child support was reserved, the order was final and appealable. Besides its reliance on the order containing Rule 304(a) language, the *Block* appellate court distinguished *Leopando*, noting that *Leopando* involved divorce proceedings and that the Illinois Supreme Court had not yet similarly ruled in parentage cases. *Block* certainly does not survive *Franson v Micelli*.

In contrast to *Block*, in 1995 the fifth district in *Elkins v Huckelberry*¹⁵ determined that a parentage judgment reserving child support but including Rule 304(a) language was not final and appealable. Citing *Deckard v Joiner* and disagreeing with *Block*, the *Elkins* court held that a parentage order is not final and appealable without ruling on the amount of current child support and expenses the father must pay.

*Department of Public Aid ex rel. Chiapelli v. Viviano*¹⁶ was another paternity case where it was determined that a paternity case was not final where the dollar amount of retroactive child support was not determined. In *Chiapelli*, the court found that an order setting the father's retroactive child support obligation at 20% of his net income for the previous four years and ordering the father to produce evidence of his income within 14 days was not final and appealable. The *Chiapelli* trial court had set the father's retroactive child support obligation at 20% of his net income but it did not determine the exact amount of payments. The appellate court stated, "This is not a mere ministerial act upon which a calculation can easily be measured, as there are potential disputes about the materials submitted, the inferences drawn from any material, and the amounts to properly be considered in arriving at a net upon which 20% can be assessed." See also: *Lekberg*, 295 Ill. App. 3d at 1069, 693 N.E.2d at 895; *Baldassone v. Gorzelanczyk*, 282 Ill. App. 3d 330, 333, 667 N.E.2d 639, 642 (1996) (holding that an order

¹³ *People ex rel Driver v Taylor*, 152 Ill App 3d 413, 504 NE2d 516 (4th D 1987); *Dept. of Public Aid ex rel Corrigan v Hawkins*, 187 Ill App 3d 139, 543 NE2d 317 (2d D 1989); *Gay v Dunlap*, 279 Ill App 3d 140, 664 NE2d 88 (4th D 1996).

¹⁴ 267 Ill App 3d 354, 642 NE2d 863 (3d D 1994).

¹⁵ 276 Ill App 3d 1073, 659 NE2d 462 (5th D 1995).

¹⁶ 195 Ill. App. 3d 1033, 553 N.E.2d 97 (1990)

declaring parentage is not a final order if it does not at least rule on the amount of child support for which the defendant is liable).

3. Child Support in Divorce and Post-Judgment Divorce Proceedings

The fourth district appellate court in *Marriage of Fink*¹⁷ characterized a post-judgment order reducing child support, but subject to later repayment, as a final and appealable order. In *Fink* the father suffered reduced income during a work strike. The trial court reduced his child support temporarily and the balance of the child support was suspended, subject to accrual for later repayment.

The *Fink* appellate court held the trial court order fully and finally disposed of the father's request to reduce his child support obligation permanently, and the order's including a provision for review did not render it unappealable. One key to the *Fink* court finding the order final and appealable is that the *Fink* appeal involved post-judgment proceedings.

In *Shermach v. Brunory*¹⁸, the appellate court found that it lacked jurisdiction where the order modifying custody did not adjudicate all of the claims raised by the petitioner. The petitioner asked the court to award temporary and permanent custody, order the respondent to pay child support, and set a visitation schedule. The order appealed resolved the issues of permanent custody and visitation but not child support. While the order set child support at 20% of the respondent's net income from all sources, it reserved the dollar amount for a future determination. The *Shermach* court dismissed the appeal and held that the determination of a noncustodial parent's support obligation is integrally related to the determination of custody. "We see no compelling reason for allowing piecemeal appeals when the matter of child support has only been partially determined by the trial court." The appellate court noted, "This case is similar to *Deckard v. Joiner*, 44 Ill. 2d 412, 255 N.E.2d 900 (1970), a case upon which our supreme court recently relied in *Franson v. Micelli*, 172 Ill. 2d 352, 666 N.E.2d 1188 (1996)."

4. Health Insurance

In *People ex rel Davis v Washington*,¹⁹ the trial court's reserving ruling on health insurance required the dismissal of the appeal. The *Davis* court specifically pointed to the *Franson* court's statements that the issue of retroactive child support was a matter of substantial controversy between the parties, and that the support issues could not be fully resolved until the health insurance issues were resolved. Despite the fact that in *Davis* there was no retroactive child support issue (as there was in *Franson*), the *Davis* court held that *Franson* supported the view that a support order is not final until health insurance issues are resolved, and a parentage judgment is not final until the support issues are fully resolved.

5. Post-High School Education Expenses

The case of *Marriage of Brenkacz*²⁰ involved the former husband's post-divorce judgment petition to modify unallocated child support and the former wife's petition for contribution for

¹⁷ 275 Ill App 3d 960, 656 NE2d 1131 (4th D 1995).

¹⁸ 333 Ill. App. 3d 313 (1st Dist., 2002)

¹⁹ 283 Ill App 3d 437, 669 NE2d 1215 (1st D 1996).

