



**JUDICIAL PRACTICE PREFERENCES FOR FAMILY LAW DIVISION SECTION 14**  
(LAST MODIFIED JANUARY 8, 2025)

**Contact Information**

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<b>Address</b>	Pinellas County Courthouse 315 Court Street, Room 413 Clearwater, FL 33756
<b>Telephone</b>	(727) 464-3594
<b>E-mail</b>	section14@jud6.org
<b>Office Hours</b>	Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The office is closed for lunch from NOON until 1:00 p.m.

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**A. Communication with the Judicial Office**

Please note that the Judicial Assistant CANNOT answer your legal questions, nor give you legal advice, nor explain your situation to the Judge. Your opportunity to speak to the Judge happens in Court only. Please do NOT send e-mails to the Court's Judicial Assistant trying to discuss the merits and/or substance of your case, as the Court cannot consider same.

**1. Method of Communication:**

The preferred form of communication with our office is via e-mail to [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org).

Unless excused from e-service, all attorneys and self-represented parties (someone not represented by an attorney in the case) are required to designate an e-mail address for e-service of all pleadings, motions, correspondence, orders, and judgments. Should a change in designated e-mail address(es) be necessary, self-represented parties should use Form 2.603.

E-mails to the judicial office should include all other parties (or their attorney(s) if represented) in order to avoid any concerns for *ex parte* communications in the subject line of any e-mail to the judicial office must contain the case number, name, and relevant matter (e.g. 24-012345-FD, Doe v. Smith, 1 hour hearing request). E-mails should copy all parties (or their counsel if represented) to prevent any concerns of *ex parte* communication. The Judicial Assistant will "reply all" with multiple dates/times for consideration as soon as possible, and the participants should then confer and agree upon at least 2 of the provided options **with this discussion NOT being conducted in the e-mail thread including the Court's Judicial Assistant.**

Communications via telephone to (727) 464-3594 is not preferred, and should be limited primarily to attorneys and/or self-represented parties whom have been excused from e-mail e-service. Please do NOT call and e-mail about the same request.

The judicial office does not accept text messages.

**2. Ex Parte Communication:**

*Ex Parte* communications are any communications to the Court to which all parties are not participatory. 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 of the parties concerning a pending or impending proceeding unless authorized by



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law. As such, all parties **must** be copied on any e-mail directed to the judicial office, unless an *ex parte* communication is authorized by law.

**3. Unsolicited Communications:**

Parties may only contact the judicial office in accordance with these procedures and instructions. Unsolicited communications from non-parties will not be considered by the Court.

**4. E-Filing Portal Contact Information:**

All attorneys and self-represented litigants must make and receive service by e-mail, which is generally through the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal, unless excused from same pursuant to Rule 2.516, Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. More information on the Florida Courts E-filing Portal may be found online at [www.myflcourtaccess.com](http://www.myflcourtaccess.com)

**5. Response to Inquiries:**

The Judicial Assistant is not authorized to provide legal advice. The Judicial Assistant strives to substantively respond to all inquiries within one (1) business day, however due to the volume of the case load in this section that is not always possible. Please do not send a follow up e-mail seeking the dates/times unless at least two (2) business days have passed without receiving a response from the Judicial Assistant.

When the Judicial Assistant is out of the office for one day or longer, your message will be acknowledged as received with an indication of when to expect a substantive response and an alternate contact for immediate assistance for emergency matters.

**B. Scheduling Procedures**

**1. Attorneys Seeking 30 minutes or less of Hearing time:**

Attorneys should use the Judicial Automated Workflow System (JAWS) for purposes of attempting to coordinate and set hearings of 30 minutes or less in length. These online requests should only be made after coordination with all participants, and then once made will be reviewed online via the Judicial Assistant. Only after receiving approval of the request should a participant then draft, file, and serve (or e-serve when appropriate) a notice setting such hearing, and thereafter provide a courtesy copy of such notice to the Court's Judicial Assistant at [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org).

