

Judicial Practices and Procedures  
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**A. Communications with the Judicial Office**

- **Method of Communication:** Communications to the judicial office are preferred to be submitted by e-mail to [civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org). All court dates must be requested via email.
- **Ex parte Communications:** All communications with the judicial office must comply with Canon 3 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which prohibits a judge from initiating, permitting, or considering ex parte communications and from considering other communications outside the presence of the parties concerning a pending or impending proceeding, unless authorized by law. All parties must be copied on any e-mail directed to the judicial office, unless an ex parte communication is authorized by law.
- **Unsolicited Communications:** Unsolicited communications from non-parties will not be considered by the court unless the parties agree and

want the court to consider the communication(s). Parties may only contact the judicial office in accordance with these practices and procedures.

- **E-Filing Portal Contact Information:** All attorneys and self-represented litigants must provide an e-mail address to receive signed orders electronically, unless excused. Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. 2.516. It is the responsibility of attorneys and self-represented litigants to update their contact information using Form 2.603 any time there is a change in the e-mail account registered for electronic service.
- **Response to Inquiries:** The judicial assistant cannot give legal advice or discuss specific case details. The judicial assistant will respond to requests in a timely manner. If the matter is an emergency, call the office and follow up with an email, noting that the request is an emergency.

## **B. Scheduling Procedures**

- **Court Schedule:** The court's jury trial weeks can be found on the judicial website under the Schedule tab. UMC dockets (hearing is 5 minutes or less) are scheduled multiple times a month, see hearing blocks on JAWS. 15 minute hearing blocks are scheduled multiple times a month, see hearing blocks on JAWS. All other hearings can be set via email ([civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org)).
- **Scheduling Hearings:** ALL HEARINGS LONGER THAN 15 MINUTES MUST BE SCHEDULED VIA EMAIL ([CIVDIVR@FLJUD13.ORG](mailto:CIVDIVR@FLJUD13.ORG)).
  - UMC Hearings and 15-minute hearings or less must be scheduled using the court's online scheduling platform. If parties are unable to identify a hearing date and time on JAWS, the scheduling party should e-mail the judicial office, copying opposing counsel and any self-represented litigant, to coordinate the scheduling of the hearing.
  - Other hearings must be requested by e-mail.
  - The court will always do its best to find time to schedule a hearing that is time sensitive or an emergency.
  - \*\*Please be advised that the hearing date(s) provided by the judicial assistant will ONLY be scheduled on the court's docket in JAWS upon receipt of a copy of the eFiled notice of hearing.

- **Notice of Hearing:** A notice of hearing must be filed and served immediately after reserving hearing time.
  - When preparing the notice of hearing, always include the filing date and document index number of the motion being heard.
  - A notice of hearing involving any remote appearance must list the judicial Zoom credentials.
  - Unilateral notices of hearing may be set with a minimum of 45 days notice and only due to a lack of cooperation. The notice of hearing must describe, in detail, the efforts made to reach an agreement on the hearing date. A single letter, email or ultimatum is insufficient. Unilaterally set hearings that do not describe efforts to agree on a hearing date may be cancelled by the court without notice.
  - Cross-noticing hearing(s) is prohibited. If the parties agree to add certain motion(s) to a hearing and the additional motion(s) will not exceed the time already allotted, the party should file an amended notice of hearing after clearing the addition with the judicial assistant. Motion(s) unilaterally cross-noticed will not be heard and may be denied without prejudice.
  - All notices of hearing must contain the ADA notification required by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.540.
- **Submission Deadlines:** The court must receive all materials for the hearing no later than five days before the hearing. Materials received after this deadline will not be considered. The court does not require legal authority to be submitted, but will gladly consider any material provided.
  - If the materials submitted to the court have any highlighting, identical copies must be provided to all other parties in advance of the hearing.
  - All hearing binders provided to the court must be picked up no later than 3 days following the court proceeding. All hearing binders not retrieved within 3 days will be recycled.
- **Order of Proceedings:** Matters will be heard in the order they appear on the docket.
- **Continuance Procedure:** Continuances are disfavored and will be granted only upon good cause shown. A request for continuance must be

submitted at least five days prior to the scheduled court date. Except for good cause shown, the motion must be signed by the party requesting the continuance, as required by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.545(e).