²⁰ 185 Ill App 3d 437, 669 NE2d 1215 (1st D 1996).

their children's college expenses. The trial court in July 1988 terminated unallocated family support and entered a maintenance order. The July 1988 order also ordered the father to pay two-thirds of the college expenses for their older son and reserved ruling on payment of the younger son's college expenses because he was not yet in college.

The *Brenkacz* appellate court cited a similar case, *Marriage of Stockton*,²¹ in holding that maintenance and college expenses were interrelated, so the reservation of some college expense issues rendered the July 1988 order not final and appealable. *Brenkacz* extends *Leopando* further than is logical or appropriate. Following *Brenkacz*, if the trial court reserves jurisdiction on payment of any of a child's educational expenses, it would not be possible to appeal an educational expense award as to other children, and perhaps not even be possible to appeal any other issues from the case, until all of the children have reached college age.

6. Reservation of Multiple Issues in Divorce Action

In the 2007 Second District case of *Marriage of Mardjetko*,²² a default judgment granting wife a divorce, dividing property, barring the husband from maintenance, and deciding custody and child support, but reserving jurisdiction on the issues of visitation, the wife's maintenance, and post-high school education expenses was held not to constitute a final judgment. Because the judgment reserved fundamental issues and therefore did not resolve the entire dissolution claim, it was not a final judgment. Consequently, the appellate court held *sua sponte* that it lacked jurisdiction to consider the husband's appeal of the denial of his motion to vacate the judgment. What is important about this case was the fact that the appellate court had a great deal of instructive language addressing final and appealable orders. A good portion of the decision relates to the use of the word "reserved" because this distinction is critical. The decision states:

However, we think further comment on issues being "reserved" may be useful, given problems that regularly arise with that term. "Illinois law encourages resolution of all issues ancillary to dissolution, as well as dissolution itself, in a single proceeding, for reasons of certainty, financial security [citations], and judicial economy." *Kenik*, 181 Ill. App. 3d at 275. A court may reserve issues for later resolution in limited circumstances only...

We recognize that trial courts sometimes describe issues as being "reserved" when, in fact, the court has decided the issue (usually based on circumstances it expects to be temporary), but intends to revisit the issue soon. Such a use of the word "reserved" nearly guarantees confusion. The Act uses the word "reserves" specifically for instances where the court is bifurcating judgment. Where it is unmistakable that a trial court is using the word in a sense that does not defeat the finality of the judgment, we will not frustrate that intent by adhering to the meaning of "reserves" in the Act. Here, however, neither the order for dissolution nor the transcript of the prove-up hearing shows that the court had in fact made a decision about "reserved" issues. We therefore take the word to have the meaning given it by the Act.

²¹ 169 Ill App 3d 318, 523 NE2d 573 (4th D 1988).

²² 308 Ill.Dec 289, 861 N.E.2d 354 (2nd D 2007).

7. Appellate Jurisdiction and Retroactivity of Supreme Court Amendments

In *Marriage of Duggan*,²³ the appellate court allowed the appeal of a postjudgment child support order without a Rule 304(a) finding, notwithstanding that a visitation petition remained pending. In postjudgment proceedings, the parties had initially agreed to modify child support with the entry of a percentage support order under which the respondent would pay “28% of net income every two weeks.” The respondent then sought to vacate the percentage support order on the basis that support must be stated as a specific dollar figure instead of a percentage. At the same time, he filed a petition to establish specific visitation. The trial court denied the respondent’s motion to vacate the agreed order, and the respondent filed a notice of appeal. However, the respondent’s visitation petition had not yet been decided. The appellate court viewed such postdissolution petitions as stating new claims within the same dissolution action, as opposed to each postdissolution petition being a new action. Under such view, there must be a Rule 304(a) finding in order to appeal a final order on one petition when another is still pending. While the appellate case was pending, however, the Illinois Supreme Court issued amendments to Rule 303(a), which governs the time for filing an appeal. The amended rule acts to save appeals which would otherwise be premature by providing that, when a timely postjudgment motion has been filed, a notice of appeal filed before “the final disposition of any separate claim” does not become effective until the order disposing of the separate claim is entered. Consequently, in order to decide whether it had jurisdiction over the respondent’s appeal, the *Duggan* Court was first required to determine whether the amendments to Rule 303(a) should apply to all cases pending before the appellate court on the effective date (retroactive application), or only to those appeals filed after the effective date (prospective application). The Court concluded that the amendments should be applied retroactively. Accordingly, under amended Rule 303(a) (saving premature appeals filed during the pendency of other claims), the respondent’s notice of appeal was not effective until the trial court later resolved the pending visitation petition, which in turn constitutes a timely notice of appeal. *Duggan* contains a good discussion regarding the finality of orders and retroactivity of legislation that should be reviewed in appropriate cases.

C. Custody and Visitation

1. *Sua Sponte* Amendment to Judgment Allowing Additional Visitation

The appellate court determined in *Marriage of Sisk*²⁴ that when, within 30 days of the judgment, the court *sua sponte* amended the judgment to provide for additional visitation of alternating Christmas Eve, the amendment did not extend the time for the filing of a post-trial motion, and a post-trial motion filed more than 30 days after the date of the judgment was not timely filed. This is one of the few cases where the appellate court found the trial court order to be final and appealable – in the circumstances where the court did not reserve any issues for future determination but instead *sua sponte* granted additional visitation.

