

Judicial Practices and Procedures
Juvenile Dependency Division B
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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| A. Communications with the Judicial Office..... | 1 |
| B. Scheduling Procedures | 2 |
| C. Remote Appearance..... | 3 |
| D. Submission of Orders and Judgments | 4 |
| E. Courtesy Copies of Case Law and Other Documents | 5 |
| F. Emergency and Other Urgent Matters..... | 5 |
| G. Exhibits for Evidentiary Proceedings..... | 5 |
| H. Pretrial Procedures and Conferences | 6 |
| I. Setting Case for Trial..... | 7 |
| J. Trial Procedures..... | 7 |
| K. Adoptions | 7 |
| L. Forms | 8 |
| M. Other Division Procedures..... | 8 |

A. Communications with the Judicial Office

- **Method of Communication:** All communications to the judicial office must be submitted by e-mail to juvdepdivb@fljud13.org. The subject line must contain the case number, case name, and relevant matter (e.g., 24-DP-1234 – Doe - 2-Hour Hearing Requested). If the matter is urgent, the subject line should include “URGENT”. Telephone calls to the judicial office should leave a voicemail, which is monitored and calls are returned. Please do not repeatedly call the judicial office without leaving a message.
- **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 or letter 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. 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 register with the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal, www.myflcourtaccess.com, and 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 is not authorized to provide legal advice. The judicial assistant may assist with scheduling matters before the court. If the judicial assistant is out of office, an out of office notification will be set up for email and voicemail communications. Messages received when the judicial assistant is out of office will be promptly addressed when the judicial assistant returns to the office.

B. Scheduling Procedures

- **Court Schedule:** Trials are scheduled one week of every month. The schedule for pretrial conferences and trial weeks is above. Trials are typically scheduled within 1-2 months of the arraignment or advisory hearing, in accordance with time standards prescribed by Chapter 39, Florida Statutes. Trials will be scheduled beyond these time standards only upon stipulation of all parties for good cause shown. Trials may be specially set outside the regularly scheduled trial week with the consent of all parties. Specially setting trials should be addressed at arraignment, advisory hearing or pretrial conference. The Court will specially set trials for parents who are incarcerated with the Department of Corrections. About one week every month, the Court covers shelter hearings for all divisions. These hearings are usually conducted in the afternoons. During those weeks, afternoon hearings are unavailable.
- **Contested motions which must be heard in division:** Motion for Reunification; Motion to Terminate Jurisdiction and Supervision; Motion to Modify Placement; Motion to Modify Visitation; Motion for Administration of Psychotropic Medication; Motion for Placement in Residential Treatment Facility;

- **Scheduling Hearings:** Hearings must be requested by e-mail to juvdepdivb@fljud13.org, copying opposing counsel and any self-represented litigant, to coordinate the scheduling of the hearing. An attorney or self-represented litigant may only request a hearing to be scheduled on a motion after the motion has been filed with the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal. Hearings may not be self-scheduled in JAWS.
- **Notice of Hearing:** A notice of hearing must be filed and served immediately after reserving hearing time. The notice of hearing must list the matters to be heard by the Court, specifically identifying any motion to be heard. Simply stating that the hearing is a “motion hearing” without identifying the motion is insufficient notice to the Court and the parties. A notice of hearing involving any remote appearance must list the judicial Zoom credentials (listed above). All notices of hearing must contain the ADA notification required by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.540.
- **Submission Deadlines:** Trial binders with caselaw must be provided at least three days before trial. The court prefers electronic copies.
- **Continuance Procedure:** Continuances are disfavored and will be granted only upon good cause shown. Motions for continuance are governed by Florida Rules of Juvenile Procedure 8.240(d) and 8.255(h). 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). The Court will hear motions for continuance at a pretrial conference or a scheduled motion hearing. However, all parents must be in attendance at the pretrial conference for the trial date to be stricken if granted. Otherwise, the Court will take the matter under advisement and rule upon the motion at the trial docket sounding to provide the parties with new court dates if granted.
- **Cancelling Hearings:** You must cancel hearings by notifying the judicial assistant immediately. You must also immediately file and serve a notice of cancellation on opposing counsel and any self-represented litigant.