Please keep in mind that ANY contested and/or evidentiary hearing – regardless of length – is presumptively to be held as an entirely IN PERSON proceeding, and no remote appearances for same will be provided except for potentially pursuant to the Court's



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discretion to permit the use of audio-video communication technology upon written motion demonstrating good cause pursuant to Rule 2.530, Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin.

Attorneys are requested to please **NOT** call nor e-mail the Judicial Assistant seeking additional hearing dates/times of 30 minutes or less in length unless you are invited to by the Court (such as in an Emergency Motion Handling Order). Instead, merely coordinate the hearing with all parties to case, then reserve the agreed upon date/time from those available on JAWS (and upon approval of your selected date/time by the Judicial Assistant through JAWS, draft and file an appropriate *Notice of Hearing* setting the matter for hearing and noticing all parties).

Blocks of time commonly available on JAWS include:

- UMC/UNC (Uniform Motion Calendar/Uncontested Hearing Calendar) – which should be used for hearings of 5-6 minutes which either do NOT require evidentiary consideration, such as a Motion to Withdraw, resolving scheduling issues, or only proving up jurisdictional testimony for an UNContested Final Hearing. **Disputed/evidentiary hearings – including Motions to Compel and/or seeking contempt, should not be scheduled on the UMC docket.**
- 15 minute or 30 minute blocks of time. These blocks of time **may not** be combined without prior approval by the Court.

**2. Self-represented parties seeking Hearing Time of less than 60 minutes;  
and Attorneys seeking Hearing Time of 31 - 60 minutes:**

As self-represented parties are not currently able to establish accounts with JAWS to seek to schedule hearing time before the Court, any and all requests for hearing time from a self-represented party should be made via e-mail to the Judicial Assistant at [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org) and in conformity with these Practice Preferences.

Attorneys seeking 31-60 minutes of hearing time should also remit such requests to the judicial office via e-mail to [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org).

ALL hearings more than 30 minutes in length are presumptively entirely IN PERSON proceedings and no remote appearances for same will be provided except for potentially pursuant to the Court's discretion to permit the use of audio-video communication technology upon written motion demonstrating good cause pursuant to Rule 2.530, Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin.



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**3. Hearing time greater than one (1) hour:**

Due to the need to coordinate calendars amongst the parties, Counsel, and the Court – while balancing out the hearing time needs of the case load pending before this section and the due process rights of the litigants, the most efficient way to coordinate and schedule any hearing greater than one (1) hour in length is via a scheduling and/or Case Management Conference. This allows the Court to differentiate the case as needed for such hearing, including setting deadlines, etc. Should a party have any expert witnesses they seek to participate in such a hearing, it is the responsibility of the party seeking to offer such expert to insure that the expert (or a person from the Expert’s office with access to the Expert’s calendar) attends the Case Management Conference.

**4. Notice of Hearing:**

It is very important that any hearing set before the Court, unless an order has been entered setting the hearing, has a separate NOTICE OF HEARING filed and sent to all parties to the case, in order to afford everyone their due process right to notice and an opportunity to be heard. Please make sure any notices setting hearings for civil contempt and/or enforcement of support issues include the language required to comply with Rule 12.615, Fla. Fam. L. R. P. and *Turner v. Rogers*, 546 U.S. 431, 131 S. Ct. 2507 (2011). Courtesy copies of all notices of hearing, as well as all notices cancelling hearings, are requested to be sent to the undersigned’s judicial assistant at [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org).

**For hearings held in person**, please make sure that your notice includes the date, time, and how much time is reserved for the hearing, a detailed listing of what specific motion(s) are set to be heard during the hearing (including the title of the motion to be heard and when the motion was filed), and the full address of the courthouse, including what courtroom the hearing will be held in, as there are five (5) courthouses within the Sixth Judicial Circuit (with three (3) of those courthouses in Pinellas County, and two (2) of those courthouses located in the city of Clearwater). Hearings in Family Law Section 14 are typically held in the **Pinellas County Courthouse located in downtown Clearwater (the Clearwater Courthouse), located at 315 Court Street, Clearwater, FL 33756**. Hearings may be held in chambers (courtroom 413) or in Courtroom A, B, C, or D, depending upon availability and scheduling, as those four (4) courtrooms are shared by the eight (8) judges assigned to the Clearwater Courthouse. Please check with the judicial assistant to find out which courtroom to include in your notice, if you are uncertain.