- **Cancelling Hearings:** Parties must cancel hearings by notifying the judicial assistant immediately by emailing [civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org).
  - If the hearing is cancelled the same day it is scheduled to be heard, the party must also call the judicial assistant. Counsel/Self represented litigant must also immediately file and serve a notice of cancellation on opposing counsel and any self-represented litigant.
  - Notice of Voluntary Dismissals/Notice of Settlement: please notify the judicial office when these notices are filed so all hearing/trial dates may be cancelled in JAWS.
  - Please notify the judicial assistant ASAP if the hearing time is no longer needed so it can be utilized for another case.

### **C. Remote Appearance**

- **Remote Appearance Procedure:** The court maintains a hybrid virtual courtroom, allowing parties to appear either in person or remotely, as provided by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.530. Requests to use communication technology for an appearance must be made by motion, if the hearing is noticed to be in person.
  - The following proceedings will be held in person:
    - Evidentiary hearings
    - Pretrial Conferences for trial, except Small Claims Pretrial Conferences, set by the clerk
    - Jury Trials and Non-Jury Trials
    - Landlord/Tenant Eviction cases
    - Hearings scheduled for more than 30 minutes
    - Any other hearing wherein evidence will be submitted to the court
- **Platform Used:** The court uses Zoom for remote appearances. The parties may download the Zoom app [here](#) for phone or computer and participate by video.
- **Platform Meeting ID#:** The Zoom link for the court's courtroom is <https://zoom.us/j/8336038373> and the Meeting ID# is 833-603-8373.

- **Requirements:** If a party is requesting a remote appearance for a scheduled, in person hearing, a written motion must be filed and a courtesy copy must be sent to [civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org). The motion must show good cause from the party requesting the remote appearance. The motion must also include whether the opposing party has an objection. A statement that counsel/self represented litigant has not heard back from the opposing party is unacceptable.
- **Other Remote Appearance Procedures:** If a party does not have access to a computer with a camera and speakers or a smartphone with video capability, they must still appear for the hearing by phone. At the scheduled time of the hearing, the party may access the hearing by calling **1-786-635-1003**. When prompted, enter the **Meeting ID#: 833-603-8373**. Please note if the party appears by phone, the hearing may be rescheduled for another date where the party will be directed to appear by video or in person at the courthouse. **If party does appear by phone, to unmute, punch \*6.** Attorneys are required to appear by video, unless the party files a motion and the court grants permission to appear telephonically. All parties must sign in using their full first and last names.

#### **D. Submission of Orders and Judgments**

- **Format:** All proposed orders must be submitted in PDF format. All proposed orders must be accompanied by a cover letter certifying that all parties agree to the order. It is not sufficient to state that the proposing party has not heard back from the other party(s), unless 5 days have elapsed without a response. Competing orders or opposed orders should not be uploaded via the E-Portal.
  - **Agreed Orders:** Proposed orders on agreed relief or relief sought jointly by the parties should begin with “Agreed Order” in the caption. The first paragraph of the order must state that the parties agree to the relief afforded by the court, and it must identify the stipulation or motion providing the basis for the relief. Except in rare circumstances, agreed orders that are not preceded by a motion or stipulation will be rejected.
  - **Competing Proposed Orders:** If, following a hearing, the parties disagree about the form and content of an order, they may submit competing orders. Competing orders should be submitted in Word format to the division email [civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org) with the words “Competing Proposed Order” in the subject line. The email may briefly describe why the party’s proposed form is correct, but

additional legal argument is prohibited. Transcripts or excerpts may be submitted, if appropriate.

- **Orders Without a Hearing:** Paragraph 16 of Administrative Order S-2026-024 allows the Court to issue orders compelling discovery without a hearing in certain circumstances. Parties are cautioned to read the administrative order closely before submitting a proposed order. Motions to compel discovery must comply with the good-faith conference certification requirements of Rule 1.380. Motions that do not comply will be denied. The Court expects parties to undertake true, good-faith efforts to resolve discovery disputes before filing a motion to compel.
- **Submission Method:** E-Filing Portal (for all agreed upon proposed orders or orders not objected to within 5 days). For competing orders, see above.
- **Deadline for Submissions:** Proposed orders must be submitted within 14 days after any hearing. Failure to timely submit a proposed order may result in a denial of the motion without prejudice or a rehearing. The party charged with submitting the order must consult with all parties within 5 days of the hearing and make a genuine effort to agree on the language of the proposed order.

