STATE OF MICHIGAN

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTIES OF MANISTEE AND BENZIE

FAMILY COURT PLAN
FOR THE 19TH CIRCUIT COURT
FOR THE MANISTEE COUNTY PROBATE COURT
AND FOR THE BENZIE COUNTY PROBATE COURT

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

19th Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2026-02J

Manistee County Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2026-02J

Benzie County Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2026-02J

Rescinds C19, Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-05J

Rescinds P51, Manistee County Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-03J

Rescinds P10, Benzie County 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 judge and the chief probate judge shall enter into an agreement establishing how the family division will be operated in the circuit court 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.

B. Goals:

The 19th Judicial Circuit will operate in a manner that effectively coordinates and delivers efficient services to families and individuals. Whenever practicable, uphold the one family-one judge requirement allowing access to all relevant case files to promote consistency and predictability for families, while also enhancing the overall efficiency of court operations.

C. Operation:

This FCP supersedes prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the family division of the Circuit Court for Manistee and Benzie Counties. This Plan will be reviewed and revised as necessary, including when family division judicial assignments change, and at least every 2 years, by the Circuit Court Judge to ensure that the Plan meets the statutory requirements and complies with the Family Court Plan Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO.

If there is a change to the actual practice within the family division of the Circuit Court for Manistee and/or Benzie Counties, the Plan will be reviewed as soon as practicable to ensure compliance pursuant to MCL 600.1011.

II. ADMINISTRATION

A. Judicial Resources/Service

i. 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.

By agreement, the Circuit Court Judge, the Manistee County Probate Judge, and the Benzie County Probate Judge shall serve in the family division of the 19th Judicial Circuit as specified in this plan (Attachment #1).

ii. Judicial Expertise.

Each judge listed above may attend New Judge Orientation as well as continuing 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, or the National Judicial College.

iii. Judicial Service

Sufficient caseload and judicial resources do not exist to allow for the full-time service of the judges listed in Attachment #1 in the Family Division of the Circuit Court.

All judges in the FCP will serve in the family division according to the Benzie/Manistee Case Assignment LAO C19, 2026-01J; D85, 2026-02J; P10, 2026-01J; P51, 2026-01J.

Case Allocation
Domestic Relations:

Hon. David A. Thompson: Manistee County: 75%
Benzie County: 10%

Hon. Jared C. Henry:	Manistee County:	25%
Hon. John D. Mead	Benzie County:	90%

Proceedings under Juvenile Code:

Hon. David A. Thompson:	Manistee County:	75%
	Benzie County:	40%
Hon. Jared C. Henry:	Manistee County:	25%
Hon. John D. Mead:	Benzie County:	60%

Proceedings under Adoption Code:

Hon. David A. Thompson:	Manistee County:	75%
	Benzie County:	40%
Hon. Jared C. Henry:	Manistee County:	25%
Hon. John D. Mead:	Benzie County:	60%

Family Division, Miscellaneous Proceedings and Ancillary Proceedings:

Hon. David A. Thompson:	Manistee County:	75%
	Benzie County:	40%
Hon. Jared C. Henry:	Manistee County:	25%
Hon. John D. Mead:	Benzie County:	60%

Personal Protection Orders:
(*PPOs when a minor is involved or parties have minor children in common and no family case with circuit judge)

Hon. David A. Thompson:	Non-Domestic	Manistee County:	100%
	Non-Domestic	Benzie County:	100%
	Domestic:	Manistee County:	see *
	Domestic:	Benzie County:	see *
Hon. Jared C. Henry	Domestic:	Manistee County:	*No less than 25%
Hon. John D. Mead	Domestic:	Benzie County:	*No less than 50%

Probate Court, Estates, Trusts, Wills, Guardianships and Conservatorships, Mental Illness and Judicial Admissions, Probate Civil and Miscellaneous:

Hon. Jared C. Henry: Manistee County: 100%

Hon. John D. Mead: Benzie County: 100%

The Chief Judge has the authority and flexibility to determine the duration of a judge's service in the family division. When a judge's service in the family division ends, all pending cases shall be reassigned to another family division judge. The chief judge and the probate judge of each county shall conduct a periodic review and make any revisions of the plan as necessary.

III. ASSIGNMENT OF CASES

A. 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 with the jurisdiction of the family court. (See Approved Benzie/Manistee Case Assignment LAO, C19, 2026-01J; D85, 2026-02J; P10, 2026-01J; P51, 2026-01J)

B. One Family-One Judge.

In both counties, if there has been a previous case involving the same minor children or other minor children of the same parent before a judge serving in the family division of the circuit court, then insofar as is reasonably possible, any new or re-opened case will be assigned to that judge or that judge's successor in the family division.

