First Judicial Circuit of Michigan
Hillsdale, Michigan 49242

Honorable Sara S. Lisznyai
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

STATE OF MICHIGAN
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTY OF HILLSDALE

FAMILY COURT PLAN
FOR THE 1ST CIRCUIT COURT
AND THE HILLSDALE COUNTY PROBATE COURT

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER
Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-02J-
Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-01J-

Rescinds Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2018-03J
Rescinds Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2018-03J

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 Circuit Judge and the Chief Probate Judge shall enter into an agreement establishing how the Family Division will be operated in the circuit and how the services will be coordinated. The Chief Judge of the Circuit Court 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(s) of this FCP are described below. The primary goal of our Court's family plan is to comply with the "one family one judge" rule set forth in MCL 600.1023. In addition, we believe that our plan will encourage consistent outcomes for families and result in more efficient court operation.

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 and Chief Probate judges to ensure that the Plan meets the statutory requirements and complies with the Family Court Plan Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO. When there is a

change to actual practice, such as a new judge taking the bench, the Chief Judge will initiate the review process.

II. ADMINISTRATION

A. JUDICAL 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. The Family Division in Hillsdale County includes:

   The Hon. Sara S. Lisznyai, who took the bench as Circuit Judge in January, 2021 and has served in the Family Division since that time, and whose current term expires in December, 2026; and

   The Hon. Michelle A. Bianchi, who has served as Probate Judge and in the Family Division since January, 2013, and whose current term expires in December, 2030.

   The Hon. Megan R. M. Stiverson, who took the bench as District Judge in January, 2021 and has served in the Family Division since that time, and whose current term expires in December, 2026.

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 (MJI), under MCL 600.1019. Our judges regularly participate in continuing judicial education, including programming that involves family law topics. Seminars and education are a component of our budgeting process in order to facilitate ongoing training.
3. Judicial Service. The Circuit Judge and Probate Judge will serve full time in the Family Division, under MCL 600.1011(3), where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exists. The District Judge will have a partial assignment for all neglect termination hearings for cases that have been involved with the Family Treatment Court. This is less than 5% of the neglect termination case filings.

B. ASSIGNMENT OF CASES.

Cases involving members of the same family (aka "one family-one judge") is defined as "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. The term "whenever practicable" is not defined in statute but generally means to the greatest extent possible to further the goals of the family court plan described in section I(B).

1. Case Assignment. Cases are assigned randomly, as provided for under MCR 8.111 or as otherwise provided in accordance with 8.112(B), except for those cases identified to be those of a family member within the jurisdiction of the family court. The Circuit Judge shall decide divorces and ancillary matters, custody, parenting time, paternity, personal protection orders (except where the respondent is a minor), parental consent waivers, and name changes, as well as any cases pending that were assigned to that Judge as of January 1, 2021, and all other cases assigned to her since that date. The Probate Judge shall decide all juvenile offenses, abuse and neglect, status of minors, adoption, guardian/conservatorship, personal protection orders where the respondent is a minor, and family treatment court cases; as well as any cases pending that were assigned to that judge as of January 1, 2021, and all other cases assigned to her since that date.

2. Definitions. For purposes of this FCP, the term "family" means: two or more people who live in one household, or who live in a separate household due to age, emancipation or divorce within Hillsdale County and are related by blood or marriage.

   For purposes of this FCP, the term "family member" means: a member of a family as defined above.

   For purposes of this FCP, the term "pending" means: an active case assigned to the Family Division of the Circuit Court and which was filed on or after January 1, 2021.

3. One Family-One Judge. Filing parties must submit to the Court form MC 21, Confidential Case Inventory, in all Family Division cases pursuant to MCR 3.206(A)(3). When the Court becomes aware that two or more matters within the same jurisdiction of the Family Division of Circuit Court involving members of the same family are pending, the judges shall meet to determine before which judge(s) the matters should proceed. The "one family-one judge" requirement may not be practicable in all instances. By way of example and not limitation, when one of the judges is unavailable due to illness or travel, or in emergency situations; for example, after-hours ERPO requests by law enforcement or exigent circumstances involving a PPO. In these situations, the available judge will take appropriate steps to address the situation, including issuing any necessary orders.

4. Prior Matters. When cases or motions are filed, the Clerk's office shall review the case inventory and court records to see if the family, as defined herein, has a prior pending matter. The County Clerk shall not accept initial pleadings from an attorney or member of the public in a Family Division case unless form MC 21, Confidential Case Inventory, has been submitted and has been completed in its entirety.

5. Case Types. The primary case types of the Family Division are AB, AC, AD, AF, AG, AM, AN, AO, AU, AY, DC, DJ, DL, DM, DO, DP, DS, DZ, EE, EJ, EM, EP, ER, EV, EZ, FH (only felony, non-payment of child support), ID, JA, JG, NA, NB, PH, PJ, PP, PW, TL, UE, UF, UI, UM, UN, VF, and VP. The ancillary case types that may be included in the Plan, if concurrent jurisdiction plans or other court configurations require it are CA, CY, DD, GA, GL, GM, JA, LG, MI, NC, and PO. All of the above-listed listed case types are being used in case assignment.

