

# Order

Michigan Supreme Court  
Lansing, Michigan

April 16, 2026

Megan K. Cavanagh,  
Chief Justice

ADM File No. 2025-30

Brian K. Zahra  
Richard H. Bernstein  
Elizabeth M. Welch  
Kyra H. Bolden  
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Justices

Proposed Adoption of  
Administrative Order No.  
2026-X: Pilot Project to  
Study Informal Domestic  
Relations Docket

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On order of the Court, this is to advise that the Court is considering the use of modified court rules for a proposed pilot project, and before cases are handled under the proposed pilot, this notice is given to afford interested persons the opportunity to comment on the form or the merits of the proposal or to suggest alternatives. The Court welcomes the views of all. This matter will also be considered at a public hearing. The notices and agendas for each public hearing are posted on the [Public Administrative Hearings](#) page.

Publication of this proposal does not mean that the Court will issue an order on the subject, nor does it imply probable adoption of the proposal in its present form.

[Additions to the text are indicated in underlining and  
deleted text is shown by strikeover.]

Administrative Order No. 2026-X – Pilot Project to Study Informal Domestic Relations  
Docket

On order of the Court, the Court approves a pilot project to study the effectiveness of an informal domestic relations docket. Case processing on the informal docket will begin in fall 2026 when the pilot courts are equipped to do so, and the following rules will apply at that time:

(A) Family Division – Informal Docket.

In addition to the family division docket as provided by Chapter 2 and Subchapter 3.200 of the Michigan Court Rules, the 8th (Montcalm County only), 14th, 17th, and 48th circuits shall pilot an Informal Domestic Relations Docket for all or a portion of their domestic relations caseload to allow alternative access to the court for individuals who may have difficulty advocating within a formal court setting because of exposure to trauma, lack of legal representation, or both and to expedite relief in such actions. Except as otherwise provided in this order, domestic relations actions under this order are governed by the general and special court rules applicable to all other domestic relations actions.

(B) Removal from Informal Docket.

- (1) All new domestic relations actions assigned to a judge, as designated by SCAO, in the 8th Circuit Court (Montcalm County), 14th Circuit Court, 17th Circuit Court, and 48th Circuit Court, will begin on the Informal Docket except those for an initial personal protection order.
- (2) Either party may remove the action from the Informal Docket by:
  - (a) Requesting a de novo hearing if the action was presented to a referee.
  - (b) Requesting the action be removed from the docket at least 14 days before a dispositive hearing or trial in the action. The 14-day restriction may be modified or waived by the court upon a showing of good cause. No formal pleading is required to remove the action – any written request by either party sent to or filed with the court, or any oral request during any conference or proceeding before the court is sufficient to opt out of the proceeding.
- (3) The court may decide that the Informal Docket will be ineffective in resolving the action and remove the action from the Informal Docket at any time even after a trial or hearing has commenced.
- (4) When an action is removed from the Informal Docket, the court may either proceed based on the original filings or order the parties to submit formal pleadings within a reasonable time.
- (5) At the time the action is removed from the Informal Docket, based on the facts and status of the case and the parties, the court may issue orders to protect the parties, their children, and their assets pending further proceedings in the case.
- (6) The SCAO shall develop a brochure for all parties in the Informal Docket explaining that it is a pilot project, explaining the differences between the traditional and informal dockets, and advising the parties that either of them may request that the case be handled in the traditional docket. The brochure shall be provided to the plaintiff at the time the complaint is filed and served with the summons and complaint.

(C) Venue.

- (1) Venue is proper in any county that satisfies the jurisdictional and venue requirements established by statute.

- (2) When a circuit court in more than one pilot court would have proper venue, the action must be filed in the county of a circuit court that has issued a prior order involving the parties.
  - (3) The court on its own motion, or on motion of a party may change venue to another circuit court among the pilot circuits that would have proper venue for the following reasons:
    - (a) An order for the protection of a party or a minor child of the parties exists in another circuit court.
    - (b) Another circuit court is more convenient for the parties given the facts and circumstances of the parties and the case.
- (D) Procedure in Informal Docket.

Actions on the Informal Docket are governed by the following procedures:

- (1) Formal rules of pleading do not apply. The request for relief and the answer to the request may be submitted on forms approved by the State Court Administrative Office. A pleading should not be dismissed because it does not strictly conform to this subrule and may be presented in any manner that the court believes apprises the court and parties of the issues the court must decide. The court should liberally grant amendments as necessary to ensure the parties are able to present their arguments to the court and may accept oral explanations to determine the scope of the hearings.
- (2) The pleadings shall wherever possible follow this form:
  - (a) The pleading party shall state each separate allegation the party believes justifies the result the party is seeking in a separate numbered paragraph.
  - (b) The pleading party shall state the statute, court rule, or other authority the party relies on to support the relief requested.
  - (c) The responding party shall respond to each separate allegation in a numbered paragraph corresponding to the pleading party's numbered paragraphs and allege any additional facts in subsequent numbered paragraphs the responding party believes justifies the result the party is seeking.
  - (d) All parties must file a domestic abuse disclosure form. The domestic abuse disclosure form shall be limited to reporting personal protection actions, domestic abuse criminal actions, and child protective actions

involving the parties and shall be on a form approved by the State Court Administrative Office. Each party must complete a separate form.

- (3) Each party shall serve a Verified Financial Information form as provided in MCR 3.206(C).
- (4) The court may limit amendments if the court is convinced a party is engaging in conduct to delay the proceedings, or to control or harass the other party.
- (5) When there is a personal protection order under MCL 600.2950 or MCL 600.2950a, an Extreme Risk Personal Protection Order under MCL 691.1801 *et. seq.*, or an order pursuant to MCL 765.6b based on domestic violence, the court may limit disclosure to an abusive party information that the abused party provides to the court or friend of the court, including but not limited to address or place of employment.

