Administrative Order

55th Circuit Court, 2025-03-J; PD17 2025-01J

Administrative Order Adopting Family Court Plan

(Rescinds Local Administrative Order 2013-01J-55th Circuit Court; PD17 2013-01J

This administrative order is issued in accordance with 2002 Public Act 682. The purpose of this order is to adopt the Family Court Plan appended to this Order as approved by the State Court Administrative Office.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Date: 3/6/25

Joshua M. Farrell, District Court Judge
Chief Circuit Court Judge

Date: 3/6/25

Marcy A. Klaus
Chief Probate Court Judge

55th Circuit Court Family Court Plan

This Family Court Plan supersedes prior plans approved for the operation of the Family Division.

Introduction

Pursuant to MCL 600.1011, each judicial circuit is required to establish a "Family Court Plan." Supreme Court Administrative Order 2003-2 requires the Family Court Plan to be submitted in accordance with the statute and guidelines provided by the State Court Administrative Office. The Family Court Plan is adopted pursuant to MCL 600.1011, Supreme Court Orders and SCAO Guidelines.

The plan supersedes all prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the Family Division.

Family Court Plan-Purpose and Overview

This plan maintains a Family Division of the 55th Circuit Court. This plan assigns the Family Division cases between the Probate Court Judge and Circuit Court Judges to meet the goal of one judge for one family while meeting the courts' statutory and constitutional requirements.

Case Assignments by Case Type

Case types are assigned to the 17th District Probate Judge and 55th Circuit Court Judge(s) as outlined in Appendix A. The assignment of cases by case type and number shall be amended from time to time to maintain a balanced weighted caseload between the judges.

All open and closed cases shall be assigned according to this chart and each judge shall hear all post adjudication matters in each case assigned to that judge.

Judges Assigned to the Family Division

The Judge of the 17th District Probate Court

The Circuit Court Judges of the 55th Circuit Court

Administration

Taking into account the special needs of families that come before the court, the public expectation of fair and efficient system of family justice, and the needs of the county government fiscal restraints, as well as the convenient administration of justice, the Family Division will be administered as follows:

1. **Presiding judge**: The chief circuit court judge, Judge Farrell, has selected circuit court Judge Hovey as the presiding judge of the Family Division of the 55th Circuit Court.

2. **Supervisory authority**: The chief judge of the 55th Circuit Court shall have supervisory authority over the administration of the Family Division.

3. **Organization chart**: Clarifications of the supervisory responsibilities are enumerated on the organization chart attached as Appendix B.

4. **Facilities management**: Facilities management shall be determined by the chief judge of the 55th Circuit Court.

5. **Budget process**: Judges within the Family Division shall develop budgets that consider the special obstacles presented, including separate funding units and separate child care fund budgets. Other obstacles include the reality that each judge is responsible for court matters separate from the family court, as well as family court operations within the separate counties. Staff in each court perform both family court and non-family court duties. Further, there are two counties which separately fund the operation of the courts. The state actively participates in the funding of child care and Friend of the Court operations. Accordingly, care must be taken to ensure the continuing efficient administration of the courts and to promote the goal of maximizing service to the family court litigants. For these reasons, the budget process shall continue with the Chief Circuit Court Judge submitting the Circuit Court budget. The Friend of the Court shall prepare the Friend of the Court budget and present the budget to the Chief Judge of Circuit Court. The Presiding Family Court Judge shall prepare and present the budget for child care related activities of the Family Division, excluding the Friend of the Court.

6. **Plan review**: This plan will be periodically reviewed and revised as deemed necessary by the Chief Circuit Court Judge and Chief Probate Court Judge.

Judicial Resources and Service

1. **Judicial expertise and duration of service**: A judge's service pursuant to this family court plan shall be consistent with the goal of developing sufficient judicial expertise in family law to properly serve the interests of families and children where cases are assigned to that judge. In furtherance of this goal, the Chief Circuit Court Judge shall have the authority and flexibility to determine the duration of the judge's service in the Family Division pursuant to this family court plan.

2. **Serving judges**: Three judges shall serve the Family Division and shall exercise all the powers conferred by law in the Family Division. The judges assigned are the 55th Circuit Court judges and the 17th Probate District Court judge. The probate judge serving pursuant to this plan shall have the same power and authority as circuit judges in family division

matters within the counties and circuit, in addition to the powers and authority of a judge of probate court.

3. **Full-time service desirable**: Recognizing that full-time judicial service in the Family Division is desirable, judges shall serve full time in the Family Division when practicable and where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exist. However, assigning a single judge to the Family Division would result in an imbalanced caseload and administrative responsibility. Removing approximately fifty-percent (50%) of two circuit judges' caseloads and placing them on a single family court judge would make it impossible to schedule family cases within the time frames set forth in the statutes and court rules. Accordingly, the Family Division will be served by the three judges identified above.

4. **Methodology to determine judicial service**: The following factors were considered in determining the best allocation of judicial resources to serve the Family Division:

    a. Existing court structure. The 17th Probate District Court consists of two counties, Clare and Gladwin. The two counties share one probate court judge. The two counties share two circuit court judges. The four courts require attention to circuit and probate cases, staff, and general fund budgets in addition to the family court cases and service delivery required for delinquency and abuse/neglect cases;
    b. Small court staff where no one employee handles solely family court cases;
    c. Two separate county funding units;
    d. Fully allocated county facilities housing the courts;
    e. A mix of union and non-union employee groups.

5. **Goal planning**: Meeting on these issues shall be held at least annually to craft a plan to minimize the inconvenience to those families that have collateral or repeat contact with the court system while trying to maximize the use of existing personnel and facilities. The first rule shall be to maximize the benefit to families in crafting a Family Division to fit the existing judicial, personnel, budgetary and facilities resources.

