

STATE OF MICHIGAN KALAMAZOO COUNTY 9TH CIRCUIT COURT KALAMAZOO COUNTY PROBATE COURT	FAMILY COURT PLAN	LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER CIRCUIT: 2026-01J PROBATE: 2026-01J
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Court Address
330 ELEANOR STREET, KALAMAZOO, MI 49007
1536 GULL ROAD, KALAMAZOO, MI 49048

Court Telephone No.
(269) 383-8837
(269) 383-8666

IT IS ORDERED:

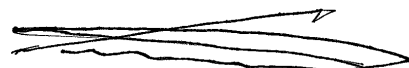
This administrative order is issued in accordance with 2002 Public Act 682. The purpose of this order is to adopt the following Family Court Plan upon approval by the State Court Administrative Office. This Family Court Plan is a joint Local Administrative Order between the 9th Circuit Court and the Kalamazoo County Probate Court.

The adoption of the Family Court Plan rescinds the Ninth Circuit Court Local Administrative Order 2014-14J and Kalamazoo County Probate Court Local Administrative Order 2014-03J.

Date: July 7, 2025


 Gary C. Giguere, Jr.
 Chief Circuit/Probate Judge

Date: March 27, 2026


 Curtis J. Bell
 Probate Judge

FAMILY DIVISION ESTABLISHMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Authority. Pursuant to MCL 600.1011, as amended by 2002 PA 682, each judicial circuit is required to establish a family court plan (FCP or “the Plan”). Supreme Court Administrative Order 2003-2 requires the family court plan to be submitted for approval to the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) for filing in accordance with the statute and guidelines provided by the SCAO. The chief judge of the joint circuit/probate court shall establish how the Family Division will be operated in the circuit and how the services will be coordinated. The chief circuit/probate judge has the authority to determine the duration of a judge’s service pursuant to the

family court plan in furtherance of this goal. This court has a multi-judge Family Division, and the chief judge has selected a presiding judge to serve in that capacity. See Appendix A for further detail.

- B. Goals. The goal of the Circuit Court Family Division is one family, one judge. The following guidelines support this goal:
1. Expedite the disposition of all cases in a manner consistent with fairness to all parties and what is permissible by law.
 2. Minimize the public's uncertainties associated with where and how cases are processed.
 3. Ensure equal access to the adjudicative process for all litigants.
 4. Ensure that the resolution of matters is guided by what is permissible under law by defined standards of service and by balancing the needs of the individual and society.
 5. Enhance the quality of litigation.
 6. Ensure that judges and hearing officials are knowledgeable in family law.
- C. Operation. This FCP supersedes prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the Family Division. This Plan will be reviewed and revised as necessary, including when Family Division judicial assignments change, and at least every 2 years, by the chief circuit/probate judge to ensure that the Plan meets the statutory requirements and complies with the Family Court Plan Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO. The 9th Circuit Court has a Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan that is signed by the Chief Judges of the District and Circuit/Probate Court which references the family court plan. It will be updated whenever there is a change in the judiciary.

II. ADMINISTRATION

A. JUDICIAL RESOURCES / SERVICE

1. Family Division Judges. All judges assigned to the Family Division have expressed an interest in overseeing family law cases through the end of their term. There are three judges assigned to the Family Division. Judge Namita Sharma began serving in 2021 and her current term will expire in 2028. Judge Kenneth Barnard began serving in 2025 and his current term will expire in 2033. Judge G. Scott Pierangeli began serving in 2013 and his current term will expire in 2026. These judges will be assigned to the Family Division for the remainder of their current terms, and barring unforeseen circumstances, until they leave the bench.
2. Judicial Expertise. Each judge listed above may attend New Judge Orientation as well as continued training consistent with MCJE rules and is encouraged to attend training that informs the position and

current skillset. Training opportunities are provided by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl), under MCL 600.1019.

3. Judicial Service. All judges in “the Plan” will serve full time in the Family Division, under MCL 600.1011(3).

B. ASSIGNMENT OF CASES

When 2 or more matters within the same jurisdiction of the Family Division of circuit court involving members of the same family are pending in the same judicial circuit, those matters, whenever practicable, shall be assigned to the judge to whom the first case was assigned. [MCL 600.1023]

1. Case Assignment. Cases are assigned randomly, as provided for under MCR 8.111. Assignment of cases is made pursuant to the current approved local administrative order on case assignment, LAO 2025-01J, Assignment of Cases (see Appendix B). Pending and new cases are assigned under the one judge-one family concept. When all Family Division judges disqualify, the case is presented to the criminal division and civil/probate division judges for review and possible assignment. If all circuit court and civil/probate court judges disqualify, the case is assigned to a visiting judge through the State Court Administrative Office.

2. Definitions.

For purposes of this family court plan, the term “family” means anyone related by law or biology. The term “family member” means anyone related by law, blood, marriage, or adoption. The term “pending” means the case is currently active (or pre-judgment).

When two or more matters within the jurisdiction of the Family Division of circuit court involving members of the same family are pending or closed, those matters, whenever practicable, shall be assigned to the judge to whom the first such case was assigned. Members of a family may be related by law or biology to one parent or the same parents or connected by case in the court’s case management system.