(E) Service.

A party may arrange for service or the clerk, or the clerk's designee will serve the initiating document and any other forms as required by MCR 2.105. Other forms of service are acceptable if the party being served files a responsive pleading, acknowledges service in writing, or acknowledges in court that the party received a copy of the pleadings.

(F) Trials and Hearings.

- (1) A trial or hearing may be conducted in the manner of an oral argument, an oral argument supplemented by testimony, an evidentiary hearing, or as a conference.
- (2) At the beginning of an Informal Docket trial or hearing, the person hearing the proceeding will explain the rules and ask the parties to confirm they understand how the proceedings will be conducted.
- (3) The court may ask the parties or their lawyers for a summary of the issues to be decided.
- (4) The initiating party will be allowed to speak to the court under oath concerning all issues in dispute. The party may be questioned by counsel or by the court to develop evidence required by any statute or rule, for example, the applicable requirements of the Michigan Child Support Guidelines if child support is at issue.

- (5) Except as allowed by the court, the parties may not directly cross-examine each other. The parties may cross-examine each other through the court. The court will ask the non-moving party or the party's counsel whether there are any other areas the party wants the court to inquire about. The court will inquire into these areas if requested and if relevant to an issue the court needs to decide.
  - (6) The process in subrules (F)(4) and (F)(5) is repeated for the other party.
  - (7) The parties or their counsel will be offered the opportunity to respond briefly to the statements of the other party.
  - (8) The parties or the court may call witnesses. Witnesses may testify on their own or through direct examination by counsel. Except as allowed by the court, the parties may not directly cross-examine witnesses. The parties may cross-examine witnesses through the court. The parties or counsel may ask the court to direct questions to the witnesses. The court may allow counsel to question the witness instead of the court in the interest of time when the witness does not appear to be aligned with the interests of a party to the action.
  - (9) The parties or their counsel will be offered the opportunity to make a brief closing argument.
  - (10) At the conclusion of the trial or hearing, the court shall make a ruling. The court may take the matter under advisement, but best efforts will be made to issue prompt rulings.
  - (11) In accordance with MCR 3.215, domestic relations referees may conduct the proceedings.
- (G) Evidence.
- (1) Except for a claim of privilege and relevance, the Michigan Rules of Evidence do not govern the admissibility of evidence in cases subject to this rule. The court may receive any relevant evidence.
  - (2) The court will receive any exhibits offered by the parties. The court will determine what weight, if any, to give each exhibit. The court may order the record to be supplemented.
  - (3) In determining the reliability of the evidence to determine a fact in dispute, or the weight to give to the evidence, the court may use the entire Michigan Rules of Evidence as a guideline.

(H) Discovery.

Discovery is limited to the Verified Financial Information Form in MCR 3.206(C) and information in documents that may be acquired from third parties and agencies pursuant to subpoena. If the court or a party determines that additional information is necessary to fully disclose information the court needs to decide the case, the court on its own motion or at the request of a party, may permit additional discovery subject to conditions necessary to prevent delay or to protect a party or witness from abuse or intimidation.

(I) Interim and Temporary Orders.

Pending the final disposition of any matter, the court may hold hearings and conferences to review the status of the action, hear arguments and receive evidence, enter scheduling orders, and enter interim and temporary orders in the action.

(J) Assistance to the Informal Docket.

The court may use community and circuit court resources to assist in resolving actions on the Informal Docket, including:

- (1) Allowing DNA testing at the request of a party to a paternity case.
- (2) Requesting a friend of the court evaluation and recommendation.
- (3) Ordering the parties to attend counseling sessions or obtain psychological evaluations.
- (4) Referring the parties to the community dispute resolution services in the parties' community.
- (5) Referring the parties to a court-approved individual to explain how the docket works, next steps in the docket, and to determine what issues are contested and what issues the court may need to consider to protect the parties, their children, and their assets. Following the meeting, the court may place any agreements on the record, take testimony to preserve proofs, and enter orders as appropriate to assist in resolving issues in the action.
- (6) Referring matters to a referee.

(K) Postjudgment.

The decisions of the court in this docket are final decisions binding on the parties to the action as in any other circuit court action. The decisions are subject to appellate review to the same extent and subject to the same rules as other circuit court

judgments for the type of action. A party is not required to object to a decision to preserve it for appeal.

**Staff Comment (ADM File No. 2025-30):** This proposed administrative order would approve a pilot project to study the effectiveness of an informal domestic relations docket.

The staff comment is not an authoritative construction by the Court. In addition, adoption of a new rule or amendment in no way reflects a substantive determination by this Court.

A copy of this order will be given to the Secretary of the State Bar and to the State Court Administrator so that they can make the notifications specified in MCR 1.201. Comments on the proposal may be submitted by August 1, 2026 by clicking on the “Comment on this Proposal” link under this proposal on the [Court’s Proposed & Adopted Orders on Administrative Matters](#) page. You may also submit a comment in writing at P.O. Box 30052, Lansing, MI 48909 or via email at [ADMcomment@courts.mi.gov](mailto:ADMcomment@courts.mi.gov). When submitting a comment, please refer to ADM File No. 2025-30. Your comments and the comments of others will be posted under the chapter affected by this proposal.



I, Elizabeth Kingston-Miller, Clerk of the Michigan Supreme Court, certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of the order entered at the direction of the Court.

April 16, 2026

*Elizabeth Kingston-Miller*

Clerk