2. Visitation Modification

In *Custody of Purdy*,²⁵ a post-divorce custody modification proceeding, the court reserved

²³ 376 Ill.App.3d 725, 877 N.E.2d 1140 (2d D 2007).

²⁴ 258 Ill App 3d 388, 630 NE2d 1289 (4th D 1994).

²⁵ 112 Ill 2d 1, 490 NE2d 1278 (1986).

jurisdiction to decide what arrangements for visitation should be made for the noncustodial parent during the summers. The post-judgment order containing Rule 304 language was held to be final and appealable. The appellate court believed reserving ruling on the mother's summer visitation did not render the custody modification order interlocutory. The *Purdy* court contended that the visitation matter that was left for future determination was merely incidental to the ultimate rights adjudicated by the post-judgment custody order. According to *Purdy*, all claims related to the custody modification petition were decided except for the mother's summer visitation, a matter that is always subject to revision.

The appellate court concluded in *Marriage of Bresnahan*²⁶ that related matters in a post-judgment divorce proceeding constitute a single claim, and no appeal will lie before all related matters are resolved. The mother in *Bresnahan* petitioned to modify visitation, and the father petitioned to transfer custody. The trial court held a hearing only on the mother's visitation petition. Because not all post-judgment matters were finalized in *Bresnahan*, the visitation order was not final and appealable.

In *In re M.M.W.*,²⁷ the appellate court held that post-judgment petitions relating to visitation modification and Rule 137 sanctions did not necessarily make that case not final and appealable. In *M.M.W.*, a parentage petition was filed in 1992. Support and visitation orders were entered in 1994, and an order establishing parentage was entered in January 1995. Two months later, the mother filed an amended petition to allow her husband to adopt the child. The adoption petition was dismissed, but the cause remained before the trial court on the mother's petition to increase child support, the father's petition for Rule 137 sanctions, and the father's petitions for rules to show cause alleging the mother did not comply with the visitation order.

The trial court in 1996 entered orders transferring custody to the father, setting the mother's child support obligation, and continuing rule on the father's motion for sanctions. In May 1997 the trial court ruled on all pending contempt petitions and ordered sanctions against the mother. The mother appealed, and the father contended the appellate court did not have jurisdiction because there was no final and appealable order.

The *M.M.W.* appellate court relied on *Franson* in holding that once the issues of parentage, custody, visitation, and child support are determined in parentage cases, ancillary or incidental issues do not render a final judgment nonfinal. The *M.M.W.* court observed that although the trial court had not ruled on pending motions to modify and clarify visitation and to enter a restraining order, these matters were ancillary and incidental to the orders transferring custody, establishing a support obligation, and setting a visitation schedule. The May 1997 order was final and appealable because it established or disposed of all issues relating to parentage, custody, support, visitation, adoption, and sanctions.

D. Maintenance

In *Marriage of Lord*,²⁸ the divorce judgment was held to be final despite the trial court's reserving the question of maintenance for two years. The basis for finding the judgment final was

²⁶ 189 Ill App 3d 159, 544 NE2d 1290 (2d D 1989).

²⁷ 296 Ill App 3d 877, 695 NE2d 1357 (2d D 1998).

²⁸ 125 Ill App3d 1, 465 NE2d 151 (2d D 1984).

an implicit finding that maintenance was not justified under the circumstances attendant at the time of the divorce. Thus, the trial court made a decision on the issue of maintenance. Two years later in *Marriage of Cannon*,²⁹ the Illinois Supreme Court also held a divorce judgment making maintenance reviewable in two years would not affect the appealability of the judgment.

What has come to be known as "rehabilitative maintenance" and is occasionally called "transitional maintenance"³⁰ is a maintenance award granted for a certain period. After that period the court may decide to extend, terminate, or modify maintenance. Such reservation of jurisdiction was held in *Marriage of Lawrence*³¹ not to affect the finality of the divorce judgment.

In *Lawrence* the divorce judgment awarded (curiously phrased) "temporary" maintenance to the wife for three years, to be reviewable thereafter. The *Lawrence* court, citing *Cannon*, held the technicality of the trial court's characterizing the maintenance award as "temporary" did not affect the divorce judgment's finality. *Marriage of Bingham*³² similarly held that a reservation of maintenance did not affect the appealability of a divorce judgment. The actual issue under *Bingham* was the ex-wife's entitlement to apply for benefits under her ex-husband's military pension plan, where the judgment, entered some years before, reserved jurisdiction on the issue of maintenance.

E. Property Rights

The difficult issue on final and appealable orders concerning property rights in divorce proceedings often involves pension benefits and personal injury actions.

1. Pension Benefits

Distribution of benefits under a pension plan is frequently accomplished through a "reserved jurisdiction" or "if and when" provision in the marital settlement agreement or divorce judgment. Under such a vehicle, each spouse takes an interest in the plan benefits if and when those benefits become payable. Such a "reservation of jurisdiction" should not affect a judgment's finality because there is a present adjudication of the parties' interest in the pension plan. Only the enjoyment of benefits is delayed.