**For hearings held remotely via Zoom**, the preferred format of the notice of hearing is:



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THIS CAUSE is set for a hearing upon *(name of motion/pleading to be heard)*

to be held on *(date)* \_\_\_\_\_ at *(time)* \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ *(specify)* \_\_\_ a.m. / or  
\_\_\_ p.m. before the undersigned Circuit Judge. *(length of hearing reserved)*  
\_\_\_\_\_ is/are reserved for this hearing.

No account is necessary on Zoom to participate, and the parties may participate by going to <http://www.Zoom.us/> and click the link to "Join a Meeting" at the scheduled date/time set forth above using the following Meeting ID: \_\_\_\_\_ and passcode: \_\_\_\_\_. Persons participating in the Zoom hearing without a computer, tablet, i-pad, or smartphone having audio and visual capabilities and a high speed internet connection may appear telephonically for the Zoom hearing by calling (646) 558-8656, (301) 715-8592, or (253) 215-8782 and using the same meeting ID and passcode, however if the Court will not be able to see and hear the participant simultaneously then the Court will not be able to administer an oath to the participant and the participant will NOT be permitted to testify at the hearing unless s/he has with them a Notary Public, or other person authorized to administer an oath, from the jurisdiction where the participant is physically present at the time of the hearing.

**5. Cancelling Hearings:**

If a hearing has been set by notice (and not by an order from the Court), the same may only be cancelled by the party who prepared, filed, and served the notice setting that hearing, which person may cancel same simply by filing a cancellation of same and serving such notice of cancellation on all other parties to that hearing – OR by order of the Court. A party who files such a notice of cancellation should provide the judicial office with a courtesy copy of same via e-mail to [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org) only AFTER the notice of cancellation has been filed with the Clerk of the Circuit Court and served on all other parties to that hearing.

If a hearing has been set by an order of the Court, the hearing may only be cancelled by an order of the Court cancelling the hearing, and the filing of a notice cancelling the hearing by a party does shall NOT cancel the hearing.

**C. Remote Appearances**

Pursuant to Rule 2.530, Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin., absent good cause and/or determination by the Court otherwise, ALL NON-EVIDENTIARY HEARINGS SCHEDULED FOR 30 MINUTES OR LESS held in Family Law Section 14 are presumptively held with all participants appearing remotely, using audio-video



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communication technology, via Zoom video conferencing.

If any hearing is evidentiary (including the taking of testimony), contested, and/or scheduled for longer than 30 minutes, **all such hearings are presumptively entirely IN PERSON proceedings**, to be held with all participants (the parties, their counsel, any witnesses, and any court reporter and/or interpreter(s)) appearing in physical person before the Court and not appearing remotely using any form of audio-video communication technology, unless the Court finds or directs otherwise. Any and all requests to allow any person(s) to appear remotely using audio-video communication technology SHALL (must) be in written motion (and not via mere e-mail) and provide the necessary information for consideration of the factors set forth in Rule 2.530, Fla. R. Jud. Admin., including but not limited to the following necessary information:

- (1) Why should the testimony be allowed in the specific form requested; and
- (2) If each party consents to the form requested; and
- (3) The anticipated duration of the testimony; and
- (4) The geographic location of the witness; and
- (5) Facts supporting any claimed cost and/or inconvenience to requiring the physical presence of the witness/party at the hearing; and
- (6) Any other matter relevant to the request to appear remotely.

Courtesy copies of the motion to allow a remote appearance (after the motion has been filed and imaged by the Clerk of the Circuit Court) should be sent to the undersigned's judicial assistant at [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org).

Parties shall have ten (10) days from the date of filing and service of motions to appear remotely within which to file and serve any objections to the requested remote appearance, which objections must include: the specific reasons why the party objects to the request. A courtesy copy of the objection(s) should also be sent to the Court's judicial assistant at [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org).

