STATE OF MICHIGAN

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTY OF SHIAWASSEE

FAMILY COURT PLAN
FOR THE 35TH CIRCUIT
AND THE SHIAWASSEE COUNTY PROBATE COURT

Administrative Order C35 2026-02J/P78 2026-02J
Rescinds Administrative Order C35 2022-03J/P78 2022-03J

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 presiding judges to serve in that capacity. See Appendix A for further detail.

B. **Goals.** The goal of the FCP is to assign cases based on subject matter expertise. To increase efficient court operation. Further, to ensure that one family is assigned to one judge pursuant to MCL 600.1023, which will provide consistency and predictability for families.

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. Review of the plan shall occur every January beginning in January of 2028. The plan shall be reviewed within 60-days of a new judicial appointment or election in either the District, Probate or Circuit Court to assess areas of practice preference, expertise, and current caseload.

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:

a. Chief Judge Mattthew J. Stewart will handle 100% of domestic relation cases. His assignment began in 2015 and his term expires January 1, 2027.

b. Judge Thomas J. Dignan will handle 100% of juvenile, including PPOs involving minors, and abuse and neglect matters. His assignment began in 2012 and his term expires January 1, 2031.

c. Judge Matthew S. McKone will handle all domestic relation disqualifications. His assignment began in 2025 and his term expires January 1, 2031.

Judge Matthew J. Stewart primarily practiced family law prior to taking the bench. Additionally, Judge Stewart has presided over domestic relations since taking the bench in 2015.

Judge Thomas J. Dignan practiced family law prior to taking the bench. Additionally, Judge Dignan has presided over domestic relation matters since taking the bench in 2012.

Judge Matthew S. McKone practiced family law prior to taking the bench. Additionally, Judge McKone has presided over domestic relations disqualification matters since taking the bench in 2025.

1. **Judicial Expertise.** Each judge listed has attended 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. Shiawassee County relies on MJI to support judicial education due to limited county resources. Each judge selects and attends training that aligns with their respective dockets and interests. When resources are available in the court's budget, the judges attend ICLE sponsored Family Law seminars.

2. **Judicial Service.** All judges in "the Plan" will serve part time in the family division, under MCL 600.1011(3), where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exist.

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.

2. For purposes of this FCP, the term "family" means: a group of persons untied by birth, marriage or adoption.

   For purposes of this FCP, the term "family member" means: a party sharing a common child, spouse, or parent or with another party.

   For purposes of this FCP, the term "pending" means: pre-judgment or active post-judgement motions requiring adjudication. If the last judicial determination involving a family more than 5-years ago, then the case shall be assigned following the random draw procedure.

3. **One Family-One Judge.** Cases shall be assigned pursuant to the Case Assignment LAO which designates cases be assigned by case type unless there is a new or ongoing NA case. Unless other compelling circumstances exists, the first judge to hear a case involving a family will continue to hear newly filed cases involving that family. Except for after-hours emergency requests will be based on the duty judge rotation.

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, as defined herein.

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, PJ,PH, 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.

6. **Concurrent Cases.** If a new Family Division case is filed while another Family Division case is pending and either action includes a pending juvenile case or pending minor guardianship case involving the same child, the case shall be assigned to the judge presiding over the family law matter unless otherwise directed by the chief judge.

   If a new adoption case is filed for a child whom there is an active abuse or neglect matter, the adoption file shall be assigned to the judge presiding over the abuse and neglect file.

   If a personal protection order case is filed involving the same parties who have a pending Family Division case, the personal protection order case shall be assigned to the judge presiding over the family law matter unless otherwise directed by the chief 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.** When a judge's service in the family division ends, pending cases will be assigned to that judge's successor.

3. **Dispute.** Any dispute on proper reassignment shall be resolved by the chief judge.

D. STAFFING AND FACILITIES

1. **Administrative Structure.** A family division organizational chart is included as Appendix A. The circuit and probate courts in Shiawassee County have one chief judge. The chief judge is responsible for the court's day-to-day administration. Some or all of those duties may be delegated to the trial court administrator/friend of the court or the family court administrator/ juvenile referee. Those day-to-day responsibilities include budgetary duties, personnel matters, case flow management, policy development and implementation, contract management, and labor relations responsibilities.