On the other hand, in *Marriage of Rosenow*,³³ the trial court reserved jurisdiction to decide how the pension plan should be distributed between the parties "if, as, and when Respondent receives any benefits from the System." Citing *Leopando*, the *Rosenow* court held there was no final and appealable order because there was no present adjudication of the pension plan distribution.

A 1993 first district case, *Marriage of Petraitis*,³⁴ ruled that a divorce judgment that provided for the future preparation and submission of a Qualified Domestic Relations Order was

²⁹ 112 Ill 2d 552, 494 NE2d 490 (1986).

³⁰ Richard W. Zuckerman, Chairman's Column, Illinois State Bar Association Family Law Section Newsletter, Vol 42, No 3 (Feb 1999).

³¹ 146 Ill App 3d 307, 496 NE2d 538 (3d D 1986).

³² 181 Ill App 3d 966, 537 NE2d 1158 (2d D 1989).

³³ 123 Ill App 3d 546, 462 NE2d 1287 (4th D 1984).

³⁴ 263 Ill App 3d 1022, 636 NE2d 691 (1st D 1993).

not a final judgment, and the trial court retains jurisdiction until finally disposing of that issue. It should therefore follow that once the QDRO is entered, the divorce judgment may be final and appealable.

In *Marriage of Wisniewski (Wisniewski II)*,³⁵ the issue was whether there was a final order at the time of a 1983 divorce judgment (upon remand by the appellate court) or whether the final order was entered in 1996. The trial court, on remand in 1983,³⁶ did not specifically allocate the husband's retirement interest, instead providing that "[j]urisdiction is continued and retained to apportion between the parties according to marital share and supervise payments of the pension if, as, and when it becomes vested in and payable to [the husband]." The husband retired in 1994, and soon after the wife petitioned for allocation of his pension benefits. The husband appealed the trial court's 1996 distribution order, and the wife argued that his appeal was not timely based upon her view of the procedure used to apportion the pension in the 1983 order.

The *Wisniewski II* court held there were two variants of the reserved jurisdiction approach, and that under the second variant the trial court waits until benefits are to be paid before determining the marital interest, or the non-pensioner's share. The wife urged that the trial court followed the reserved jurisdictional approach in the 1983 order, so the husband needed to have appealed from that order in 1983. The wife argued the trial court's 1983 "if, as, and when" language implied the "proportionality rule" was to be used.

The appellate court disagreed, ruling the 1983 order did not determine the method of apportionment but only referred to its timing. The *Wisniewski II* appellate court held the apportionment was not completed until the 1996 order was entered, making that order final and appealable.

2. Personal Injury Action

The trial court's reservation of jurisdiction in *Marriage of Toth*³⁷ to dispose of a pending personal injury claim of a party did not affect the finality of the divorce judgment, and the divorce judgment was allowed to be appealed. The wife in *Toth* contended that the trial court's reservation of jurisdiction to divide any proceeds received on account of her pending personal injury action precluded an appeal of the divorce until the personal injury case concluded. The appellate court disagreed. Citing *Lord* with approval, the *Toth* review court found the trial court resolved all issues that could be decided at the time of judgment and reserved jurisdiction over only one issue that could not be resolved at that time.

F. Attorney Fees

In *Marriage of Piccione*,³⁸ the appellate court found a post-judgment order in a divorce case was not final and appealable because it reserved the issue of attorney fees. The order also failed to include the language required by Rule 304(a). The second district in *Marriage of*

³⁵ 286 Ill App 3d 236, 675 NE2d 1362 (4th D 1997).

³⁶ *Marriage of Wisniewski (Wisniewski II)*, 107 Ill App 3d 711, 437 NE2d 1300 (4th D 1982).

³⁷ 224 Ill App 3d 43, 586 NE2d 436 (1st D 1991).

³⁸ 158 Ill App 3d 955, 511 NE2d 1157 (2d D 1987).

*Tomei*³⁹ also concluded that a divorce judgment was not final and appealable when a petition for attorney fees between the parties was pending, and thus rendered a notice of appeal premature. Further, dismissal of the fee petition by an agreed order after the notice of appeal was filed did not cure the defect.⁴⁰ The *Tomei* court found attorney fees depend on and are integrally related to decisions regarding the parties' financial resources. A disposition of allocating fees should therefore be made before the appellate court can properly assess lower court rulings on maintenance, child support, or division of property. Similarly, in *In re Marriage of Darning*⁴¹, the appellate court held that the question of liability for attorney fees was integral to the judgment dissolving the parties' marriage and that the judgment was not final until that liability was finally determined.

A post-decree order modifying visitation that reserved the issue of attorney fees was ruled not to be final and appealable in *Marriage of Ruchala*.⁴² The mother appealed the trial court's denial of her request to set a visitation schedule and the court's terminating her rights to visitation. In considering the wife's request, *Ruchala* noted the trial court reserved ruling on attorney fees.