If/when a remote hearing is permitted by the Court the Court's Judicial Assistant will provide the Zoom Meeting ID and Passcode to be used for noticing such hearing(s).

**Mere convenience of counsel for the parties is typically NOT good cause to permit a remote appearance by a party or their counsel.**

**D. Continuances**

Motions for continuance are disfavored and will be granted only upon good cause shown.



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Successive continuances are highly disfavored. Except for good cause shown, the motion MUST be signed by the party requesting the continuance as required by Rule 2.545(e), Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud Admin.

Motions for continuance must state with specificity: (1) the basis of the need for the continuance, including when the basis became known to the movant; (2) whether the motion is opposed; (3) the action and specific dates for the action that will enable the movant to be ready – including but not limited to confirming the specific date any required participants are available; and (4) the proposed date by which the case will be ready to proceed and whether that date is agreed by all parties.

Attorneys whom are making an appearance in a case AFTER the matter has already been set for hearing which has been pending for a significant period of time and the lawyer anticipates requesting a continuance based upon being newly hired and/or retained to represent a party at such hearing, such counsel is/are reminded of the language of *Merino v. Powell*, 325 So.3d 960 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA, 2021) which held “When a lawyer steps into a case in this posture, he or she should expect to proceed to trial immediately. If that is unacceptable, he or she should not take the case.”

**E. Submission of Orders and Judgments**

Due to the case load volume in Family Law Section 14, whenever possible the Court orally pronounces ruling at the conclusion of a Case Management Conference, motion hearing, and/or trial, then assigns counsel for one of the participants present with the task of drafting a proposed order in conformity with the Court’s oral pronouncement for consideration and entry by the Court. When an attorney is tasked with such responsibility it is expected that the proposed Order will be provided to the Court for entry **within 14 days of the conclusion of the hearing**. This allows up to one (1) week to draft same and remit the proposed order to the opposing party (or their counsel if represented) for review, with the non-drafting party to have up to five (5) days to review same and respond with any objections to the proposed order as drafted, then provide the parties another two (2) days to resolve any language differences to thereafter timely remit same for consideration and potential entry by the Court. Any objections to the proposed order must be specific in nature and provide alternate language for the disputed item(s) which the objecting party believes more accurately reflects the Court’s oral pronouncement. If no objections are timely raised, it will be understood the non-drafting party has no objection to the form and substance of the drafted proposed order properly reflecting the Court’s oral pronouncement.



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Agreed upon Orders should be uploaded by counsel on JAWS in .pdf or .pdfa formatting in the Work Queue for the Judge's signature, with a cover letter uploaded indicating the parties have agreed to the form and substance of same if the signatures of the parties and/or their counsel are not already included in the uploaded proposed order,

If the form/substance of an order is not agreed upon, then it may only be uploaded on JAWS for consideration IF the cover letter includes clear detail as to what specifically is objected to by the opposing party and what alternate language the opposing party requests (which may be accomplished by attaching the thread of emails detailing same, a red-lined version detailing the specific language disputes etc.) OR that the proposed order was remitted to the other party for consideration on X date and more than five (5) days have passed since that time without receipt of any objections to the proposed order.

At the time of uploading any proposed order for consideration by the Court on JAWS, the uploading person is reminded to double check on JAWS that all parties (or their counsel if the party is represented) have their designated e-mail address(es) included on JAWS for distribution of the potentially electronically rendered order or judgment.

Otherwise, disputed orders should not be uploaded on JAWS for entry by the Court and the disputed proposed order should be submitted to the Court in WORD formatting (97-2003 preferred) via e-mail to the judicial office at [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org).

Submission of proposed orders by paper / hard copies, is discouraged, but if/when that happens then the submitting party is reminded of the need for that person to also include sufficient copies and pre-addressed envelopes (with appropriate postage) for distribution of the ultimate order to all parties.