Attorney referees will be utilized to move the docket expeditiously in both counties.

C. 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.

D. 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.

E. Concurrent Cases.

Assignment procedures are crucial for maintaining the integrity of the "one family-one judge" requirement. Assigning the same judge to oversee all aspects of a family's relevant cases allows

the judge to make informed decisions based on the full context, therefore reducing the risk of conflicting rulings or orders. This contributes to greater stability for the family involved.

IV. REASSIGNMENT OF CASES

A. 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, and finally by SCAO assignment.

B. Transfer.

When a judge's service in the family division ends, unresolved cases will be reassigned to another family division judge with careful attention to continuity and consistency, ensuring minimal disruption for the families involved and maintaining the integrity of the judicial process.

The successor judge will receive a briefing on the caseload they are inheriting, which may include reviewing case files, previous rulings, and any ongoing proceedings or pending decisions. In cases involving multiple family members, if the original judge is unavailable to continue hearing the case, every effort will be made to assign the successor judge to all concurrent cases involving the same family.

C. Dispute.

Any dispute on proper reassignment shall be resolved by the chief judge and/or the presiding family division judge, should one be appointed.

V. STAFFING AND FACILITIES

A. Administrative Structure.

A family division organizational chart is included as Appendix #1.

The positions of Family Division Referees, ADR Clerk, Friend of the Court Caseworker/ Mediators and Juvenile Officers are strategically structured to support the court's mission of delivering fair, timely resolutions to family-related matters. Each role carries specific duties that ensure cases are processed efficiently, families are connected with essential resources, and the best interests of children are prioritized. By working collaboratively, staff help reduce delays, improve access to justice, and uphold the core values of the Family Court Plan.

i. Remote proceedings

The FCP will comply with MCR 2.408 and other remote proceeding requirements by incorporating flexible procedures that allow for the use of remote technology in appropriate cases and be accessible to all participants, including litigants, attorneys, and other relevant parties while preserving the integrity of the legal process.

ii. Facilities.

In Manistee County, mediation is conducted in the Friend of the Court hearing room. Meeting rooms are also available on the 2nd floor of the courthouse for attorney/client meetings.

In Benzie County, rooms are available for reservation for attorney/client meetings.

In both counties, court security is present at court hearings.

VI. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

A. Clerks of the Court.

The Manistee County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division of Manistee County. The Manistee County Probate Clerk shall maintain every record created by or filed with the probate court.

The Benzie County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division of Benzie County. The Benzie County Probate Clerk shall maintain every record created by or filed with the probate court.

B. Plan Development.

The County Clerks have 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.

C. Filing.

All filings for the family division of the circuit court will be with the Clerk of Court for the county in which the plaintiff or petitioner has chosen to file the action. The Clerk of the Circuit Court in each of the counties of the 19th Circuit will also provide information to the bar and to the public regarding such matters as where to file documents, where records are stored, and case scheduling information. The County Clerk has been afforded the opportunity to participate in the development of plan for Records Management.

D. Access Point.

Manistee County's website: www.manisteecountymi.gov
Benzie County's website: www.benzieco.gov

E. Technological Access.

Use of the Judicial Information Service (JIS) to review files. The clerks of the court also deliver the case files for review.

F. Public Access.

The FCP is posted on the court's website and is otherwise publicly available upon request.

ATTACHMENT #1

JUDGES SERVING IN THE FAMILY DIVISION OF THE 19TH CIRCUIT COURT

- **Hon. David A. Thompson, Circuit Court Judge**:
  Elected to Office January 1, 2015, with the term ending December 31, 2020. Re-elected to Office January 1, 2021. Current term expires December 31, 2026.

