VAN BUREN COUNTY COURTS • STATE OF MICHIGAN • TUEBOR CIRCUMSPICE	**FAMILY COURT PLAN**	**LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER** **C36 2025-05J** **D07 2025-04J** **P80 2025-04J** **RESCINDS:** **C36 2003-04J** **P80 2003-03J**

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. This court has a multi-judge family division, and the chief judge has selected a presiding judge to serve in that capacity. See Section II(A)(1) for further details. The chief judge of the trial 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 include but are not limited to staff and judicial subject matter expertise, access to information from all relevant files, efficient court operation, and consistency and predictability for families. The Plan reflects this court's commitment to the one family-one judge requirement. Additionally, this court seeks assignment based on expertise while complying with statutory requirements and creating an equitable distribution of workload for maximum scheduling 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 the family division judicial assignments change, and at least every 2 years to ensure that the Plan meets the statutory requirements and complies with the Family Court Plan Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO. The review of this plan will occur at the Judicial Council meeting held in January every other year, beginning in January 2027. The Judicial Council includes the judges and court administrators. The Plan will be reviewed immediately upon a new judicial appointment or election.

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. The Family Division Judge is the Honorable Jeffrey Dufon, P45292. Judge Dufon's term began in 2013, and the current term expires in 2026. The

Probate Judge is the Honorable Susan Metzger, P62867. Judge Metzger's term began in 2024, and the current term expires in 2029. Judge Dufon has served as the presiding judge of the family division for the past decade. Judge Metzger has recently accepted the adoption docket.

2. **Judicial Expertise.** Each judge listed above has attended the 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.** Judge Dufon serves full-time in the family division to further the goals of the family division, under MCL 600.1011(3). He is assigned all family division case types, except adoptions and divorces without children. Probate Judge Metzger is assigned 100% of adoption cases and divorces without children. This caseload assignment is documented in LAO C36 2025 02J D07 2025 01J P0 2025 01J Assignment of Cases and provides minimal disruption to families as most adoptions are independent of any other family court action.

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. The LAO C36 2025 02J D07 2025 01J P0 2025 01J Assignment of Cases governs all case assignments and is to be read in conjunction with the Plan.

2. **Definitions.**

For purposes of this FCP, the term "family" means related by law or biology to one parent or same parents.

For purposes of this FCP, the term "family member" means family related by law or biology to one parent or same parents this FCP.

The term "pending" means: the case is pre-judgment. Pre-judgment family division motions are generally held by the family division referees and are not included in the definition as it is not relevant to the judge's familiarity with the family. If the family has a child protective proceeding and a domestic relations matter, the domestic relations matters are heard by Judge Dufon.

3. **One Family-One Judge.** Cases are assigned pursuant to the LAO C36 2025 02J D07 2025 01J P0 2025 01J Assignment of Cases, with all family division case types being assigned to Judge Dufon, except adoption matters and divorces without children that are assigned to Judge Metzger. ERPO cases are handled by Judge Dufon; however, after-hours ERPO cases are handled by Judge McKay.

4. **Prior Matters.** When cases or motions are filed, the court 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 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.** Cases not otherwise specified in this order may be transferred to a judge upon agreement of the two judges. If there is a conflict, the Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan C36 2025-03J/D07 2025-02J/P80 2025-02J will be referenced, with the Chief Judge making the final decision.

C. REASSIGNMENT OF CASES

1. **Disqualifications.** Disqualifications will first be handled as described under MCR 8.111(C)(1) and/or the Court's Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan C36 2025-03J/D07 2025-02J/P80 2025-02J. Cases must be reassigned first with the court's family division, then within the remaining bench as described in Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan C36 2025-03J/D07 2025-02J/P80 2025-02J, 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 Judge will determine how to disperse any pending cases if a complete caseload transfer is not possible.

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 referees, juvenile probation officers, and Friend of the Court provide statutorily required support services to the court so that the court operates efficiently with each judge serving in their area of expertise and in furtherance of the Family Division goals.

2. **Remote Proceedings.** Remote proceedings may be utilized as permitted by MCR 2.408 and other remote proceedings requirements and the presiding hearing officer. Nearly all Friend of the Court hearings are handled remotely.

3. **Facilities.** The Family Division is split between two locations. The juvenile department operates in the Courthouse Annex and the Friend of the Court is housed in a standalone building across the street from the Courthouse. The county does not operate a juvenile detention facility. The Sheriff's Department provides security for the facility and the staff work area is restricted, secure badge-only access. The county maintains the facilities and works with court administration to consider the improvements requested as needed. The historic courthouse has space limitations that prevent an area for childcare during hearings or supervised parenting time. There are two conference rooms available for attorney/client meetings. The Friend of the Court offers non-traditional hours from 8:30 – 5:00, Monday through Friday, remaining open with full services through the lunch hour. The county is exploring facilities options.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. **Clerks of the Court.** The Van Buren County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division.