   The chief judge has the authority and flexibility to determine the duration of the judge's service in the family division and to delegate supervision based on the goal of the Family Plan.

   The family division of the circuit court shall be comprised of the circuit, district, and probate court judges. The friend of the court will also assist and provide services to the family division, working to establish, modify and enforce orders in domestic relation cases. The friend of the court and personnel in that office are under the jurisdiction, control and supervision of the chief judge through the trial court administrator/friend of the court.

   The family court administrator/ juvenile referee are under the jurisdiction, control, and supervision of the chief judge. The employees of that office are also under the control and jurisdiction of the chief judge through the family court administrator/juvenile referee. Daily supervisory authority of the juvenile division employees shall be with the probate court judge.

   The authority to hire, discipline, or discharge any court personnel, with the exception of a judge secretary and law clerk, if any, shall vest in the chief judge upon the recommendation of Judges Dignan and McKone, consistent with Rule 8.110.

2. **Remote Proceedings.** Each judge and referee will have the discretion of using remote proceedings in compliance with the court rule MCR 2.408..

3. **Facilities.** Currently the offices of the Circuit Court are on the 2nd and 3rd floor of the Historic Courthouse, the offices of District Court are on the 1st floor of the District Court Building, and the offices of the Probate Court are on the 2nd floor of the District Court Building. Due to financial and space limitations, these offices will remain unchanged. This results in family court matters being held in three separate locations and does not create an unreasonable inconvenience to those involved in family division

proceedings as the buildings are across the road from one another.

Shiawassee County has a Juvenile Youth Center that is located in the basement of the District Court building. The Youth Center provides behavioral and academic support for youth who are on the consent calendar or probation. The Youth Center will be operated under the direction of the Family Division of Circuit Court. Sara Edwards is responsible for the operations of the facility and Walt Knickerbocker is responsible for managing the facility.

Both Circuit and Probate Cours offer meeting places for attorney/client meetings. Financial deficits and space limitations prevent having all family court matters in one area. Court offices have created processes that seek to eliminate unreasonable inconveniences for those involved with the family court.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. **Clerks of the Court.** The Shiawassee County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. The Shiawassee County probate clerk 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.** In Shiawassee County, the different physical locations require that, for the present time, traditional filing patterns will be maintained. Family Court matters that were previously Circuit Court matters will continue to be filed in Circuit Court. Matters for the Family Court (previously filed Juvenile Court matters) will continue to be filed at the Juvenile Court location.

4. **Access Point.** The current Circuit Court County Clerk's Office will be the central access point to provide the public and Bar with information regarding access to courts and court related activities.

   Specific questions about name changes, emancipation, juvenile delinquency, or abuse and neglect will be referred to the appropriate Family Court staff for assistance.

   Specific questions about domestic relations or support issues will be referred to the appropriate Friend of the Court staff for assistance.

5. **Internal Transfer.** The Circuit, District, and Probate Courts use JIS case management systems and rely on physical court files within the courtrooms and for filings made within the clerk offices. The circuit court utilizes Laserfiche for storing electronic copies of filed documents. Judges and