**E. Courtesy Copies of Documents**

The Court has access to an electronic record. The Clerk does not maintain a paper file. Please submit courtesy copies of *Notices of Hearing* and *Notices of Cancellation of Hearing* to the Court via e-mail to the Judicial Assistant at [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org). No other documents that have been e-filed (Pre-Trial Memorandum etc.) need to be copied to the Court, unless specifically requested by the Judge.

**F. Emergency and Other Urgent Matters**

**Parties and/or Counsel seeking emergency relief are expected to** read, review and be familiar with *Smith v. Crider*, 932 So.2d 393 (Fla. 2<sup>nd</sup> DCA, 2006), *Loudermilk v. Loudermilk*, 693 So.2d 666 (Fla. 2<sup>nd</sup> DCA, 2007) and Rule 12.605, Fla. Fam. L. R. P.,



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prior to the filing of any request for emergency, expedited and/or *ex parte* relief.

All Emergency Motions must be filed with the Clerk of Court **prior** to being reviewed by the Court for determination of if the motion warrants emergency status. Only after the motion has been filed with, and imaged by, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, should the movant should send an e-mail to [section14@jud6.org](mailto:section14@jud6.org) with a copy of the emergency motion (including the Clerk's manual or electronic stamp indicating when the motion was filed) for consideration. Please note that simply marking a filing as an emergency on the State's E-filing Portal does not timely provide a copy of the motion to Judge for consideration.

The Court strives to enter an Emergency Motion Handling Order within 24 hours (or 1 business day) of receipt of the Emergency Motion which may: enter an order granting the requested relief without notice and setting a return hearing; unilaterally schedule and set an emergency or expedited hearing upon the motion; set an expedited Case Management Conference; allow a hearing to be set and direct the moving party to contact the Judicial Assistant for available dates/times; direct a party to file a written response; deem the matter not an emergency, to be handled in the regular course of business; or take other appropriate action – including admonishing or sanctioning a moving party for improper use and/or abuse of the emergency motion process.

**G. Exhibits for Evidentiary Proceedings**

As all evidentiary hearings are presumptively in person, **unless directed otherwise by the Court** exhibits should be brought to the hearing and not provided to the Court in advance of the hearing. Unless specifically directed to provide same, exhibits should not be sent to the Court in electronic formatting as there is presently no effective mechanism in place for electronic rendition of exhibits from a hearing to the Clerk of the Circuit Court.

Unless the hearing is being heard on an emergent or expedited basis where time does not permit, the parties (or their counsel if represented) are expected to meet and confer at least two (2) business days in advance of the hearing about what exhibits will be presented at the hearing and strive to put together Joint Hearing Binders, wherein they organize all of the potential exhibits in the same order, and divide the exhibits into three sections.

- Section I should be all exhibits that no party has any legal objection to the admissibility of the exhibit.
- Section II should be any exhibits that the Petitioner seeks to admit that the



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Respondent has some legal objection to the admissibility of the exhibit.

- Section III should be any exhibits that the Respondent seeks to admit that the Petitioner has some legal objection to the admissibility of the exhibit.

All exhibits should include sufficient space for the Court to be able to stamp with a stamp to receive same into evidence (if the document is ultimately admitted into same), and ideally (particularly with any pictures/photographs) should include some sticker already including the Case Number on sticker and providing at least 2.5" x 1.5" of clear space for the Court to stamp same into evidence.

All attorneys and self-represented parties must bring sufficient copies of each exhibit or Joint Hearing Binder for each party and the Court to be able to review same during the hearing or trial. Typically this involves at least four (4) copies – one for each party, one for the Court (to be potentially rendered to the Clerk), and one for the witness stand.

Pursuant to multiple Family Law Rules, any pleadings or other documents with the Clerk of the Court are required to comply with the minimization of sensitive information requirements of Rule 2.425, Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. **Accordingly the parties are reminded that any exhibits provided to the Court for potential rendition to the Clerk must be minimized prior to providing that exhibit to the Court at the hearing.**

Parties should generally not file discovery documents nor exhibits with the Clerk of the Circuit Court in advance of a hearing intending those documents to be used at a hearing. Those filings do not somehow automatically become part of the record at the hearing, places a needless burden on the Clerk of the Circuit Court, and potentially exposes the parties' personal information to public exposure as the Clerk's records are public records generally viewable by all persons. There are multiple Family Law Rules seeking to prohibit the filing of same – including documents exchanged in Mandatory Disclosure exchanges other than the Financial Affidavit and Certificate of Compliance (see Rule 12.285(3), Fla. Fam. L. R. P.).