A case which distinguished *Piccione* and came to the opposite result was *IRMO Sassano*,⁴³. In *Sassano* it was urged that the appeal was premature because a petition for attorney's fees was still pending at the time of the appeal. The *Sassano* court ruled, "The facts of this case and *Piccione* are very similar. However, this case is distinguishable because the trial court entered the express written finding as required by Rule 304(a) and respondent filed his notice of appeal within 30 days of the finding. Therefore, we conclude that we have jurisdiction to review the denial of respondent's motion to modify support, and we deny petitioner's motion to dismiss the appeal." Accordingly, *Sassano* is one of the few cases to turn on the issue of whether there was an express written finding per SCR 304(a).

In *Marriage of Kerman*,⁴⁴ however, the fee petition was the lawyer's own fee petition against his own client brought under a previous version of IMDMA section 508.40 The *Kerman* court held the lawyer's pending fee petition did not affect the divorce judgment's finality and appealability because determining the reasonableness of fees owed by a party to his former attorney "does not affect the previous apportionment of attorney fees between the parties."

The 1997 amendments to the attorney fees provisions of the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act, better known as the "Leveling of the Playing Field Amendments," address the issue of finality of judgments in the context of a lawyer's fee petition against his or her own client. The amended IMDMA section 508©)(2)⁴⁵ is consistent with the *Kerman* decision and provides in pertinent part:

Irrespective of a Petition for Setting Final Fees and Costs being heard in

³⁹ 253 Ill App 3d 663, 624 NE2d 884 (2d D 1993).

⁴⁰ See also *Marriage of Cierny*, 187 Ill App 3d 334, 543 NE2d 201 (1st D 1989) (wife's pending petition for fees against husband rendered divorce judgment non-appealable).

⁴¹ 117 Ill. App. 3d 620 (1983)

⁴² 208 Ill App 3d 971, 567 NE2d 725 (2d D 1991).

⁴³ 337 Ill. App. 3d 186 (2d D 2003).

⁴⁴ 253 Ill App 3d 492, 624 NE2d 870 (2d D 1993).

⁴⁵ 750 ILCS 5/508 (1993).

conjunction with an original proceeding under this Act, the requested under a Petition for Setting Final Fees and Costs constitutes a distinct cause of action. A pending but undetermined Petition for Setting Final Fees and Costs shall not affect appealability of any judgment or other adjudication in the original proceeding.⁴⁶

In December 2003, In *IRMO King* the Illinois Supreme Court affirmed the appellate court's decision and held that an order entered for attorney fees before the divorce judgment is entered is interlocutory and not final, so trial court can modify the terms for payment of the fee award. Furthermore, a creditor could not initiate sheriff's sale of husband's home under pre-judgment order he recorded that limited collection to husband's bank accounts.

The Muller Law Firm in King withdrew its representation of the husband in Cook County divorce proceedings. On January 5, 1999, the trial court entered a fee award in Muller's favor for \$4,380, with the order stating, "Said sum shall be paid directly to the Muller Firm Ltd. from one of Mr. King's bank accounts currently restrained***." The January 5th order added that there was "no just cause existing to delay appeal or enforcement hereof." On February 5, 1999 a divorce judgment was entered. The judgment stated in pertinent part: "8.2 The Court entered Judgment against Samuel King and in favor of The Muller Firm on January 5, 1999, in the amount of \$4,380.00. Said sum shall be paid out of the accounts listed in Section 2.2(a) out of, Samuel King's assets." (Strikeout in original.) The Muller Firm recorded the January 5, 1999, order to create a lien against the husband's home, then proceeded with collection efforts that included a sheriff's sale of the husband's home. At sale the bid of the appellants in this case, Kenneth Swiatek, et al., was accepted. The husband, who had been without legal representation after The Muller Firm withdrew, then hired an attorney who filed a petition to vacate the sheriff's sale, alleging several aspects of non-compliance with Article XII of the Illinois Code of Civil Procedure (judgments and enforcement).

The trial court ultimately granted the husband's motion to vacate the sheriff's sale and the appellate court affirmed the trial court's order vacating the sheriff's sale. The appellate court decision regarding the standard of review is instructive when it addresses ambiguous versus unambiguous language. The Supreme Court looked to the language in Section 508(c)(2) which provides that the petition for attorney's fees against a lawyer's own client (technically called a "petition for setting final fees and costs") constitutes a "distinct cause of action."

The Supreme Court stated, "The cardinal rule of statutory construction is that the court must ascertain and give effect to the intent of the legislature. *Paris v. Feder*⁴⁷. When construing a statute, the court should look first to the language of the statute, giving the terms their plain and ordinary meaning⁴⁸. Where the language is clear and unambiguous, we must apply the statute without resort to further aids of statutory construction⁴⁹. If the statutory language is ambiguous, however, we may look to other sources to ascertain the legislature's intent. *People v. Ross*⁵⁰. The construction of a statute is a question of law that is reviewed *de novo*.

⁴⁶ 750 ILCS 5/508(c)(2) (1997).

⁴⁷ 179 Ill. 2d 173, 177 (1997).

⁴⁸ *Paris*, 179 Ill. 2d at 177.

⁴⁹ *Davis v. Toshiba Machine Co., America*, 186 Ill. 2d 181, 184-85 (1999).

