STATE OF MICHIGAN

ISABELLA COUNTY TRIAL COURT
300 NORTH MAIN STREET
MT. PLEASANT, MICHIGAN 48858
TEL. (989) 772-0911

HON. ERIC R. JANES
CHIEF JUDGE
KERRI R. CURTISS
COURT ADMINISTRATOR

HON. STUART BLACK
TRIAL JUDGE
HON. J.E.B. ALLEN
TRIAL JUDGE
HON. SARA SPENCER-NOGGLE
TRIAL JUDGE

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER
2025-3
Isabella County Trial Court
Family Court Plan

This Administrative Order rescinds and supersedes Local Administrative Order 2020-02.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. **Authority.** MCL 600.1011, as amended by 2002 PA 682, requires each judicial circuit to establish a family court plan. Michigan 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 the guidelines provided by the SCAO. According to MCL 600.1011(1), 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. MCL 600.1011(3) provides that 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. The Isabella County Trial Court is a Unified Trial Court comprised of all courts (circuit, probate, district) and the judges thereof in Isabella County, Michigan. This court has a Chief Judge who oversees the administration of the entire court, and the other presiding judges serve in an advisory capacity to the Chief Judge, as set forth in this court's Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan. The Chief Judge has entered into an agreement with the presiding judges regarding the establishment and operation of the Family Division. This court has a multi-judge Family Division presided over by the Chief Judge. See Appendix A for further detail.

B. **Goals.** The purpose of this Plan is to continue to provide efficient and effective services to families and individuals and to share jurisdiction between Circuit, Probate, and District Courts so that all court resources are available for maximum flexibility, efficiency, and consistency, and also to adhere to the "one family-one judge" requirement set forth in MCL 600.1023.

C. **Operation.** This Plan supersedes prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the Family Division and will be reviewed and revised as necessary, including when Family Division judicial assignments change, and at least every 2 years, by the Chief

Judge and presiding 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 a change to actual practice must occur, such as the identity of judges serving, this Family Court Plan will be updated with an addendum identifying and explaining the change in practice.

II. ADMINISTRATION

A. Judicial 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. The Isabella County Trial Court has four judges and all have been assigned to the Family Division from the time they came to the bench and are intended to continue serving until their time on the bench comes to an end whether that is through retirement or another means.

2. **Judicial Expertise.** Each judge listed above will attend training consistent with Michigan Continuing Judicial Education (MCJE) rules, and is encouraged to attend training that informs the position and current skillset from the training opportunities provided by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJI) under MCL 600.1019. A judge's service in the Family Division shall be consistent with the goal of developing sufficient judicial expertise in family law, juvenile law and other areas of law affecting families and children to properly serve the interests of the families and children whose cases are designated to that judge. Each judge periodically oversees different types of family law cases in order to keep familiar with the processes. The judges share resources and continually review relevant updates in the law.

3. **Judicial Service.** All judges serve in the Family Division pursuant to the Isabella County Trial Court Case Allocation, which is attached as Appendix B.

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 the 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 by 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 according to the judicial case allocation of the Family Division judges set forth in section II(A)(3) of this Plan, as provided for under MCR 8.111 or as otherwise provided in accordance with

MCR 8.112(B), except for those cases identified to be those of a family member within the jurisdiction of the family court.

2. **Definitions.**

   Family. For purposes of this Family Court Plan, the term "family" means: Two or more people related by birth, marriage or adoption.

   Family Member. For purposes of this Family Court Plan, the term "family member" means: A party sharing a common child, spouse or parent with another party.

   Pending. For purposes of this Family Court Plan, the term "pending" means: pre-judgment or active post-judgment, including post-judgment collection of child support within the three months preceding the filing of the new action.

3. **One Family-One Judge**. All new matters within the jurisdiction of the Family Division when there is not another matter involving members of the same family pending shall be assigned according to the judicial case allocation percentages of the Family Division judges set forth in section II(A)(3) of this Plan. New matters in the Family Division when there is another pending matter or matters involving members of the same family will be assigned to the same judge presiding over the other pending matter or matters whenever practicable. Matters in the Family Division are also assigned consistent with MCR 8.111(D)(1), and so when two or more actions arise out of the same transaction or occurrence, they are assigned to the same judge. If emergency or unavailability of a judge renders it impracticable to assign a matter to the same judge when it otherwise would have been pursuant to this Plan, the matter will be assigned to another judge so as to best further the goals of the Family Court Plan described in section I(B).

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, PH, PJ, PP, PW, TL, UE, UF, UI, UM, UN, VF, and VP. The ancillary case types are CA, CY, DD, GA, GL, GM, JA, LG, MI, NC, and PO.

6. **Concurrent Cases.** Cases not otherwise specified in this Plan may be transferred to a judge upon the agreement of the two judges in order to further the goals of this Plan and the "one family-one judge" requirement.

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 or assigned as determined by the Chief Judge.