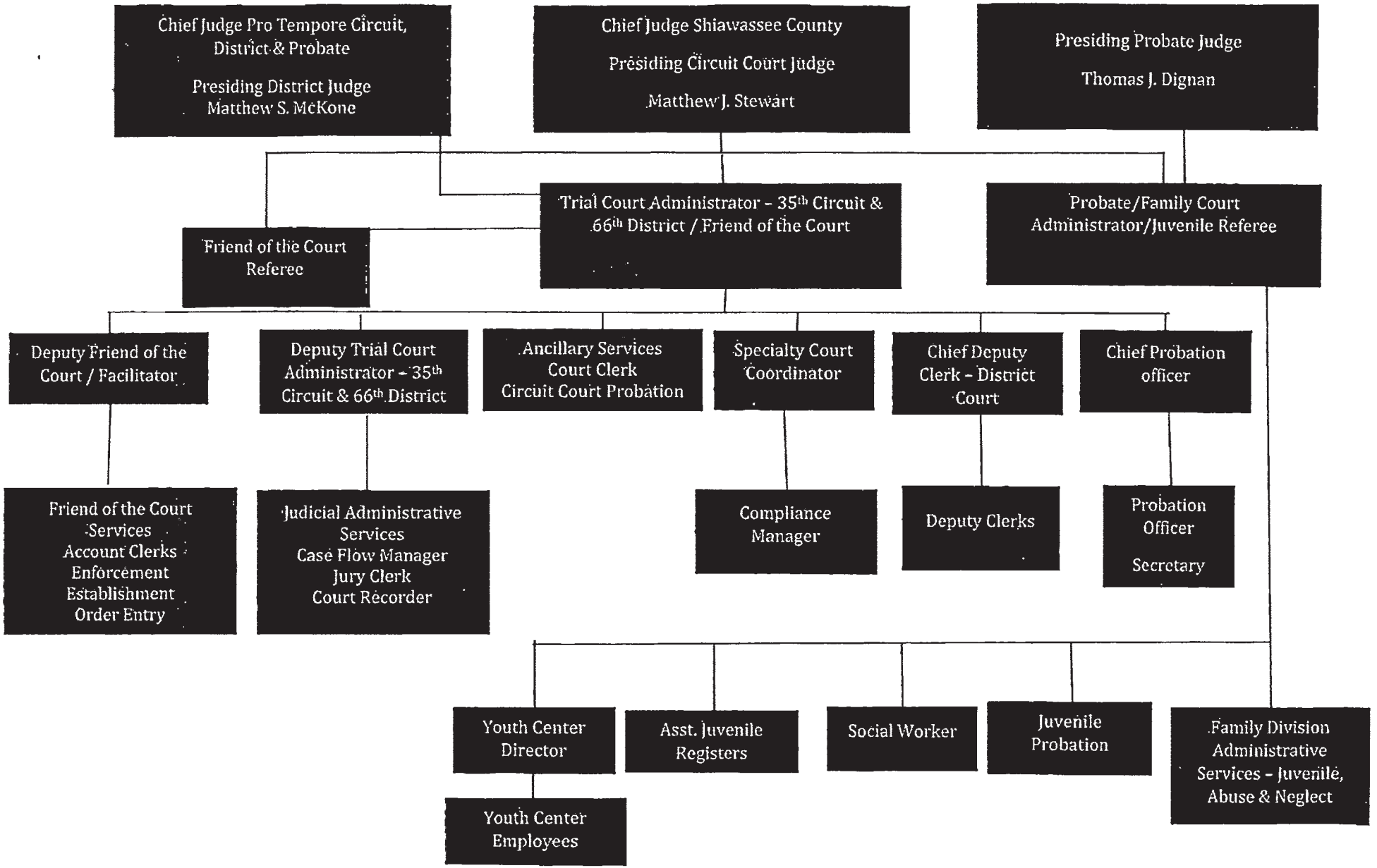
court staff have access to view electronic copies as desired. A physical legal file is created for cases filed with the juvenile court.

6. **Technological Access.** All judicial officers and court staff shall have appropriate electronic case management access for the family division section(s) they serve.

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

Hon. Thomas J. Dignan P 42382
Probate Court Judge
Date: 6-3, 2026

Hon. Matthew J. Stewart P 58047
Chief Judge, Circuit, District, & Probate Court
Date: 6-3, 2026


Chief Judge Pro Tempore Circuit, District & Probate
Presiding District Judge
Matthew S. McKone
Chief Judge Shiawassee County
Presiding Circuit Court Judge
Matthew J. Stewart
Presiding Probate Judge
Thomas J. Dignan
Friend of the Court Referee
Trial Court Administrator - 35th Circuit & 66th District / Friend of the Court
Probate/Family Court Administrator/Juvenile Referee
Deputy Friend of the Court / Facilitator
Deputy Trial Court Administrator - 35th Circuit & 66th District
Ancillary Services Court Clerk Circuit Court Probation
Specialty Court Coordinator
Chief Deputy Clerk - District Court
Chief Probation officer
Friend of the Court Services Account Clerks Enforcement Establishment Order Entry
Judicial Administrative Services Case Flow Manager Jury Clerk Court Recorder
Compliance Manager
Deputy Clerks
Probation Officer
Secretary
Youth Center Director
Asst. Juvenile Registers
Social Worker
Juvenile Probation
Family Division Administrative Services - Juvenile, Abuse & Neglect
Youth Center Employees