**H. Pre-Trial Conferences, Procedures, and Setting Cases for Trial**

A Pre-Trial Conference will be required for any Final Hearing by Non-Jury Trial which is expected to take three (3) hours or more of the Court's time. In most cases a Case Management Conference is necessary to set a Pre-Trial Conference as the Court will enter an Order Setting Pre-Trial Conference which requires the parties to draft and file an appropriate Pre-Trial Memorandum – including exhibits such as a proposed Equitable Distribution Worksheet, Proposed Parenting Plan, Proposed Child Support Guidelines,



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Witness List, Exhibit List, and other documents - in advance of the Pre-Trial Conference. Accordingly, it is recommended that a party schedule a Case Management Conference pursuant to Rule 12.200, Fla. Fam. L. R. P. after they have filed their Notice for Trial pursuant to Rule 12.440, Fla. Fam. L. R. P. in order to aid in the differentiation of the handling of your case.

Pre-Trial Conferences are typically scheduled for 30-60 minutes in length (depending upon the number and depth of issues involved) and no motions will be heard at the Pre-Trial Conference without prior approval of the Court. The parties, and counsel if represented, must attend the Pre-Trial Conference. If the parties anticipate relying upon any expert's testimony at the final hearing then the expert(s) or someone from the expert's office with access and authority on the expert(s)' calendar should also be present for the conference. As the Court typically imposes discovery deadlines and requirements associated with the Final Hearing at the Pre-Trial Conference, so the parties, counsel, and any experts involved must bring and/or have full access to their calendars to the Pre-Trial Conference.

**I. Other Division Procedures**

**1. Adoptions / Name Changes:** Adoption files and Name Changes are reviewed by the Court's Staff Attorney prior to any final hearings being scheduled. If you believe your case is ready to set for final hearing, e-mail [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org) with the case number so that we may verify the status with the Staff Attorney. You will be notified by the Staff Attorney if additional documentation is needed; or you will be notified by e-mail from the Judicial Assistant with dates/times available for a final hearing. **All final hearings involving adoptions of minor children MUST have a court reporter present.** The Court does not provide a court reporter for the proceedings.

**2. Attorney's Fees:** Prior to any attorney's fee hearing, the attorneys should exchange affidavits outlining the reasonable number of hours requested and the reasonable hourly fee. They should also make arrangements to meet prior to the hearing to discuss resolution and allow each other to talk with opposing experts (if applicable). Fee affidavits are sufficient in lieu of expert testimony IF all parties agree to their use. All fee awards must meet the requirement of *Florida Patients' Compensation Funds v. Rowe*, 472 So.2d 1145 (Fla. 1985).

For Attorney's Fees / Costs requests exceeding \$50,000.00, or upon request of a party or upon the Court's initiative in requests below that threshold, upon scheduling a hearing upon a party's Motion for Award of Attorney's Fees and Taxation of Costs, the Court will enter an Order Setting Final Evidentiary Hearing On Attorney's Fees and Costs; Referring



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Parties to Mediation on Amount of Fees & Costs; and Establishing Pre-Hearing Requirements setting forth detailed requirements for the consideration of the motion.

**3. Case Management Conferences:** Case Management Conferences are encouraged by the Court as a mechanism for differentiated handling of individual cases. The Court may set Case Management Conferences on its own, or at the request of a party, to address matters as set forth in Rule 12.200, Fla. Fam. L. R. P.

Unless otherwise agreed to by the parties in advance, the individual parties are expected to attend, and will not be excused from attending, the first Case Management Conference in their case (the initial Case Management Conferences are typically held remotely through Zoom unless directed otherwise by the Court).

