STATE OF MICHIGAN
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE COUNTY OF MUSKEGON

FAMILY COURT PLAN
FOR THE 14TH CIRCUIT COURT
AND THE 61ST PROBATE COURT

LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER
Circuit Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-08J
Probate Court Joint Local Administrative Order 2025-04J

Rescinds Circuit Court Local Administrative Order 2025-04J
Rescinds Probate Court 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. This court has a multi-judge family division and the chief judge has selected a presiding judge to serve in that capacity. See Appendix A for further detail.

B. **Goals.** The Muskegon 14th Circuit Court- Family Division seeks to assign cases in accordance with the judge's preferred area of practice and expertise while creating an equitable distribution of workload, maximizing scheduling efficiency, and ensuring that one family is assigned to one judge pursuant to MCL 600.1023 to ensure consistency and predictability for families.

C. **Operation.** This FCP supersedes prior plans that have been approved for the operation of the family division. This FCP 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 probate judge to ensure that the FCP meets the statutory requirements and complies with the FCP Requirements and Guidelines provided by the SCAO. In the event that the identity of one or more family division judges' changes, this order will be updated with an addendum identifying all serving family division judges.

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.

    1. Probate Judge Gregory C. Pittman- term expires December 31, 2030; began assignment in January 1998.
    2. Circuit Judge Jenny L. McNeill- term expires December 31, 2028; began assignment in January 2023.
    3. Circuit Judge Kathy L. Hoogstra- term expires December 31, 2026; began assignment in June 2013.
    4. Probate Judge Brenda E. Sprader- term expires December 31, 2028; began assignment in January 2017.

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. Muskegon County relies upon MJI and SCAO to support judicial continuing education.

3. **Judicial Service.** Judge Pittman, Judge McNeill, and Judge Sprader will serve full time in the family division, under MCL 600.1011(3), where sufficient caseload and judicial resources exists. Judge Hoogstra, pursuant to our Case Assignment LAO, will serve part-time in the Family Division in order to handle divorce without minor children, minor guardianship and conservatorship, and Extreme Risk Protection Act case types.

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 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 such 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 FCP 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. **Definitions.**

For purposes of this FCP, the term "family" means: any person(s) related legally by birth, marriage, or adoption.

For purposes of this FCP, the term "family member" means: individuals that are minor children, either biological, adopted, or step-children of the mother.

For purposes of this FCP, the term "pending" means: A case that has been filed, but has not been fully resolved or concluded. If the court accepts a new filing on a closed domestic relations case, the case will remain with the previously assigned judge, unless a different result is required by the Court's Case Assignment LAO. If a new case is filed involving a 'family member' of a party in a previously closed domestic relations case, the time frame to automatically assign the same judge to the new case file, shall be two years from the date of the prior case closure, or two years from the date of the last filing in the closed case.

3. **One Family-One Judge.** Cases shall be assigned pursuant to the case assignment LAO. To the extent practicable, when a new case within the jurisdiction of the Family Division is filed, and an existing case involving the same family is pending in the Family Division, the new case will be assigned to the same judge assigned to the pending case, in order to further the concept of "one family- one judge."

In neglect/abuse cases where the same or similar petitions are filed against fathers or guardians, but involve different mothers, the cases shall be assigned to one judge. The judge assigned shall be the judge to whom the first case was assigned.

Emergency Situations: If there is an urgent matter, such as a Personal Protection Order, Extreme Risk Protection Order, ex-parte order, or juvenile division pick-up order that requires immediate attention and the assigned Judge is not available, the on-call judicial officer or the judge handling the assigned judge's responsibilities will address the emergency.

Prior Matters. When cases or motions are filed, the clerk's office, or the juvenile clerk as it pertains to DL, DJ, and NA cases, shall

review the case inventory and court records to see if the family, has a prior pending matter, as those terms are defined herein.

4. **Case Types.** The primary case types of the family division are AB, AC, AD, AF, AG, AM, AN, AO, AU, AY, CY, DC, DJ, DL, DM, DP, DS, DZ, EE, EJ, EM, EP, ER, EV, EZ, GM, JG, LG, NA, NB, NC, PJ, PP, PW, TL, UE, UF, UI, UM, UN, VF.