⁵⁰ 168 Ill. 2d 347, 352 (1995)

The Supreme Court addressed the argument that there was a final order when the fee issue against the lawyer's own client was resolved due to the language in the statute which had provided that the fee claim was a "distinct cause of action." The Supreme Court stated, "However, in ascertaining the meaning of a statute, a court should not read language in isolation, but must consider it in the context of the entire statute." The Supreme Court stated, "Accordingly, the phrase "distinct cause of action" must be read together with the sentence immediately following, which states that a pending, but undetermined, petition for fees shall not affect the appealability of any judgment or other adjudication in the dissolution proceeding. By use of this language, section 508(c) contemplates that a petition for setting final fees may still be pending at the time a final judgment of dissolution of marriage is entered...."

The Supreme Court then reasoned:

Accordingly, given the separation of final fee petitions from other issues in the dissolution proceeding under the new procedures, there is no reason to defer finality and appealability of dissolution judgments until fee petitions are resolved. In such cases, the concerns we expressed in *Leopando* about the appealability of orders on interrelated issues in a dissolution case do not apply. It is in this context that the phrase "distinct cause of action" in section 508(c)(2) must be understood. The use of that phrase is simply a recognition that the issue of fees owed by a client to his or her attorney is not interrelated with other issues, such as child support, property division, and maintenance. As such, once these other interrelated issues are finally determined, the judgment of dissolution is final and appealable, despite the continued pendency of the issue of attorney fees under section 508(c).

The Supreme Court specifically addressed the issue of the finality of attorney fee awards against a lawyer's own client made prior to the entry of the judgment of dissolution of marriage, given the fact that the trial court made a Rule 304(a) finding that there was no just reason to delay enforcement or appeal of the underlying order. In a familiar refrain, the Court stated, "However, a prerequisite for such a finding is that the judgment must be a 'final judgment'⁵¹." Inclusion of Rule 304(a) language does not convert a nonfinal order into a final order for purposes of enforcement or appeal. Citations omitted."

The Supreme Court also noted that a further reason that the January 5th order was not a final order related to the trial court's ability to reconsider the judgment of dissolution of marriage pursuant to §2-1203 of the Illinois Code of Civil Procedure. The Supreme Court pointed out a scenario which may commonly occur in divorce cases:

Suppose, for example, that the trial court denies contribution on behalf of a client spouse in a contribution hearing. The client's previously withdrawn attorney then files a petition for final fees and obtains an award of fees under section 508(c). A judgment of dissolution is subsequently entered and the client's current attorney files a postjudgment motion and one of the issues is the court's denial of contribution. If the court reconsiders that denial and enters an order allowing some contribution to the client's attorney fees from the other spouse, the court must then modify the order awarding attorney fees to withdrawn counsel to reflect the

⁵¹ 155 Ill. 2d R. 304(a).

contribution from the client's spouse to the client's attorney fees and the client's reduced liability for fees to the attorney. It is the order on reconsideration that then becomes the final and appealable order. 155 Ill. 2d R. 303(a)(1). Such a scenario illustrates the potential difficulties in viewing an attorney fee award entered pursuant to section 508© as a final, appealable, and enforceable order prior to entry of a final judgment of dissolution of marriage.

A final case which addressed the appealability of an interim order for attorney's fees held that temporary order which directed the husband's attorneys to disgorge a portion of the fees previously paid to them by husband is not subject to appeal either before or after final dissolution. See [IRMO Johnson](#)⁵² and *Leving v. Weiman and Wessel*⁵³. The question in whether the disgorgement order was a final order. The appellate court correctly noted that the order was not final until the conclusion of the divorce proceedings.

[IRMO Olesky](#)⁵⁴ also addressed an appeal of an interim order for attorney's fees finding the matter was not subject to appeal where it involved post-divorce proceedings. In Olesky the respondent urged that the this court lacked jurisdiction because the plain language of sections 501(c-1)(1) and (2) of the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act precluded appeals of interim orders under *In re Marriage of Tetzlaff*⁵⁵. The petitioner ex-husband argued that Tetzlaff did not apply because it involved interim attorney fees for predissolution proceedings, but that Olesky involved fees for postdissolution proceedings. The appellate court stated summarily, "This is incorrect. Section 501(c-1) applies to both predissolution and postdissolution decree proceedings. *In re Marriage of Beyer*⁵⁶".

In *Olesky*, the court stated, "The trial court here found that Henryk "has the financial ability to pay reasonable amounts" to "enable [Margaret] to participate adequately in the litigation." Unlike *Lawrence*, this order was not set for future review by the trial court. Neither was the \$4,000 designated as a one-time or final interim fee payment. These facts support the conclusion that the order was interlocutory and not subject to appeal. Petitioner's motion to dismiss for want of jurisdiction the portion of the appeal related to interim attorney fees is granted."

G. Contempt

In 2004, the Third District appellate court in [Earles v. Earles](#)⁵⁷ addressed the issue of whether contempt proceedings were independent of the petition to increase child support. In this case, the appellate court affirmed the trial court's ruling that it lacked jurisdiction to consider the motion to reconsider the order which finally disposed of the cross-petitions to modify support, found the ex-husband in contempt and continued the matter for sentencing. The appellate court reasoned that because contempt is a collateral proceeding independent of other matters, the order was final and appealable regarding the cross-petitions to modify. Therefore, the court lacked

⁵² 351 Ill. App. 3d 88, 812 N.E.2d 661, 285 Ill. Dec. 841 (Ill. App. Ct. 2004)

⁵³ Id.