If the parties are in agreement with the need for a Case Management Conference, a party may schedule and coordinate a 15 or 30 minute Case Management Conference on JAWS without need of the filing of a motion seeking same.

In a Dissolution of Marriage action, at a Case Management Conference, upon request of a party, or upon the Court's own initiative, the jurisdictional testimony may be elicited and an order confirming the jurisdiction of the Court may be entered.

**4. Digital Recording / Court Reporters:** A digital court reporter is *only* provided by the Court for injunction proceedings, criminal contempt issues (orders to show cause), and terminations of parental right hearings. The Court does not provide a court reporter or digital recording for any other proceeding and it is the responsibility of the party desiring such reporting to arrange for a Court Reporter to be present for whatever hearing they believe a Court Reporter is necessary, and to be responsible for the payment for the court reporter's services (subject to later reallocation by the court if an appropriate motion seeking same is filed and approved by the court).

A court reporter is required for any adoption case involving minor children.

**5.** If you do not have a lawyer, then you are a pro se litigant or self-represented party: **The Judicial Assistant CANNOT answer your legal questions, and will not explain your situation to the Judge. Your opportunity to speak to the Judge happens in Court only.** Although not expected to be as skilled and knowledgeable as lawyers, all "self-represented" parties (also known as "pro se" litigants) are nevertheless subject to all laws and Rules of Court procedure that apply to a lawyer. Judges, and their assistants, are forbidden from giving any advice or help to unrepresented parties. Judges, and their assistants, must remain neutral and impartial. A self-represented party is



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authorized to contact the Judge's office in the same manner as an attorney's office as set forth in these preferences. Personal visits to the Judge's office are discouraged as it disrupts the working routine in the office, leads to concerns about *ex parte* communications, and hoists an increased burden upon courthouse security.

The Clerk of Court has a Self Help Program for self-represented litigants in the Clearwater Courthouse, phone (727) 464-5150, 315 Court Street, Clearwater, FL 33756. The program staff is not the lawyer for the self-represented party, nor are they legal advisors or secretarial services for the self-represented party.

- Gulfcoast Legal Services can be reached at (727) 443-0657 in Clearwater and (727) 821-0726 in St. Petersburg.
- Bay Area Legal Services is available at (800) 625-2257.
- Community Law Program in St. Petersburg can be reached at (727) 582-7480.

Lawyer referral services can be contacted through:

the Clearwater Bar Association at (727) 461-4880; and  
the St. Petersburg Bar Associations at (727) 821-5450.

**6. Mediation:** Pursuant to local Administrative Order No.: [2011-006 PA/PI-CIR](#) all post judgment matters **and** temporary support matters are automatically referred to mediation prior to a hearing on the matter. Parties seeking to set nor schedule a hearing upon any motion or petition (whether initial, supplemental, temporary or Final) seeking to establish and/or modify parental responsibility, time-sharing and/or support issues **MUST** first set and schedule mediation upon said motion/petition and be able to advise the Court's judicial assistant as to the scheduled date of same, as no hearings upon such requests will be scheduled without attending such mediation absent specific order of the Court permitting same.

The following hearings may be scheduled without prior mediation: civil contempt or enforcement of support; discovery related issues (seeking to compel production, objections to discovery/interrogatories, etc.); motions directed to the pleadings (seeking to amend, strike, default, dismiss, set aside, etc.); uncontested matters (name change, dissolution, etc.); and where the Court has entered an order allowing an exception based upon a hardship, emergency or other exigent circumstances pursuant to a written motion filed with the Court.

**7. Motion to Withdraw:** If a client, or opposing party, objects to the withdrawal of an attorney, the Motion to Withdraw should be set for hearing during a UMC docket or 15 minute hearing time on the Judge's calendar through JAWS. The motion, and the notice setting hearing, must certify service upon the client via regular U.S. Mail unless



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the client has designated an e-mail address for e-service upon him/her-self, and the motion must comply with the provisions Rule 2.505(f)(1), Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. by setting forth the reason for the withdrawal and the client's last known address, telephone number, including area code, and e-mail address. The proposed Order Granting Motion to Withdraw shall not specify any abatement of activity in the case, however it shall (must) recite the client's full contact information as set forth in the motion.