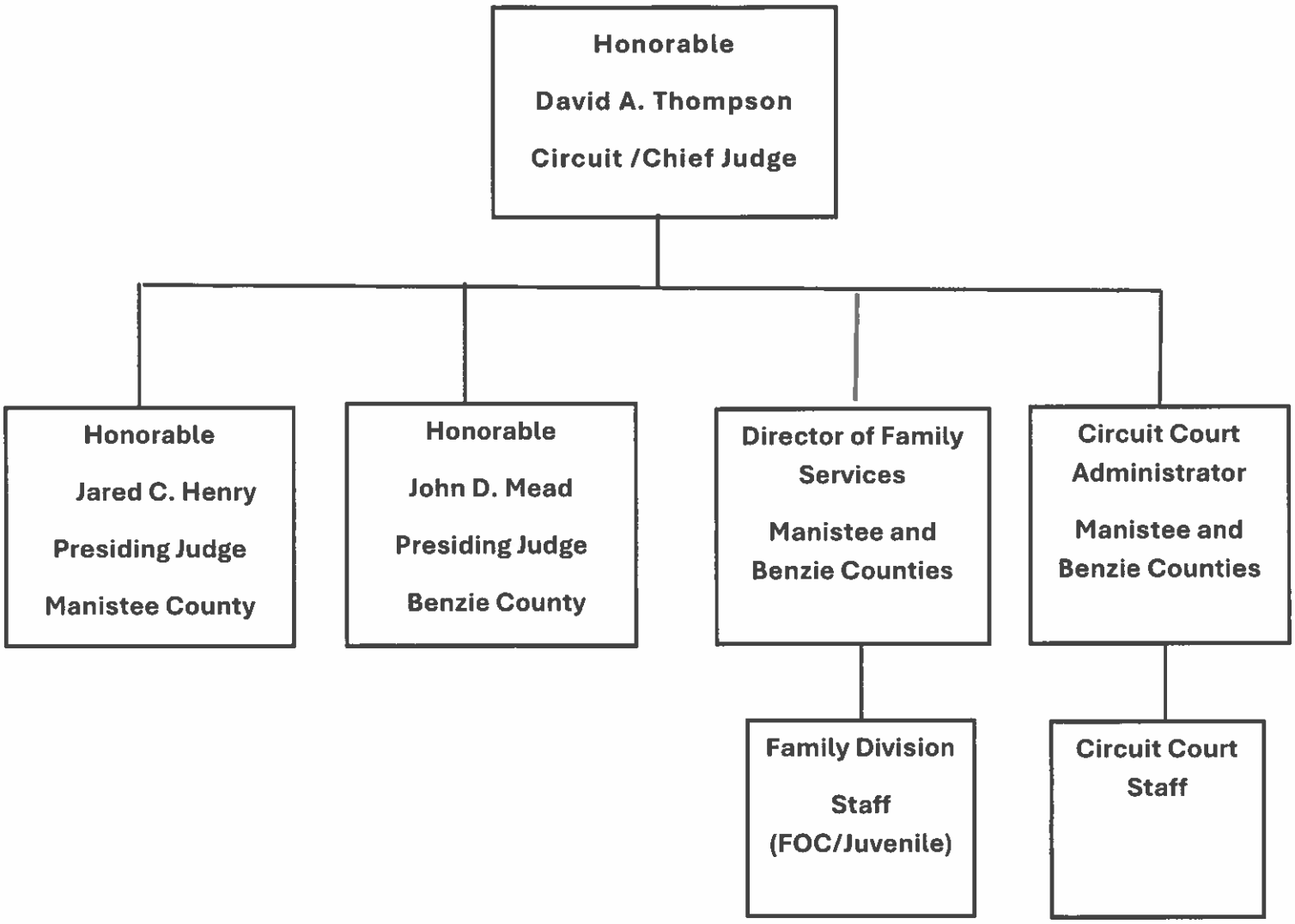
- **Honorable Jared C. Henry, Manistee County Probate Judge:**
  Appointed to the bench on August 28, 2023, with the appointment effective through December 31, 2024. Elected to Office January 1, 2025. Current term expires on December 31, 2030.

- **Hon. John D. Mead, Benzie County Probate Judge:**
  Elected to Office January 1, 2013, with the term ending December 31, 2018. Re-elected to Office January 1, 2019, with the term ending December 31, 2024. Re-elected to Office January 1, 2025. Current term expires on December 31, 2030.

APPENDIX #1

19th CIRCUIT COURT FAMILY DIVISION

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



STATE OF MICHIGAN

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTIES OF MANISTEE AND BENZIE

ORDER ADOPTING FAMILY COURT PLAN

FOR THE 19TH CIRCUIT COURT
FOR THE MANISTEE COUNTY PROBATE COURT
AND FOR THE BENZIE COUNTY PROBATE COURT

IT IS ORDERED:

This Local Administrative Order is issued pursuant to Administrative Order No. 2003-2 and MCL 600.1011(7), as approved by the State Court Administrative Office.

Dated: 7/23/26

Hon. John D. Mead
Benzie County Probate Judge

Dated: 7/30/26

Hon. Jared C. Henry
Manistee County Probate Judge

Dated: 7/30/26

Hon. David A. Thompson
Chief Judge