⁵⁴ 337 Ill.App.3d 946, 272 Ill.Dec. 497, 787 N.E.2d 313 (2nd Dist. 2003)

⁵⁵ 304 Ill. App. 3d 1030, 1039, 711 N.E.2d 346 (1999).

⁵⁶ 324 Ill. App. 3d 305, 314, 753 N.E.2d 1032 (2001).

⁵⁷ 352 Ill. App. 3d 274, 815 N.E.2d 1203, 287 Ill. Dec. 400 (2004).

jurisdiction to consider post trial motion challenging holding on petitions to modify filed more than 30 days after order. Earles is probably not good law in light of the 2008 *IRMO Gutman* decision.

H. Domestic Violence Proceedings

Generally, a plenary order of protection is immediately appealable – even whether there is an argument that the underlying case is still pending and that therefore appealing the order of protection amounts to piecemeal litigation. A 2004 case addressing this issue is *In re T.H. and K.M. Minors*⁵⁸, where the First District court addressed a previous case on this issue. There court court first stated, “... this court has held that a protective order is a claim separate from and not ancillary to its related proceedings and may be appealed as a judgment in and of itself. See *In re Marriage of Blitstein*⁵⁹.”

Next, the First District court noted that Supreme Court Rule 307(a)(1) allows appeals on an interlocutory basis of an order, “granting, modifying, refusing, dissolving, or refusing to dissolve an injunction.” The court then stated:

The State relies on this court's decision in *In re Johnny S.*⁶⁰, in contending that the order of protection does not constitute an injunction and is therefore not appealable. In that case, three minors appealed from an order of the circuit court which allowed the children to remain with their father pending a final custody determination. The order was entered at a temporary custody hearing held pursuant to the Juvenile Court Act (705 ILCS 405/1-1 et seq. (West 2002)), and we concluded that it was an interim decision which left the parties' status intact and did not rise to the level of an injunctive order⁶¹. We find the proceedings and facts in this case distinguishable.

In this case, the initial emergency order of protection and the ensuing plenary order were entered pursuant to section 202(a)(2)(ii) of the Illinois Domestic Violence Act of 1986, in conjunction with proceedings to terminate the respondent's parental rights and to appoint a guardian with the right to consent to adoption. 750 ILCS 60/102(4), 202(a)(2)(ii). The order compelled respondent to stay away from T.H. and to refrain from physically abusing and harassing her, from going to HELP's offices, and from contacting anyone at the transportation company for a definite duration of two years. By contrast, in *In re Johnny S.*, the respondent was not compelled to do anything and the order maintained the status quo pending the outcome of a temporary custody hearing. Accordingly, we conclude that the plenary order of protection is injunctive in substance rather than administrative and as such is an appealable final order. We therefore find that this court has jurisdiction to consider this appeal.

In *In re Marriage of Gordon*⁶², the court determined that a petition for a protective order under

⁵⁸ 354 Ill. App. 3d 301, 820 N.E.2d 977, 289 Ill. Dec. 902 (2004).

⁵⁹ 212 Ill. App. 3d 124, 129-30 (1991).

⁶⁰ 219 Ill. App. 3d 420 (1991).

⁶¹ Id at 422.

⁶² 233 Ill. App. 3d 617 (1992).

the Domestic Violence Act filed in a divorce case is a separate claim and is not an ancillary part of the claim for dissolution.

H. Distinct Issues

There are issues other than domestic violence proceedings within divorce cases which are clearly distinct issues and therefore not an ancillary claim to the divorce proceedings.

In 2005, the [IRMO Link](#)⁶³ court addressed the issue of whether of whether the husband's third-party action against his former girlfriend (ostensibly former) is distinct from the issues between the parties in their divorce case. In that case, the husband deeded property which had been in his name alone and would have been marital property to his girlfriend's name. Thereafter, the girlfriend allegedly changed the locks to the house. Thereafter, the husband brought a third party complaint alleging that his former girlfriend held the property in a resulting trust for the benefit of the marital estate.

The issue on appeal was the timeliness of the proceedings because at the time the divorce case was still pending. What was also noteworthy was that no party addressed the jurisdiction issue and the appellate court decided this issue sua sponte. The appellate court determined it had no jurisdiction but then noted that the appellants, "might rely upon Rule 304(a) and, after obtaining the necessary written finding from the trial court, return to this court." The court stated, "if resolution of David's third-party action against Cheri is distinct from the issues between Helen and David in the dissolution case, this case is appealable with a proper Rule 304(a) finding."

The appellate court then ruled, "Thus, although the third-party case touches upon one of the ancillary issues in this dissolution, in our judgment it is not intertwined with the dissolution case in the same way that the custody issue was intertwined with the dissolution claim in *Leopando*. Therefore, we hold that the judgment in favor of Cheri on the third-party complaint would have been immediately appealable if the appellants had obtained the necessary Rule 304(a) finding." Thus, *Link* is one of the few cases addressing the importance of the inclusion of SCR 304(a) language in divorce cases – when the issue is clearly a distinct one.

