

# Michael Jackson hires retired judge for 'family law matter'

By Linda Deutsch  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Michael Jackson and his ex-wife, Deborah Rowe, have agreed to hire a retired judge to handle an unspecified "family law matter," according to a court document.

The matter is believed to concern custody and visitation arrangements for the couple's two children — a boy, 7, and a girl, who is 5 or 6, who reportedly live with Jackson.

In an order filed Friday, a judge approved an agreement reached by Jackson and Rowe on Jan. 27 to have retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Stephen M. Lachs preside over the case. Lachs works with a center for alternative dispute resolution that allows parties in civil disputes to hire private judges at a rate of \$650 an hour.

"They hire private judges so that everything can be done behind closed doors," said attorney Dana Cole, an expert in family law who is not involved in the case.

It has been reported that Rowe wants to change the terms of the custody and visitation agreements involving the two children.

With Jackson facing trial on child molestation charges, Cole said such a request would not be unusual.

Rowe's attorney, Iris Fimliver, did not immediately return a call for comment. A call to Jackson attorney Lance Spiegel was answered by a recording saying Spiegel's law firm did not respond to media requests for comment.

Cole noted that the private

judge's rulings would be as binding as if they were made in a regular family court, but would also remain private.

Rowe and Jackson were married in 1996 in Sydney, Australia, after they announced that Rowe, who worked as a nurse for Jackson's plastic surgeon, was carrying the pop star's child.

She gave birth to a son, Prince Michael, who recently turned 7, and the couple later had a daughter, Paris, who is 5 or 6. Jackson has a third child, Prince Michael II, who is

believed to be about 10 months old, but he has not disclosed the identity of that boy's mother.

It was Prince Michael II Jackson made headlines with last year when he dangled him from the balcony of a Berlin hotel for fans to see.

The Jackson-Rowe marriage ended in 1999 after Rowe filed, citing irreconcil-

able differences.

In Indianapolis Tuesday, a federal judge removed Jackson from a copyright infringement suit.

The judge ruled that the Indiana-born entertainer had no involvement in a disputed compilation of songs performed by the Jackson 5 decades ago.

Members of a Gary-based rhythm and blues group had accused Jackson of misrepresenting their work as his own on the 1996 release "Pre-History: The Lost Steeltown Recordings."

Their lawsuit accused Jackson and the other Jackson 5 members — Tito, Marlon, Jackie and Jermaine Jackson — of trade-name and copyright infringement. The four others reached an out of court settlement in December.



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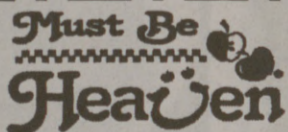
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