STATE OF MICHIGAN

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTY OF JACKSON

FAMILY COURT PLAN FOR THE 4TH CIRCUIT COURT AND THE JACKSON COUNTY PROBATE COURT

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2026-06J
Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Oder 2026-04J

Rescinds Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-03J
Rescinds Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-03J

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/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 circuit/probate judge has elected to serve as the presiding judge over the family division.

B. **Goals**. The goal(s) of this FCP are three guiding principles. Continuity, Specialization, and Efficiency. "Continuity" refers to the goal of one judge serving all of a particular family's needs whenever possible. "Specialization" means utilizing judges who have experience and specialized expertise in family law matters. "Efficiency" relates to effective docket management, recognizing that speedy resolution of family problems can be as important as judicial expertise or continuity with the same judge. How these three principles will be applied to any given case must be flexible; some cases will call for maximum weight on the "Continuity" factor, while others may need to emphasize "Specialization" or "Efficiency".

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 and the family court judges to ensure that the Plan meets the statutory requirements and complies with the Family Court Plan Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO. In the event that the identity of one or more family division judges change, this order will be updated with an addendum identifying all serving family division judicial officers in full replacement of Section II.A.1.

II. ADMINISTRATION

This Section shall include:

A. JUDICAL RESOURCES / SERVICE

1. **Family Division Judges Term of Service and Assignment**. Judge Jennifer M. Kelly, Probate Court Judge, has expressed an interest in serving in the Family Division. At this time, no Circuit Court judge has expressed an interest in a permanent Family Division assignment. Accordingly, the Chief Judge has assigned Circuit Court judges to the Family Division on a temporary, rotational basis to ensure adequate judicial coverage, balance the Family Division workload, and promote judicial proficiency in Family Division case types, consistent with the goals of the Family Court Plan.

   Family Division Assignments

   - Judge Allison L. Bates, Circuit Court Judge
   - Judge Jennifer M. Kelly, Probate Court Judge
   - Judge Richard N. LaFlamme, Circuit Court Judge

   The Court remains committed to the one-family-one-judge concept whenever practicable by assigning related matters to the same judge. The assignment of multiple judges to the Family Division supports the timely resolution of cases and the efficient administration of the Family Division while ensuring continuity of judicial experience within the Family Division.

   Addendum A lists all probate judges serving in the family division pursuant to the plan. Any and all changes will be made by amending said addendum.

   Addendum B lists all circuit judges serving in the family division pursuant to the plan. Any and all changes will be made by amending said addendum.

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. The judges assigned to the FCP will comply with all required training as outlined by SCAO.

3. **Judicial Service**. The Family Division shall be divided into two sections:

   A. The Domestic Relations Section consists of all of the following cases designated with a case type defined by MCR 8.117(A) as "Family Division – Domestic Relations and Family Division Miscellaneous Proceedings."
      i. The office of the Friend of the Court is a part of the Domestic Relations Section.
      ii. The Probate Judge identified in Addendum A and the Circuit Court Judges identified in Addendum B shall be assigned cases as listed on Addendum C.

   B. The Juvenile Section consists of all of the following cases designated with a case code type defined by MCR 8.117(A) as "Family Division Proceedings under Juvenile Code," "Family Division – Proceedings under the Adoption Code," Family Division – Miscellaneous Proceedings," and "Family Division – Ancillary Proceedings."
      i. The Probate Judge identified in Addendum A and Circuit Judges identified in Addendum B shall be assigned cases as listed in Addendum C.

   C. The judges in the family court plan will serve full time in the family division, under MCL 600.1011(3) where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exist.

All of our current Circuit Judges identified in Addendum B and the Probate Judge identified in Addendum A have partial assignments in the family division. Their assignments are outlined in Addendum C.

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, based upon the percentage assignments for the judicial officers identified in Section II.A.3. All parental consent to abortion cases will be heard by the probate judge. These cases will not be randomly assigned to all family division judges because of the confidential nature, the special procedures required, and the low number of these cases.

2. **Definitions.**

For purposes of this FCP, the term "family" means: A group of persons united by birth or marriage.

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

For purposes of this FCP, the term "pending" means: Pre-judgement or active post-judgement including post-judgement collection of child support within five years proceeding the filing of the new action.

3. One Family-One Judge. New matters within the jurisdiction of the Family Division shall be assigned in accordance with the Family Division assignments established by the Chief Judge in Addendum C. To the extent practicable, matters involving the same family shall be assigned to the same judge in furtherance of the "one-family-one-judge" concept and consistent with MCR 8.111.