#### **E. Courtesy Copies of Case Law and Other Documents**

- **Not Required:** Courtesy copies of case law is not required but the court will consider any materials submitted no later than 5 days before any evidentiary proceeding.
- **Format:** The materials may be submitted in PDF format.
- **Submission Method:** The materials may be hand delivered, mailed or emailed to the court if the materials are less than 50 pages.
- **Deadline for Submissions:** Courtesy copies must be delivered to the Court no later than five days before any evidentiary proceeding. If the materials submitted to the court has any highlighting, identical copies must be provided to all other parties in advance of the hearing.

#### **F. Emergency and Other Urgent Matters**

- **Requirements:** If a party believes there is a factual basis for setting an emergency hearing, a detailed motion setting forth the following must be filed: (1) the issues to be resolved, (2) reasons why an emergency

hearing is necessary, and (3) the amount of time needed for each party's presentation.

- **Scheduling:** If the court determines that an emergency exists, a hearing will be scheduled unilaterally by the Court. All parties shall make themselves available for the emergency hearing, barring exigent circumstances.

## **G. Exhibits for Evidentiary Proceedings**

- **Submission Method:** See Pretrial/Trial order for trial exhibits. For evidentiary hearing exhibits, all documents the parties want the Court to consider, must be filed with the Clerk of Court and mailed to the Judge's chambers 7 days before the hearing, or delivered by hand 3 days before the hearing.
- **Format:** Exhibits must be submitted to the Clerk of Court in paper format unless the exhibit is an audio/video file. Audio/video files must be submitted on a disc or thumb drive. The party introducing any digital evidence must make arrangements for the evidence to be shown in court during the trial/hearing. All attorneys and self-represented litigants must bring sufficient copies of each exhibit for the Clerk, the Court, and each party to review during the hearing or trial. Exhibits must be labeled in the following format: "Petitioner/Plaintiff 1" or "Respondent/Defendant 1."
- **Deadline for Submissions:** All exhibits must be received in chambers three days before the evidentiary proceeding.

## **H. Pretrial Procedures and Conferences**

- **Case Management Conference:** Any party may request a case management conference (CMC) when a case requires it. The court strongly encourages the early use of CMC in more complex cases, multiple-party litigation, or any case that might benefit from court intervention. Unless excused by the court in advance, all CMCs are mandatory for attorneys and self-represented litigants. Parties represented by counsel are not required to appear at a CMC.
- **Status Conference:** Any party may request a status conference when a case requires it.
- **Requirements:** Any request for a CMC or status conference must articulate the reasons for the necessity of the conference.
- **Scheduling:** The moving party may schedule the CMC or status

conference through the online scheduling platform (UMC docket) or contact the judicial assistant via email at [civdivr@fljud13.org](mailto:civdivr@fljud13.org).

## **I. Setting Case for Trial**

- **Procedure:** The parties should email the judicial assistant requesting a hearing to set a trial date or set the case on a UMC docket; or the parties may stipulate to a trial date and submit a stipulated order setting the case for trial. The Court's trial dates can be found on the Judge's website under the "Schedule" tab.
  - Small claims non-jury trials will be set by the Court by a Notice after mediation has been completed and no agreement was reached.
- **Notice Period:** The court does not set date-certain trials. Attorneys, self-represented litigants, parties, and witnesses are expected to be available during the entire trial period.
- **Mediation:** ALL CASES MUST BE MEDIATED BEFORE TRIAL.
- **Motions prior to trial:** All motions, except motions in limine, must be heard before the Pre-Trial Conference. No motions will be heard after the Pre-Trial Conference. Parties must first confer regarding Motions in Limine before requesting hearing time from the Court.
- **Pre-Trial Conferences:** Attendance at the Pre-Trial Conference in person is mandatory.

## **J. Forms**

- **Access:** Division forms are available on the Judge's [website](#).

## **K. Other Division Procedures**

- **ADA Accommodations:** If a party needs an ADA accommodation, please contact ADA Coordinator, Hillsborough County Courthouse, 800 E. Twiggs St., Room 604, Tampa, FL 33602, (813) 272-7040, at least 7 days before the scheduled court appearance. If a party is hearing or voice impaired, call 711.
- **Interpreter Requests:** Interpreters are not provided by the court.
- **Professionalism:** Judge O'Brien expects the highest standards of professionalism, civility, candor, and preparation in her courtroom.

Any attorney or party displaying conduct unbecoming of the proceeding may be subject to sanctions without notice.