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. Appearances for Trials: All parties, witnesses and counsel must appear in person for trials unless a motion is filed seeking permission for a witness or party to appear virtually. Virtual appearance of witnesses at trial should be addressed at the pretrial conference.

- **Incarcerated Parents:** The Court will permit incarcerated parents to appear at all pretrial proceedings by remote appearance without a motion. DCF is responsible for arranging the remote appearance. The Court will permit appearance of an incarcerated parent at trial only on motion or stipulation of all parties. Remote appearance of an incarcerated parent at trial should be addressed at the arraignment or advisory hearing.
- **Platform Used:** The court uses Zoom for remote appearances.
- **Platform Meeting ID#:** Meeting ID#: 829 4976 6513; No password is required.
- **Requirements:** Enable your camera when you attend and put in your name and title if applicable.
- **Technology Needs:** Zoom may be downloaded free of charge for IOS and Android devices, and it may also be accessed via desktop computer. If you do not have access to an iPhone, iPad or similar computer audio/video technology, then you may call in at scheduled time of your hearing by calling: +1-305-224-1968 US. The phone dial-in and Meeting ID may be utilized from any landline, cellular or internet phone.

D. Submission of Orders and Judgments

- **Format:** All proposed orders must be submitted in PDF format unless otherwise instructed by the Court. All proposed orders must be accompanied by a cover letter either (1) certifying that all parties agree to the order or (2) containing a statement identifying any disagreement of the parties as to the proposed order.
- **Submission Method:** Through the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal.
- **Deadline for Submissions:** Proposed orders must be submitted within 10 days after any hearing.
- **Stipulated Motions and Orders:** If all parties stipulate to a motion, no hearing is necessary. The motion must be filed with the Clerk and an agreed order submitted to the Court through the E-Portal. The order title must begin with “Agreed” or “Stipulated”. If the Court requires a hearing on a stipulated motion, the parties will be notified by the judicial assistant.
- **Modifications of Placement:** Modifications of placement must be authorized by court order. If the motion is agreed to, a stipulated order may be submitted.

E. Courtesy Copies of Case Law and Other Documents

- **Format:** Courtesy copies of case law must be submitted to the court at least before any evidentiary proceeding.
- **Format:** PDF or Word.
- **Submission Method:** E-mail to the division email account.
- **Deadline for Submissions:** No later than three days before any evidentiary proceeding.

F. Emergency and Other Urgent Matters

- **Requirements:** If a party believes there is a factual basis for setting an emergency hearing, an emergency 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. The motion must contain "Emergency" in the title. The motion must be sent to the judicial assistant after filing.
- **Scheduling:** Contact the judicial assistant for scheduling. The Court endeavors to hear emergencies within 1 business day. If time is not available on the Court's calendar, the Court may require that the emergency motion be placed on the juvenile shelter docket.

G. Exhibits for Evidentiary Proceedings

- **Submission Method:** Exhibits must be submitted to the clerk of court in paper format. 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.
- **Format:** Paper format. Use the Clerk's Label. Exhibits must be labeled in the following format: 'Petitioner 1', 'GAL 1', 'Mother 1', 'Father 1', etc.
- **Deadline for Submissions:** Exhibits must be brought to the hearing.
- **Disclosure of Exhibits:** The Court expects, as a matter of professionalism, that, absent exceptional circumstances, copies of all exhibits intended to be used in an evidentiary proceeding will be disclosed to the opposing parties sufficiently in advance of the proceeding to enable the party to review the exhibits and be prepared to address any objections.