Instructively, the appellate court included a discussion of a somewhat similar appellate court case decided 25 years ago. The appellate court stated:

*In re Marriage of Peshek*⁶⁴, lends support for our conclusion that the issue of whether David made a gift of the property is distinct from the dissolution issues. In that case, the petitioner and the respondent in the dissolution case deeded their marital home to the petitioner's parents, who put it into a land trust with a bank. The respondent sought leave to file a third-party complaint against the petitioner's parents and the bank in the dissolution case, which was denied. The respondent alleged that the beneficial interest in the marital home was the sole property of the marital estate. The appellate court held that the respondent should have been

⁶³ Nos. 2-05-0194 & 2-05-0209 cons. (2d Dist. November 2005)

⁶⁴ 89 Ill. App. 3d 959 (1980).

allowed to file the third-party complaint in the dissolution proceeding because under section 503 of the Act the court has to consider whether property is marital or nonmarital. The appellate court pointed out the speculative nature of the marital estate's interest in the property. "At best, the property can be considered a potential or alleged asset. It is possible that a hearing on this issue would result in a finding that the parties have no interest in the property because they deeded the house to [the petitioner's parents] as a gift ***." This language suggests that the issue of whether the parties made a gift is distinct from the dissolution issues and that a separate hearing on what interest the marital estate has is a threshold to considering whether the property is marital or nonmarital.

IV. Effect of Premature or Untimely Motions to Reconsider

A. Premature Motion to Reconsider Does Not Extend Time to File Notice of Appeal.

In the 2007 case of *Marriage of Waddick*⁶⁵ the wife filed a motion to reconsider the trial court's written decision, but prior to entry of the actual judgment. She did not file another post-trial motion or notice of appeal within 30 days after entry of the judgment. Instead, she filed her notice of appeal within 30 days after the trial court denied her motion for reconsideration. However, since the wife's motion was filed prematurely before entry of the judgment (regardless of when the motion was heard), it did not qualify as a timely postjudgment motion. Accordingly, the motion could not extend the time for filing the notice of appeal. In order to qualify as a postjudgment motion for purposes of SCR 303(a), a motion must be directed against the judgment and the ex-wife's motion was directed against the trial court's written decision, not its judgment.

B. Improper Motion to Reconsider Results in Untimely Notice of Appeal.

In the case of *Marriage of Singel*,⁶⁶ on the thirtieth day after entry of judgment, the respondent filed a motion for an extension of time for filing a motion to reconsider. The respondent did not actually file a motion to reconsider the judgment, either within 30 days or at any time thereafter. After the trial court denied the respondent's motion for an extension of time, he then filed a notice of appeal. The appellate court dismissed the appeal as untimely since the notice of appeal was filed more than 30 days after entry of the dissolution judgment. The respondent's motion for an extension to time did not constitute a proper postjudgment motion under Section 2-1203 of the Code of Civil Procedure because it did not request any relief against the judgment. The decision states, "Contrary to what respondent contends, it does not matter that he filed his motion for an extension of time within 30 days after the entry of the judgment." Moreover, the respondent's reliance upon S.Ct.Rule 183 was misplaced since that rule applies only to the time limits for filing pleadings and to time limits that have been set by the supreme court rules. The trial court could not have used Rule 183 to grant respondent more time to file a postjudgment motion. Therefore, because the respondent did not file a proper postjudgment motion which would have extended the time in which to appeal, his notice of appeal was untimely.

⁶⁵ 869 N.E.2d 1089 (2d D 2007).

⁶⁶ 868 N.E.2d 1079 (2d D 2007).

V. Conclusion

Most of the cases cited in this article held that the appeals were premature. Most of the cases in which an appeal was allowed were issued before the Illinois Supreme Court opinion in *Franson v Micelli*. Under the narrow construction allowed by *Franson*, many of the previous cases in which the appeal was allowed even though the trial court reserved jurisdiction on some issue must be questioned. However, a case should still be considered final and appealable if the trial court reserved only the abilities to enforce and modify its orders. This ruling, from *Deckard v Joiner*, is unchanged by *Franson*.

The standard in parentage cases appears to be that a trial court decision is not final and appealable unless the issues of parentage, pregnancy and birth expenses, custody, visitation, support, and attorney fees have been resolved. The standard in divorce proceedings is that a trial court decision is not final and appealable unless all issues that can be resolved at the time of judgment have been resolved, with the possible exception of maintenance in cases where no maintenance is being currently awarded but there is a reservation to award future maintenance.

It is unclear whether a trial court's reservation of whether to award maintenance will now be considered final and appealable in light of *Franson*. The appellate courts in *Lord and Cannon* considered the trial court's orders final and appealable, even though in both cases the trial courts reserved ruling on maintenance for two years. The assumption is that by finding that a spouse did not need maintenance at the time the order was entered, the trial court made a finding with regard to maintenance. The reservation of maintenance for two years, therefore, could be construed as the trial court's ability to modify its maintenance order.

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