When assignment to the same judge is not practicable due to judicial workload, scheduling conflicts, disqualification, judicial expertise, emergency circumstances, or other operational needs of the Court, the matter may be assigned to another Family Division judge. In such instances, the Court shall strive to maintain consistency in judicial decision making and further the goals of the Family Court Plan.

Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) requests received after normal business hours, on weekends, or on Court holidays shall be reviewed and acted upon by the judge assigned to handle on-call judicial matters. Subsequent proceedings

shall be assigned in accordance with this Plan whenever possible.

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, ID, JA, JG, NA, NB, PH, PJ, PP, PW, TL, UE, UF, UI, UM, UN, VF, and VP. FH (felony non-payment of support cases) will fall under the same assignment division as all other FH cases listed on Addendum C.

6. Concurrent Cases. The clerk opening a new Family Division case shall review the case inventory and court records for existing or prior matters involving the same family. When related matters are identified, the case shall be assigned to the same judge whenever practicable and consistent with the efficient administration of justice. If assignment to the same judge in not practicable, the matter may be assigned to another Family Division judge in accordance with this Plan.

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. Complete caseloads will be transferred to a successor judge if there is a judicial vacancy that is later filled. If the case assignment order is modified, the Chief Circuit/Probate Judge will determine how to disperse any pending cases if a complete caseload transfer is not appropriate.

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. Each part of the structure of the Family Division will enhance the goals of the Family Court Plan while providing statutorily required support services to the court. This will allow the court to operate efficiently with each judge serving in their area of expertise and in furtherance of the Family Division goals.

2. Remote Proceedings. Each Judge and Referee will have the discretion of using remote proceedings under MCR 2.408. All hearings that are done via remote proceedings must comply with MCR 2.408.

3. Facilities. The courthouse will provide meeting rooms for attorney/client meetings. The Victim's Rights office will assist victims as needed. The Friend of the Court will have hearing rooms for referee hearings held there. Court Security provided by the sheriff's department at each location will ensure safety in accordance with our local courthouse security plan that has been reviewed by the security committee and approved by SCAO.

Jackson County has a juvenile detention center that is equipped to hold

emergency hearings and remote court appearances. The Jackson County Youth Center (JCYC) is a court operated facility, under the authority of the Chief Circuit-Probate Judge. The Youth Center Director is responsible for the day to day operation on the JCYC. The Youth Center Director reports directly to the Circuit-Family-Probate Court Administrator.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. Clerks of the Court. The Jackson County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. The Jackson probate clerk shall maintain every record created by or filed with the probate court. The Adoption Coordinator shall maintain every record created by or filed regarding adoptions.

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 filings for the Family Division must adhere to the current filing standards of the Jackson County Clerk's Office. The County Clerk's Office will follow the procedures in the records management by the State Court Administrative Office. All probate court filings will be filed with the Probate Court Office. All adoptions will be filed with the Adoption Coordinator.

4. Access Point. The Jackson County Clerk's Office will provide information to the public and the bar as to where to file documents, records storage, records access and case scheduling information and any other pertinent information.

5. Internal Transfer. The Family Division has JIS for its case management system and OnBase for its electronic documents. Staff members can view the electronic file through these systems and a paper file is also maintained.

6. Technological Access. All judicial officers and court staff shall have appropriate electronic case management access for the family division sections they serve.

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

Effective: Upon SCAO Approval

Dated: 7/10/24

Susan B. Jordan P63085
Chief Circuit/Probate Judge

Dated: 7/10/24

Jennifer M. Kelly P47168
Probate Judge

ADDENDUM A

Probate Judge:

Jennifer Kelly
Term 1/1/2025 – 01/01/2031

ADDENDUM B

Circuit Judges serving in the family division:

Allison Bates
Term 04/13/2026 – 01/01/2027

Richard LaFlamme
Term 01/01/2023 – 01/01/2029

ADDENDUM C

05/04/2026 Circuit Court Docket Reassignments

Case Type	**1-Jordan** *Criminal Division*	**2-Kelly** *Probate/Family Court*	**3-LaFlamme** *Civil Division/ Family Court*	**4-McBain** *Criminal Division*	**5-Bates** *Family Court*
NA		50%	50%		
Adoption		100%			
DL					100%
DM, DC, DP, DS					100%
PPO's with children		25%			75%
DO		100%			
PPO's without children	25%	25%	25%	25%	
Probate		100%			
NC	25%	25%		25%	25%
Criminal	50%			50%	
Civil (except AL)			100%		
Business Court			100%		
A Cases	50%			50%	
Adult Treatment Court	100%				
Primary back up	McBain	LaFlamme	Kelly	Bates	Jordan

ADDENDUM D

JACKSON COUNTY CIRCUIT/FAMILY/PROBATE COURT ORGANIZATION CHART

