



**The Circuit Court**  
for the Tenth Judicial Circuit of Michigan

**DARNELL JACKSON**  
CHIEF JUDGE, SAGINAW COUNTY

Telephone  
**(989) 790-5488**

TO MEMBERS OF THE SAGINAW COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION:

Over the past few months, I have met with Judge Jim Borchard, Tara Hofmeister, Director of Friend of The Court (FOC) and members of the Saginaw County Domestic Relations Bar to work out a protocol for Referee Hearings through the FOC. I am providing you all with an outline of the procedures that will be followed. They will take effect immediately. I am pleased to say that these procedures are the result of a truly collaborative effort of all involved. And I would like to particularly thank Renee Brisbois, Beth McGrandy and Colin Dill for their participation and input.

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**INTERNAL OPERATING PROCEDURE – FRIEND OF THE COURT  
REFEREE HEARING POLICY**

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**PURPOSE:** To provide protocol on how Referee hearings will be conducted to ensure that all Referees conduct their hearings in a consistent manner.

**PROCEDURE:**

- **Pre-judgment matters – DM & DC cases**
  1. Once a case is filed, a Settlement Conference will be scheduled with a Referee based upon the first letter of the father's last name, using the same timeframe that was used for FIG conferences.
  2. Attorneys and their clients will appear for the settlement conference and meet with the Referee unless both attorneys stipulate to not attend pursuant to our ADR LAO.
  3. Settlement conferences will be on the record.
  4. If parties reach an agreement, that will be placed into a temporary order with 21-day objection period language.
  5. If either party objects, a de novo hearing will be held before the Judge.
  6. If neither party objects, the order will continue as is.

7. Either party can file an objection to the Referee's report and recommendation.
8. Any objections filed must be filed with the Saginaw County Clerk's Office, and a copy must be emailed to the Friend of the Court on the same day. The controlling date for the filing of the objections will be the date they are emailed to the Friend of the Court.
9. The objection to the Referee's report and recommendation will be scheduled for a hearing before the Judge.
10. If neither party files an objection within the 21-day timeframe, then the temporary order will continue as signed.

- **Pre-judgment matters – DP & DS cases**

1. Case is filed.
2. For DP cases, a Referee hearing will be held to establish paternity.
3. For DS cases, a Referee hearing will be held to establish child support.
4. For any DS/DP cases that go to mediation, if mediation is unsuccessful, then an evidentiary hearing will be held before the Referee.
5. If there is no mediation on DS/DP cases, they will automatically go to an evidentiary hearing with a Referee.

- **Post-judgment matters**

1. An evidentiary hearing post-judgment will only be held if mediation regarding parenting time matters is unsuccessful or not held.
2. An evidentiary hearing will be scheduled before the Referee. These hearings will be recorded, whether the parties are represented by counsel or appear pro per. There is no restriction on presence of attorneys representing their clients.
3. Referee hearings will originally be scheduled by zoom. In the event an in-person hearing is necessary, a request for in-person hearing must be filed prior to the scheduling of a Referee hearing.
4. A request for an in-person hearing can be made at the time the motion is filed, at the time the referral from the Judge is made, or by the Request for In-Person Hearing form. If a request is not made prior to the scheduling of the hearing, then the hearing will be conducted by zoom, except for good cause shown.
5. No later than seven (7) days prior to the hearing, each party must submit a custody/parenting time conference form and provide a copy to the other party, unless good cause is shown.
6. Any evidence intended to be submitted as evidence must be presented to the Referee office no later than three (3) days prior to the hearing, unless good cause is shown.

7. Upon the conclusion of the evidentiary hearing, the Referee will issue a report and recommendation/proposed order that will be sent to the Judge to sign and enter as an interim order.
8. Either party can file an objection to the Referee's recommendation and schedule a de novo hearing before the Judge.
9. If no objection is filed within 21 days from the date the recommendation is mailed, then the interim order will continue as is.

For now, the alphabet split will be:

- Kathy – A-D
- Darrin – E-M
- Randy – N-Z

*Darnell Jackson*

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Darnell Jackson

Chief Judge, Saginaw County Trial Courts

August 5, 2022