3. One Family-One Judge. Determining the process and criteria for the one family-one judge requirement, and exceptions to the one family-one judge requirement, are outlined in LAO 2025-01, Assignment of Cases (Appendix B).

4. Prior Matters. When cases or motions are filed, the court clerk's office shall review court records to see if the party in the case has a prior pending or closed case.
5. Case Types. The case types of the Family Division are adult adoptions, agency international adoptions, direct placement adoptions, relative adoptions (includes guardians), safe delivery of newborn adoptions, agency MCI adoptions, non-relative guardian adoptions, agency other adoptions, adoption miscellaneous, step-parent adoptions, custody, designated juvenile cases, delinquency, divorce (minor children), divorce (no children), paternity, other support, other family matters involving domestic relations, extreme risk protection orders (ex parte, minor respondent), extreme risk protection orders (non ex parte, minor respondent), emancipation of minors, extreme risk protection orders (ex parte, adult respondent), extreme risk protection orders (non ex parte, adult respondent), extreme risk protection orders (emergency request, adult respondent), extreme risk protection orders (emergency request, minor respondent), infectious disease, juvenile guardianship, neglect and abuse, safe delivery of newborn child, personal protection domestic relationship (when there is a prior domestic case having activity within a two-year period), waiver of parental consent to obtain abortion, traffic and ordinance, UIFSA establishment, UIFSA filing, UIFSA initiation, UIFSA registration of orders for enforcement, and young adult voluntary foster care.
The following case types are not being used in case assignment in the Family Division: felony non-payment of child support, personal protection against stalking, personal protection actions brought under the juvenile code, uninsured motorist, violation proceedings on out-of-county personal protection order
6. Concurrent Cases. Case assignment occurs when the filing is loaded into the circuit court's case management system, which is a party-driven system, and supports the one family-one judge requirement.

C. REASSIGNMENT OF CASES

1. Disqualifications. Disqualifications will first be handled as described under MCR 8.111(C)(1). Cases must be reassigned first with the court's Family Division, then within the remaining bench, and finally by SCAO assignment.
2. Transfer. The chief circuit/probate judge, at his or her discretion, may provide that when a judge's service in the Family Division ends, the pending cases of that judge may be reassigned to another judge or

judges serving pursuant to the Family Court Plan or may be resolved by that judge

3. Dispute. Any dispute on proper reassignment shall be resolved by the chief circuit/probate judge and/or the presiding Family Division judge.

D. STAFFING AND FACILITIES

1. Administrative Structure. An organizational chart is included as Appendix A. The referee unit, juvenile probation officers, Juvenile Home employees, and Friend of the Court provide statutorily required support services to the court so that the court is operating efficiently. Each position will enhance the goals of the Family Court Plan through all services that are available.
2. Remote Proceedings. The 9th Circuit Court has been utilizing Zoom for proceedings that are scheduled for a short duration, such as settlement conferences and motion hearings. Some lengthier proceedings are conducted remotely via Zoom by a referee to accommodate litigants except if one of the litigants, or the referee, determine that the remote proceeding cannot be facilitated for that evidentiary hearing. All motion hearings and scheduling conferences (pretrials) in pre-judgment proceedings are remote unless the party cannot use Zoom for any given reason. All of these accommodations comply with MCR 2.407 and 2.408.
3. Facilities. The Family Division operates out of the Gull Road Justice Complex which provides a number of attorney/client meeting rooms. The Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home is adjacent and connected to the Gull Road Justice Complex. The Juvenile Home Administrator is responsible for the operations of the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home. There is an after-hours hearing room in the juvenile facility used for after-hours and weekend emergency preliminary hearings. There is a Court Security Committee that conducts periodic review of the security of the Gull Road Justice Complex where all of the family court matters as well as civil and probate matters are handled.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. Clerks of the Court. The Kalamazoo County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. The County Clerk deputizes the court clerks who handle the files of circuit court at the courthouses. The Kalamazoo County Probate Register shall maintain every record created by or filed with the probate court.

2. **Plan Development.** The County Clerk has been afforded the opportunity to participate in the development of plans for management of court records. Any letter of concurrence or disagreement with “the Plan” authored by the County Clerk regarding management of court records shall be submitted to the SCAO with the submission of the family court plan for approval. Pursuant to section I-C, the County Clerk shall be included in any subsequent review of this plan, not to exceed two years.
3. **Filing.** The process for filing court documents follows Michigan Court Rules and the Michigan Trial Court Case File Management Standards. Records access is addressed in Local Administrative Order 2025-06J/2025-04J, Access, Inspection, Reproduction and Creation of Court Records. The Circuit Court Clerk’s Office is the central point of access for the Circuit Court, providing information regarding filing locations, records storage, records access, and scheduling information.
4. **Access Point.** The Clerk’s Office at the Gull Road Justice Complex can provide information to the public and the bar as to where to file documents, records access, and case scheduling information. This information can also be accessed at the Judge Charles A. Pratt Justice Center Clerk’s Office. The address and contact information for both locations is listed on the county webpage.
5. **Internal Transfer.** The internal transfer of files and documents are managed within the court case management system, the county network, file transfer protocol, or via the courier.
6. **Technological Access.** Court files are maintained electronically through the court case management system and are accessible to judges and referees.
7. **Public Access.** The court has provided this Family Court Plan on the court’s website.