**8. Notice of Final Disposition:** It is the responsibility of the party providing the proposed order/final judgment (or the moving party if the Court is drafting the order/final judgment) to draft and file the Notice of Final Disposition with the Clerk of the Court upon entry of the order/final judgment disposing of the matters pending before the Court.

**9. Parenting Class:** In all cases involving the initial establishment/determination of Parental Responsibility and Timesharing of minor children the parties are each required to attend a 4-hour Parent Education & Family Stabilization Course pursuant to § 61.21, Fla. Stat., and file a certificate of completion of the course with the Clerk of the Court prior to the entry of the Final Judgment. Pursuant to § 61.21(5), Fla. Stat. all parties are required to complete the parenting class as expeditiously as possible, and unless excused by the Court the Petitioner must complete the course within 45 days after the filing of the initial petition and the Respondent must complete the course within 45 days of receiving service of process of the initial petition (or 45 days of adjudication of paternity). **Any and all persons required to take the 4-hour Parent Education and Family Stabilization course may attend the parenting class online or via distance learning without need of any motion seeking, or order granting, permission to do so, for cases pending in Family Law Section 14.** A list of providers of the [Required Courses for Parents](#) may be found through this link, or on the [www.jud6.org](http://www.jud6.org) website under "Self Representation"

**10. Relocation:** Pursuant to § 61.13001(10), Fla. Stat., the Court affords special accommodation to schedule hearings on relocation requests – both temporary and final – on an expedited basis **provided the moving party has complied with all other requirements for seeking relief INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION THE REQUIREMENT TO SCHEDULE AND ATTEND MEDIATION PRIOR TO SEEKING HEARING TIME WITH THE COURT.** The failure of a party to abide by the strict requirements of the statute, as well as the requirements of the local Administrative Orders and the Practice Preferences of this section SHALL be deemed a waiver of any specific time requirements of the Statute.



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If a party is seeking to invoke the statutory provision entitling him/her to an expedited hearing upon a Motion to Permit Temporary Relocation, then the moving party shall also file a Motion for Referral to Mediation with the Clerk of the Court, along with an [Affidavit for Establishing Mediation Fees](#) and must provide a copy of both motions (with the Clerk's stamp reflecting the date/time of filing of same) to the Judge's Judicial Assistant via e-mail to [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org). Upon receipt of same the Court will set and conduct an expedited Case Management Conference to differentiate the handling of the action.

If a party is seeking to invoke the statutory provision entitling him/her to an expedited final hearing upon the Petition to Permit Relocation With Minor Child(ren), then **immediately** upon the filing of the Notice For Trial (certifying that the pursuant to Rule 12.440, Fla. Fam. L. R. P. the matter is ripe for and ready to be set for trial), the moving party must provide a copy of the Notice to the Judge's Judicial Assistant via e-mail to [Section14@jud6.org](mailto:Section14@jud6.org) with request for an expedited Case Management Conference to differentiate the handling of the action and schedule same.

**11. Temporary Relief:** For temporary relief matters, ALL temporary motions (i.e. custody, visitation, support, etc.) must be mediated prior to a hearing being held. The parties do NOT need to wait until the mediation actually occurs until they seek to schedule the temporary relief hearing, but they must have a date/time coordinated, set, scheduled, and notice for the mediation prior to seeking to coordinate the temporary relief hearing. Temporary relief hearings are typically scheduled for one (1) hour of time, unless additional time is sought by a party and thereafter permitted and coordinated at a Case Management Conference by the Court. Due to the time limitations involved, the parties are encouraged to agree and/or stipulate upon as many issues/facts as possible and/or to otherwise expedite their presentations of evidence to help resolve the issues. As temporary relief hearings are, by their very nature, typically contested and evidentiary, all such hearings are presumptively set, scheduled, and noticed to be held as entirely in person proceedings before the Court.