H. Pretrial Procedures and Conferences

- **Judicial Reviews:** Judicial reviews are conducted approximately every 5-6 months. The first judicial review in the case will be conducted in division. Subsequent judicial reviews will be referred for hearing to a general magistrate. At judicial reviews, the Court will address services for the children, placement of the children, compliance with any case plan, and visitation.
- **Status Conference:** Any party may request a status conference when a case requires by contacting the judicial assistant with a hearing request. A notice of hearing must be filed for the status conference. The notice must identify the subject matters to be discussed. If a motion is to be heard, the motion must be identified.
- **Pretrial Conferences:** Pursuant to Fla. R. Juv. P. 8.510(b), the Court will conduct a pretrial status conference before an adjudicatory hearing on a petition for termination of parental rights. The Court may also, in its discretion, set pretrial status conferences before adjudicatory hearings on dependency petitions. Parties should be prepared to address: the length of the trial, number of witnesses, scheduling, status of discovery, witness availability, stipulations, and the possibility of settlement. The Court will accept consents to petitions at the pretrial conference.
- **Mediation:** At the parties' request, the Court may order the parties to participate in mediation prior to a pretrial conference.
- **Trial Call/Docket Sounding:** The Thursday or Friday before the Court's trial week, usually on Friday, the Court conducts a trial call and docket sounding where all cases scheduled for trial the following week are called to appear before the Court. Parents must appear in person for these hearings unless permission from the Court for them to appear by other means is granted at the pretrial conference. Unless excused by the Court, the failure of a parent to appear in person at the trial call will be considered a consent to the petition by non-appearance. Voluntary consents will be accepted by personal appearance at the trial call. The Court will schedule all cases going forward during the following week at the trial call and will advise all parties of the trial date(s) and time(s) the following week. Witnesses should be available during the entire trial week. Counsel should be prepared to address any specific witness availability issues at the trial call. Counsel should be prepared to address any scheduling conflicts at the trial call. If a parent fails to appear for the scheduled trial on a petition for termination of parental rights or voluntarily surrenders parental rights, the Court may, if time is available, proceed with hearing testimony on manifest best interests pursuant to Section 39.810, Florida Statutes.

I. Setting Case for Trial

- **Procedure:** Adjudicatory hearings on dependency petitions will be set for trial at arraignment. Adjudicatory hearings on petitions for termination of parental rights will be set at the advisory hearing. Parties will be notified of pretrial conference and trial dates at that time. If the parties are requesting a trial be specially set outside the Court's regular trial weeks, that matter should be raised at the arraignment or advisory hearing.
- **Notice Period:** Parents must be advised in person or on Zoom of trial dates, including any continued trial dates. The court does not typically set date-certain trials. At the arraignment or advisory hearing, the court will assign cases to trial docket sounding for the following week. The Court will set cases for a specific date during the trial week at the trial docket sounding. Attorneys, self-represented litigants, parties, and witnesses are expected to be available during the entire trial week.

J. Trial Procedures

- **Conduct of Trial:** All trials are conducted by the Court in person without a jury, using the rules of evidence applicable in civil cases.
- **Exhibits:** Exhibits should be pre-marked using the labels required by the Clerk of Court.
- **Legal Authority:** Must be provided to the Court 3 business days in advance of the trial.
- **Remote Appearance of Witnesses:** All witnesses must appear in person unless the Court grants permission for the witness to appear by Zoom.

K. Adoptions

- Petitions for adoption of dependent children filed with the Clerk of Court are reviewed by court staff for completeness before being referred to the judge's chambers for final review. Please ensure all required filings, consents, home study, etc. are filed with the petition.
- Parties not requesting an in-person adoption hearing may, upon receiving permission from the judicial assistant, upload a final judgment of adoption in the adoption case and order terminating jurisdiction of the child in the dependency case to the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal.
- Parties requesting an in-person adoption hearing must schedule the hearing through the judicial assistant. Before the hearing, please upload

a final judgment of adoption in the adoption case and order terminating jurisdiction of the child in the dependency case to the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal.

L. Forms

- **See Forms Page**

M. Other Division Procedures

- **ADA Accommodations:** If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodations in order to participate in a proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact the ADA Coordinator, Hillsborough County Courthouse, 800 E. Twiggs St. Room 604, Tampa, FL, 33602, (813) 272-7040, at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.
- **Interpreter Requests:** If an interpreter is needed for a hearing or trial, please contact the judicial assistant.
- **Prisoner Transport:** The Court will permit Zoom attendance for all pretrial hearings. Attorneys for the Department of Children and Families will make arrangements for prisoner Zoom attendance with the jail or correctional facility. Absent exceptional circumstances, prisoners must be transported to the Court for trials. Attorneys for the Department of Children and Families will make arrangements for prisoner transport with the jail or correctional facility.