3. **Dispute.** Any dispute on proper reassignment shall be resolved by the Chief Judge.

D. **Staffing and Facilities**

1. **Administrative Structure.** An Isabella County Trial Court Organizational Chart is included as Appendix A.

   The Chief Judge has supervisory authority over the administration of the Family Division. All Isabella County Trial Court judges have been assigned to the Family Division. The Court Administrator or his/her designee oversees daily operations of the Family Division as directed by the Chief Judge.

   Each judge shall have exclusive direction and control of their judicial secretary/court recorder and Court Officers for courtroom operational procedures. Court Officers are court employees responsible for safety and security for all staff, court users and inmates.

   The Friend of the Court staff includes caseworkers, a warrant officer, support enforcement specialist, deputy FOC and several clerical staff. Referees, the juvenile register, juvenile probation officers and clerical support team members provide statutorily required support services to the court.

   As a unified trial court, all team members work to provide services to the court and community and to the extent their position allows further the goals of the Family Court Plan.

2. **Remote Proceedings.** Remote proceedings will be utilized as permitted by the Michigan Court Rules and the policies of this court.

3. **Facilities.** The 21st Circuit, 76th District, and 37th Probate Court facilities are all located within the Isabella County Courthouse. All courtrooms and hearing rooms are located in the same facility. There are four hearing rooms on the first floor and four courtrooms on the second floor.

   The Isabella County Non-Secure Detention Facility is located in a rural location in Isabella County. The Court contracts with a provider for the day-to-day operation of the facility. The Court Administrator is the liaison between the

provider and the Court, and conducts meetings with the staff from the facility quarterly or as needed. This facility is managed by McBride Homes, who reports directly to the Court Administrator.

The Isabella County Day Treatment Facility is located in a residential location in Isabella County. The Court contracts with a provider for the day-to-day operation of the facility. The Court Administrator is the liaison between the provider and the Court. Also, the Intensive Juvenile Probation Officer is provided office space at the facility to meet with probationers. The Court Administrator meets with the staff from the facility quarterly or as needed.

E. **Records Management**

1. **Clerks of the Court.** The Isabella County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. The Isabella 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.** The Trial Court Business Office serves as a central access point for filing documents and public information about the Family Division. The Business Office is located on the first floor of the Isabella County Courthouse.

4. **Access Point.** Information for the public regarding the Family Division is provided on Isabella County's website under the Isabella County Trial Court section. www.isabellacounty.org.

5. **Technological Access.** All judges and other court staff shall have appropriate access to electronic files necessary for their role in the Family Division.

6. **Public Access.** This Family Court Plan is posted on the court's website and is otherwise publicly available upon request.

Appendix:
Appendix A— Isabella County Trial Court Organizational Chart
Appendix B— Isabella County Trial Court Judicial Case Allocation

The undersigned affirm that the information contained in this Plan represents the full agreement of all Isabella County Trial Judges.