6. Concurrent Cases. The above procedures support the "one family-one judge" requirements with concurrent cases (for example, paternity cases with concurrent NA, DL, or DJ cases) because these cases will typically be assigned to the same judge.

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. If a judge leaves the Family Division or is no longer sitting as a circuit or probate judge, his/her respective cases shall be reassigned to his/her successor in the Family Division. If a vacancy occurs and until a successor assumes the bench, the remaining Family Division judge shall temporarily assume these cases.

3. Dispute. Any dispute on proper reassignment shall be resolved by the Chief Judge and/or the presiding Family Division judge, should one be appointed.

D. STAFFING AND FACILITIES

1. Administrative Structure. A Family Division organizational chart is included as Appendix A. Coordination of staff:

   a. The Judge of the Circuit Court shall have supervisory authority over the Friend of the Court, who may be appointed by local administrative order to serve as referee, and his/her staff in addition to the staff of the Circuit Court.

   b. The Judge of the Probate Court shall have supervisory authority over the Probate Court staff, including the Juvenile Referee/Administrator, and the staff of the Circuit Court dealing with juvenile delinquency, abuse and neglect, Family Treatment Court, adoptions, and the youth home.

   c. The respective judges shall have the sole authority to negotiate collective bargaining agreements, develop personnel policies, and set salaries with his/her respective staff as the judge deems appropriate in conjunction with county-developed personnel policies. The judges agree to discuss and

attempt to alleviate any disparities in salaries paid to staff with similar job responsibilities and to focus on coordination of collective bargaining agreements for consistency in administering human resource issues.

d. Each judge shall prepare a budget for the staff under his/her supervision. The judge shall coordinate the submission of a proposed budget to the funding unit as a single budget for all courts.

e. This plan shall be subject to an annual review or at such time as the respective judges deem an amendment is appropriate. This plan supersedes all prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the Family Division.

f. Each judge's court administrator shall be responsible for the scheduling of hearings in that judge's courtroom.

2. Remote Proceedings. A judge may, at the request of any participant, or *sua sponte*, allow the use of videoconferencing technology by any participant in a Family Division proceeding. The use of videoconferencing technology generally shall not be used in bench or jury trials, or any Family Division proceeding wherein the testimony of witnesses or presentation of evidence may occur, except in the discretion of the court after all parties have had notice and opportunity to be heard on the use of videoconferencing technology. Subject to a determination by the court that the use of videoconferencing technology is inappropriate for a particular case under an analysis as contained in MCR 2.407(C), the use of videoconferencing technology shall be presumed for pretrials; early scheduling conferences; motions filed pursuant to MCR 2.119 regarding discovery; adjournments; modifications to scheduling orders; motions in limine; postjudgment collections or discovery matters; testimonial proofs for hearings under MCR 3.210(A)(4); motions to correct, strike, or amend pleadings; and motions for summary disposition.

3. Facilities.

a. Use of Current Facilities. Each judge shall utilize the circuit and probate courtrooms according to the division of responsibilities set forth in section II(B)(1), above. Each court shall cooperate with the other in coordinating the use of courtrooms to facilitate the maximum use of space and allocate resources depending on the type of case heard.

b. The Hillsdale County Youth Home and its staff shall be managed under the Juvenile Referee/Administrator as the facility manager under the Probate Court Judge.

c. The judges shall meet periodically to review the security of file materials and court personnel. They shall coordinate with the County Clerk the

development of electronic networking of information and access to files to expedite the resolution of court cases.

d. The judges shall meet periodically to review court facilities and to plan renovations to address the needs of families in the following areas: places for child care during hearings or other meetings; places for supervised parenting time; places for attorney/client meetings; court security for employees, the public, and records; facility security during non-traditional hours; such other criteria that may arise during the meetings.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. Clerks of the Court. The Hillsdale County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. The Hillsdale 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.

3. Filing. All Family Division cases shall be filed with the County Clerk in his/her office in the courthouse. Subsequent to the initiation of a file, all additional pleadings, notices or filings shall be filed with the county clerk. The County Clerk shall ensure said filings are placed in the designated files. Judge's Copies shall be required by Court Rule.

4. Access Point. The public or attorneys may access the court files by contacting the County Clerk. Information regarding the Family Division and related activities, record filing, record storage, record access, and case scheduling shall be obtained from the County Clerk. Contact information for the Clerk's office is available online. Docket and case information is also available online through the websites of the Circuit and Probate courts.

5. Internal Transfer. The county clerk's office shall maintain all Family Division files regardless of the judge to which such cases are assigned. Each judge shall coordinate a program of training for their respective staff and the county clerk staff

6. Technological Access. Timely technological access to all Family Division cases for all Family Division judges and referees is available through the JIS system.

7. Public Access. This FCP is posted on the court's website and is otherwise publicly available upon request

Dated: JUN 11 2025

The Hon. Sara S. Lisznyai P43799
Chief Judge

Dated: 4-10-2026

The Hon. Michelle A. Bianchi P39145
Probate Judge

APPENDIX A

The Hon. Sara S. Lisznyai, Circuit Court Judge

The Hon. Michelle A. Bianchi, Probate Court Judge

FAMILY DIVISION OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