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.** Documents for filing in DL, DJ, NA, and JG are received at the juvenile court office from the prosecutor, caseworkers, and attorneys. Domestic relations case documents are filed at the county clerk's office and the county clerk houses the legal file. The county clerk sends copies to the Friend of the Court while retaining the original copy. Files are retrieved in advance of hearings. Within the family division, juvenile records are maintained in the juvenile court office and retained according to requirements set forth in the Record Retention and Disposal Schedule #15. Adoption cases are filed with Judge Metzger's judicial assistant for entry into the case management system. Adoption records are held by Judge Metzger's judicial assistant in locked cabinets. Juvenile court records and adoption files are in the process of digitization and will soon be stored in OnBase. The Friend of the Court has used OnBase for electronic file storage for many years.

4. **Access Point.** Information for the public is provided on the county's website under the Court's section at www.vanburencountymi.gov. Quarterly meetings are conducted with the juvenile court's contract attorneys to keep them apprised of administrative and legislative updates.

5. **Internal Transfer.** All case files maintained by the Van Buren County Juvenile

Court are in the process of electronic retention except for Parental Waiver cases which are maintained separately as required by law. Any file transfers necessary will be done by the Clerks of the applicable courts.

6. **Technological Access.** By the end of 2025, all Family Division files will be maintained electronically and are accessible to court employees and the bench of respective courts. File security is managed with employee-specific profiles. Court Administration and County Information Technology maintain file access permissions. Public Friend of the Court documents are available for inspection at the Clerk's office.

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

Kathleen Brickley
Hon. Kathleen Brickley, Chief Judge

8/6/25
Date

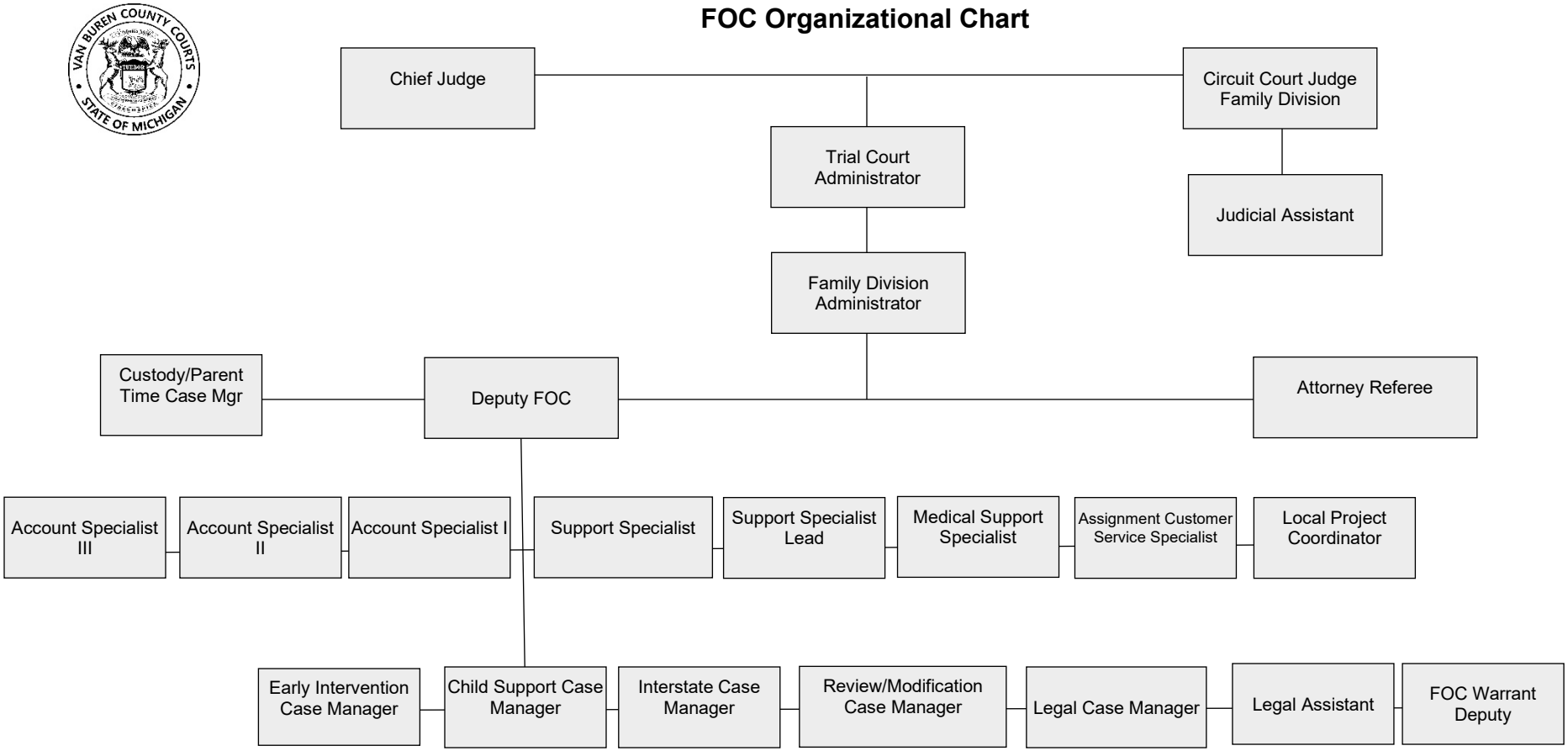
Hon. Jeffrey Dufon, Presiding Family Division Judge