Assignment of Cases

Cases will be assigned as outlined in the Family Division Case Assignment Local Administrative Order (LAO).

1. **Docket management**. It is recognized that each judge will have separate case responsibilities outside of the family court, which will require docket coordination with family court cases assigned to that judge. Accordingly, each judge shall be independently responsible for the docketing of cases assigned to that judge and in administering their individual docket to ensure the efficient administration of justice. Further, in this regard, the judges shall observe the Michigan standards for annual leave, training, education and seminars as set forth in Michigan Court Rules and the Michigan Code of Judicial Conduct. Judges shall observe the holiday schedules stated in the court's Local Administrative Order.

Records Management

1. **Central access point**. The office of county clerk shall serve as a central access point for public information about the Family Division. Questions, whether by walk in or telephone, regarding adoption, change of name, dependent neglect and abuse, emancipation of minors, juvenile delinquency, parental consent, or domestic relations shall be referred to the appropriate Family Division or friend of the court staff for assistance.
2. **Public assistance**. All questions from the public, particularly from self-represented litigants, concerning the filing of initial petitions in matters concerning adoption, change of name, emancipation, parental waivers and status offenses concerning home and school incorrigibility, runaways and other home base juvenile offenses shall be referred to the Family Division staff assigned for assistance. Family court division staff shall assist in the filing and processing of these matters including the preparation of documents and orders. Assistance in the preparation of documents and orders by Family Division staff shall also apply to matters involving status offense delinquency and dependent neglect and abuse.
3. **Records maintenance**. Cases assigned to the family court judges shall be filed with and maintained by the county clerk. The respective county clerks have been afforded the opportunity to participate in the development of plans for management of court records.
4. **Staff training**. Because the current probate court staff with responsibility for these matters will support the Family Division of the circuit court, training needs are minimized. The respective judges will ensure any new training where appropriate. The judges and their staff shall meet regularly to consider training opportunities and assess needs. The goal will be to simplify implementation and processes while retaining sensitivity to the special needs of family court litigants. The court staff has received training in handling of closed files, with particular attention to the enhanced requirements of confidentiality and restricted access in adoption, parental waiver and juvenile files.

Date: 3/6/25

Hon. Joshua M. Farrell, District Court Judge
Chief Circuit Court Judge

Date: 3/6/25

Hon. Marcy A. Klaus
Chief Probate Court Judge

CASE ASSIGNMENTS BY CASE TYPE FOR THE 55th CIRCUIT COURT FAMILY DIVISION PLAN

Judge Klaus Judicial Sec'y: Open Juvenile Referee: Open	Judge Hovey Judicial Sec'y: Angie Cullen Law Clerk: Nick Madaj	Judge Ambrozaitis Judicial Sec'y: Cecelia Price Law Clerk: Nick Madaj
Proceedings under Juvenile Code DJ, DL, JG, NA, PJ, TL	Circuit Criminal AX, FC, FH, FJ	
Proceedings Under Adoption Code AB, AC, AD, AF, AG, AM, AN, AO, AU, AY	Domestic Relations DO, DM, DS, DC, DP, DZ	Domestic Relations DO, DM, DS, DC, DP, DZ
Domestic Relations * (see below) UD, UE, UF, UI, UM, UN		Other Civil Matters CB, CC, CD, CE, DE, CF, CH, CK, CL, CP, CR, CZ, PC, PD, PR, PS, PZ
Miscellaneous Proceedings EM, ID, NB, NC, PH, PW, VF, PP, EP, ER, EV, EE, EJ, EZ	Civil Damage Suits ND, NF, NH, NI, NM, NO, NP, NS, NZ	
Ancillary Proceedings pursuant to Case File Management Standards (A)(10)	PPOs PH, PP, VP, EP, ER, EV, EE, EJ, EZ	PPOs PH, PP, VP, EP, ER, EV, EE, EJ, EZ
Probate Court Cases All case types listed pursuant to Case File Management Standards (C)		

*To meet the goal of the Family Court Plan, domestic relations cases will be assigned to one judge for one family. If a DM, DC, DS, DP, DZ is or becomes an ancillary case with any case assigned to the probate judge, the DM, DC, DS, DP, DZ case(s) shall be assigned to the probate judge to promote this goal. If there is a conflict for the probate judge, a circuit court judge shall be drawn by lot and assigned to the cases involving the family. If there is a conflict for a circuit court judge, the matter will first be assigned to the other circuit court judge and then the probate judge.

Appendix A (55th Circuit Family Court Plan)

FAMILY COURT PLAN
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
FOR THE 55TH CIRCUIT COURT

Chief Judge – 55th Circuit Court

Presiding Family Court Judge

Family Division Judge	Family Division Judge

Reporting to the Chief Circuit Court Judge and Presiding Family Court Judge

Circuit Court Administrator

Reporting to the Circuit Court Administrator

Juvenile Registers	Family Court Clerks

Reporting to the Chief Circuit Court Judge and Presiding Family Court

Friend of the Court Administrator/Referee

Reporting to the Friend of the Court Administrator/Referee

Caseworkers	Financial Officer Office Manager	All other Friend of the Court Staff

As of 3/6, 2025,

Chief Circuit Court Judge Joshua M. Farrell, District Court Judge

Chief Probate Court Judge Marcy A. Klaus, Family Division judge

Circuit Court Judge Tara Hovey, presiding Family Division judge

Circuit Court Judge Michelle J. Ambrozaitis, Family Division judge

Circuit Court Administrator Steven Worpell

Friend of the Court Administrator Scott D. Moore