STATE OF MICHIGAN

THE CIRCUIT COURT
8TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IONIA AND MONTCALM COUNTIES

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FAMILY COURT PLAN FOR THE 8th CIRCUIT COURT AND THE IONIA AND MONTCALM COUNTY PROBATE COURTS

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2026- 01J
Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order P34 2026-01J P59 2026-01J
Rescinds Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-03J
Rescinds P34 Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-03J
Rescinds P59 Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-02J

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.

B. Goals. The goals of this FCP are described below. This plan has been designed to ensure and maximize the efficient operation of the Family Division of the 8th Circuit, while addressing the legislative intent of consolidating family members for the benefit of litigants and maintaining the mission of the Judiciary of the State of Michigan to provide fair, effective, and responsive forums for the resolution of civil and criminal matters. This plan has also been designed to ensure that a Judge's service in the family court is consistent with the requirement to develop judicial expertise in family law. The Court's structure supports the "one family-one judge" requirement by ensuring all cases involving a family are assigned to the same judge while appropriately balancing judicial resources.

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. In the event the identity of one or more family division judges changes, this order will be updated with an

addendum identifying all serving family division judicial officers.

II. ADMINISTRATION

This Section shall include:

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.

   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.

3. Judicial Service. All judges in "the Plan" will serve full time in the family division, under MCL 600.1011(3), where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exist such that each judge in "the Plan" is assigned cases in the family division in addition to other non-family division case assignments. The percentage of new filings by case type assigned to each judge is described below.

   A. The Domestic Relations Section consists of all of the following: cases designated with a case code 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 Circuit Court Judges identified in Addendum B shall equally share Domestic Relations Section assignments, except for disqualifications or reassignments under the "one family-one judge" policy described below.

   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 shall be assigned 100% of the Juvenile Section cases, except for disqualifications or reassignments under the "one family one judge" policy described below.

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. One Family-One Judge. To the extent practicable, all matters within the jurisdiction of the Family Division will be assigned to the same judge to further the concept of "one family-one judge." When a matter within the jurisdiction of the Family Division is filed, and a matter involving the same family is pending in the Family Division, the new case will be assigned to the judge assigned to the pending matter.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Concurrent Cases.

A. If a new Family Division case is filed while another Family Division case is pending and either action includes a pending Juvenile Section case or a pending minor guardianship case involving the same child, all

active cases shall be reassigned to the Probate/Juvenile Section Judge.

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

C. 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 assigned to the existing pending matter.

When reassignment of a pending matter is required, the clerk receiving the new action shall notify the judicial assistant who will prepare an order for reassignment to be signed by the appropriate 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 resolved by that judge or assigned to that judge's successor.

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 Addendum C. Each position listed in the organizational chart serves in the family division. The Friend of the Court and Juvenile Court staff provide statutorily required support services to the Court so the court is operating efficiently with each judge serving in their area of expertise and in furtherance of the family division goals.

2. Remote Proceedings. Family division proceedings will be conducted via videoconferencing to the greatest extent possible. All judges will comply with the requirements of MCR 2.408.

3. Facilities. The Court location for each county provides meeting rooms for attorney/client meetings. Court Security via the Sheriff's Department at each location provides security for the facilities. The county maintains the facilities and works with court administration to consider any requested improvements as needed.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. Clerks of the Court. The Ionia County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the

Court for the Ionia County Family Division. The Montcalm County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Montcalm County Family Division. The Ionia probate clerk shall maintain every record created by or filed with the Ionia County probate court. The Montcalm probate clerk shall maintain every record created by or filed with the Montcalm County 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. Filings in matters under the Domestic Relations Section of the Family Division for Ionia County shall be completed in the office of the County Clerk located on the first floor at 100 W. Main St., Ionia, MI 48846.

Filings in matters under the Domestic Relations Section of the Family Division for Montcalm County shall be completed in the office of the County Clerk located at 639 N. State St., Stanton, MI 48888.

Filings in matters under the Juvenile Section of the Ionia County Family Division shall be completed in the office of the Juvenile Clerk located on the second floor at 100 W. Main St., Ionia, MI 48846.

Filings in matters under the Juvenile Section of the Montcalm County Family Division shall be completed in the office of the Juvenile Clerk located at 625 N. State St., Stanton, MI 48888.

Filings in ancillary matters for Ionia County shall be completed on the first floor at 100 W. Main St., Ionia, MI 48846 in the office of the Probate Register.

Filings in ancillary matters for Montcalm County shall be completed at 625 N. State St., Stanton, MI 48888 in the office of the Probate Register.

4. Access Point. The central access point of the Family Division in Ionia County is the office of the Ionia County Clerk located on the first floor of 100 W. Main Street., Ionia, Michigan 48846.

The central access point for the Family Division in Montcalm County is the office of the Montcalm County Clerk located at 639 N. State St., Stanton,

MI 48888.

The central access points are designated to provide the public and bar association with information regarding access to the family division and court related activities.

5. Internal Transfer. The 8th Circuit does not utilize internal transfers. All judicial officers and court staff have appropriate access to case files and information without the need for a formal internal transfer.

6. Technological Access. All judicial officers and court staff shall have appropriate electronic case management access for the family division section they serve. Court Administrators and designated clerk staff shall have access to all family division sections to identify conflicts and case assignment needs.

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

Date: 8/12, 2026

Ronald J Schafer, Chief Judge

Date: 8-19, 2026

Robert S. Sykes, Jr., Probate Judge

Date: 7/29/26, 2026

Charles W. Simon, III, Probate Judge

ADDENDUM A

Ionia Probate Judge -- Robert S. Sykes, Jr. (2005-1/1/2031 current term expires)

Montcalm Probate Judge -- Charles W. Simon, III (2007-1/1/2031 current term expires)

ADDENDUM B

8th Circuit Judge, Ronald J Schafer (2016-1/1/2029 current term expires)

8th Circuit Judge, Suzanne Hoseth Kreeger (2009-1/1/2027 current term expires)

ADDENDUM C
FAMILY DIVISION ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