08/07/2025
Date

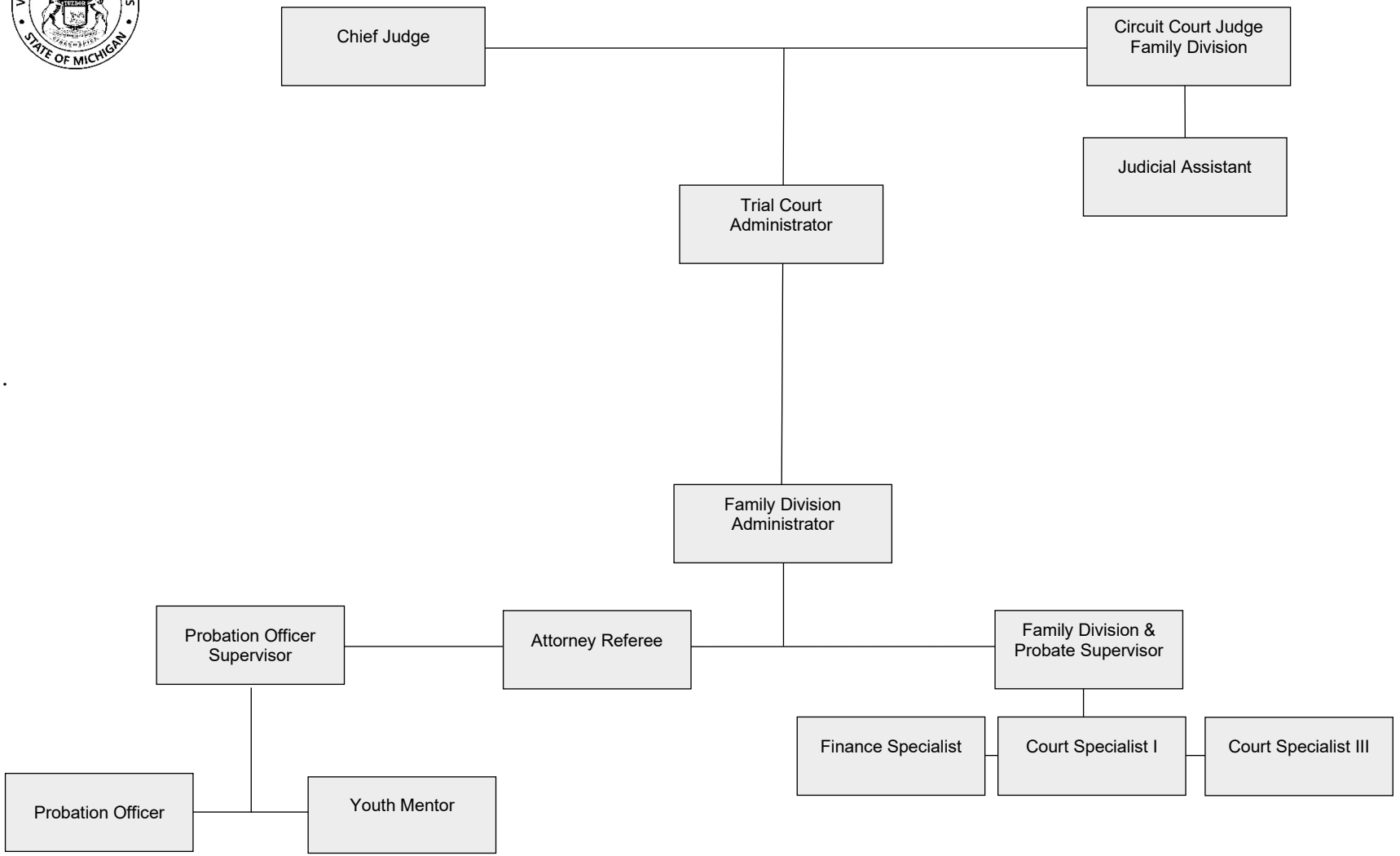
Susan Metzger
Hon. Susan Metzger, Probate Judge

08/07/2025
Date

FOC Organizational Chart



Juvenile Organizational Chart



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5/5/2025