   When a CY, GM, or LG case is filed, it will be assigned according to our Case Assignment LAO unless the family member involved has a pending case assigned in the Family Division. If so, the new case will be assigned to the judge assigned to the pending matter in the Family Division.

   Felony non-support FH cases, CA, DD, DO, GA, GL, ID, JA, MI, PO, PH, and VP are not included in this FCP and will be assigned pursuant to the Case Assignment LAO that results in equitable division of caseloads.

5. **Concurrent Cases.** As indicated in Section (II)(B)(3), case types identified in subsection (4) above will be assigned under the "one family-one judge" concept as those terms are defined herein. When a Family Division case is filed, the county or juvenile clerk will review the case inventory and court records and will assign the new filing to the judge that has any pending or closed cases involving the family, as defined in subsection (2) above.

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 LAO is modified, the Chief 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, or by the presiding family division judge, should the Chief Judge delegate that authority.

D. STAFFING AND FACILITIES

1. **Administrative Structure.** A family division organizational chart is included as Appendix A.

   The Chief Judge shall appoint a Circuit Court Administrator-Friend of the Court

after consultation with all the other Judges within the Circuit and Probate Court. The Circuit Court Administrator shall also serve as the Family Division Administrator and Friend of the Court. The Circuit Court Administrator shall be under the direct supervision of the Chief Judge and shall keep the presiding Judge of the Family Division informed regarding all Family Division matters.

A probate judge serving in the Family Division shall have the same power and authority as circuit judges in family division matters, in addition to powers and authority of a judge of probate court.

Family Division referees shall work under the supervision of the Chief Judge and the Circuit Court Administrator. The Referees are assigned to handle both domestic and juvenile matters.

The Muskegon Circuit Court- Family Division is a combined office with the Muskegon County Friend of the Court. As a result, there are multiple staff positions that have duties in both the Family Division and Friend of the Court. The combined nature of our Court allows us to serve families holistically and more efficiently.

2. **Remote Proceedings.** Each presiding judicial officer 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 Muskegon Circuit Court-Family Division resides within the Muskegon County Hall of Justice Building, along with the Friend of the Court. The Hall of Justice is a county-owned facility that also houses the Sheriff's Administration office, Prosecutor's Office, and Circuit Court Clerk's Office. The Sheriff's Office provides security for the Hall of Justice. Within the Hall of Justice are multiple conference rooms, on each floor, accessible for attorney/client meetings. The Courthouse Security Committee meets quarterly to review courthouse facilities and security measures. This committee also makes requests and recommendations to County administration regarding improvements.

The Muskegon Juvenile Detention Center is under the administrative authority of the Muskegon Circuit Court-Family Division and is located at a separate location that is owned by the County.

E. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

1. **Clerks of the Court.** The Muskegon County Clerk is designated as the Clerk of the Court for the Family Division. However, for juvenile delinquency and neglect/abuse cases, the Juvenile Clerks within the Muskegon County Circuit

Court-Family Division are designated as the Clerk of the Court. The Muskegon Probate Register 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.

3. **Filing.** All filings for the Family Division shall be filed with the Circuit Court Clerk's office located on the 6th floor of the Hall of Justice. All filings for juvenile delinquency cases, neglect/abuse cases, and adoption cases shall be filed with the Muskegon Circuit Court- Family Division office located on the 3rd floor of the Hall of Justice. All filings in ancillary matters shall be filed with the Muskegon Probate Office, located on the 5th floor of the Hall of Justice, except NC cases shall be filed with the Circuit Court Clerk's Office on the 6th floor.

4. **Access Point.** Information for the public is provided on the county's website under the Court's section at www.co.muskegon.mi.us. Additionally, the Muskegon Circuit Court Clerk's office can provide information on filing documents, records storage, records access, and case scheduling information.

5. **Technological Access.** All Muskegon County Circuit Court files are maintained electronically and are accessible to court employees and judicial officers. File security is managed with access profiles and is specific to each employee.

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

Effective Date: _____

Date: 10/8/25

Chief Judge Kenneth S. Hoopes

Date: 10-15-25

Chief Judge Pro Tem/Probate Judge Gregory C. Pittman

Muskegon County Circuit Court- Family Division

September 2025