Honorable Eric R. James
Chief Judge

Dated: 6-2-25

Honorable Stuart Black
Trial Court Judge

Dated: 6/2/25

Honorable Sara Spencer-Noggle
Trial Court Judge

Dated: 6/2/25

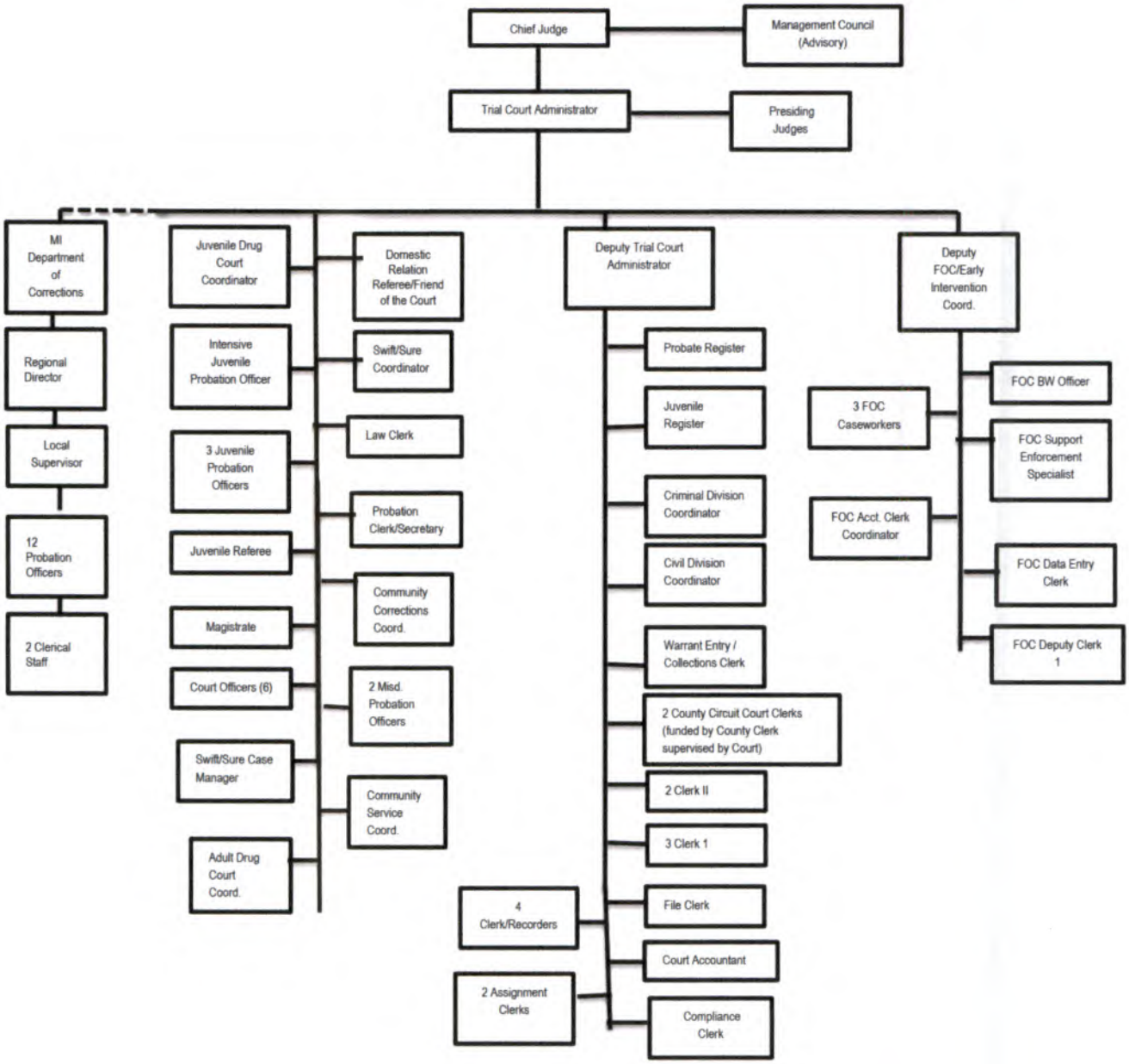
Honorable J.E.B. Allen
Trial Court Judge

Dated: 6-2-25

ISABELLA COUNTY TRIAL COURT JUDICIAL CASE ALLOCATION

	JANES	BLACK	ALLEN	SPENCER-NOGGLE
ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES	• Chief Judge duties: including ceremonial functions: supervision of court personnel and other duties under MCR 8.110(C)			
FAMILY DIVISION	• Domestic Relations DO • 25% Domestic Relations DM • Estates (Wills & Trusts)-Conflict & Overflow • Guardianships/Conservatorships Backup • FOC Show Cause Backup • Collection Show Cause Backup	• 50% Domestic Relations DM • Adoptions • Guardianships—All • Conservatorships—All • Juvenile Delinquencies • Neglect/Abuse & Termination • Estates (Wills & Trusts) • Misc. Family Division and Probate Matters • ERPO (Minors) • Mental Commitments • FOC Show Cause • Arraignments	• Non-Domestic PPOs • Paternity (DC: DS: DP) • Juvenile Delinquencies-Conflict & Overflow • Neglect/Abuse & Termination-Conflict and Overflow • Arraignments	• 25% Domestic Relations DM • Domestic PPOs • ERPO-Adult • Mental Commitment-Conflict & Overflow • Arraignments
CIVIL DIVISION	• All Trials • General Civil (no limit) • Landlord/Tenant • Land Contract Forfeiture/Foreclosures • Claim and Delivery • Other Statutory Duties including appointment authority	• Election Commission • Drain Appeals • Other statutory Duties including appointment authority • Arraignments	• General Civil-Conflict & Overflow • Other Statutory Duties including appointment authority • Arraignments	• Criminal Forfeitures • Other statutory Duties including appointment authority • Arraignments
CRIMINAL DIVISION	• All Felony Jury & Non-Jury Trials • Misdemeanor Trials—Conflict & Overflow • SSSPP	• Juvenile Drug Court • Juvenile Traffic • Arraignments 2 days/week	• Preliminary Exams • Misdemeanor Pre-Trials: Misdemeanor Jury & Non-Jury Trials • Traffic: except Juvenile • SSSPP Overflow • Arraignments	• Adult Sobriety Court • Felony up to Trial • Felony Jury Trials—Conflict & Overflow • Prelim-Overflow • Misdemeanor Jury Trial Conflict & Overflow • License Restoration • All set asides • Arraignments 2 days/week
APPELLATE DIVISION	• All (except conflict)	• By Assignment	• By Assignment	• By Assignment

Isabella County Trial Court
Organizational Chart



MDOC are employed by the State of Michigan. The Trial Court has limited supervision and some budgetary requirements associated with MDOC.

04-21-2025