

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 5.101-05/2024*

IN RE: UNIFIED FAMILY COURT JURISDICTION

The Florida Supreme Court, in In Re: Report of the Family Court Steering Committee, 94 So.2d 518 (Fla. 2001), (“Family Courts IV”), directed each Circuit to submit revised local rules, or an Administrative Order, implementing a Unified Family Court consistent with its approved recommendations. The Florida Supreme Court further directed each Circuit to make every effort to resolve family disputes in a fair, timely, efficient and cost effective manner.

In compliance with the Florida Supreme Court’s directives, the Fifteenth Circuit adopted the following Unified Family Court Mission:

Unified Family Court is a fully integrated, comprehensive approach to handling all cases involving children and families, while at the same time resolving family disputes in a fair, timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

In furtherance of this mission, the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit shall assist litigants with cases involving family issues in order to avoid conflicting decisions, minimize inconvenience to the family, and to maximize all resources readily available to assist with resolving familial related case litigation. The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit also seeks to facilitate open and effective communication between judges, court staff, attorneys, and social service providers to better serve the litigants.

NOW, THEREFORE, pursuant to the authority conferred by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.215, it is **ORDERED** as follows:

A. UNIFIED FAMILY COURT JURISDICTION

1. The Unified Family Court (“UFC”) shall include all Family, Mental Health and Guardianship, and Juvenile proceedings as well as Judicial Division CHJD, and County Court Division DV-TD.
2. All UFC judges shall be assigned as Juvenile Court judges, as Mental Health and Guardianship Court judges, and as Family Court judges.
3. At a minimum, the Unified Family Court of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit shall include the following case types: dissolution of marriage; division and distribution of property arising out of a dissolution of marriage; annulment; support unconnected with dissolution of marriage; paternity; disestablishment of paternity; child support; URESA/UIFSA; custodial care of and access to children; proceedings for temporary or concurrent custody

of minor children by extended family; adoption; name change; declaratory judgment actions related to premarital, marital, or post marital agreements; civil domestic, repeat, sexual, stalking, cyber stalking, and dating violence injunctions; juvenile dependency; termination of parental rights; emancipation of a minor; CINS/FINS; truancy; modification and enforcement of orders entered in these cases; juvenile delinquency; criminal domestic violence; stalking; cyber stalking; all mental health and guardianship cases, including but not limited to petition for determination of incapacity and petition for appointment of guardian; Marchman Act; Baker Act; and risk protection orders.

4. Two or more cases listed in paragraph A3 above constitute a “related case” when any of the parties are either presently or were ever previously involved in litigation.
5. At the time of filing any case type delineated in paragraph A3 above, except risk protection orders, a fully completed Notice of Related Case shall be filed with the Court by the Petitioner in accordance with Rule 2.545(d), Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration.
6. Pursuant to Administrative Order 5.109, the moving party or the attorney for the moving party shall provide the name, current address and date of birth of the Petitioner(s), the Respondent(s) and each minor child listed in any newly or reopened Unified Family Court case as defined in paragraph A3 above by filing a fully completed “Date of Birth Form” with the Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller (Clerk). When the Petitioner is a governmental agency, the Petitioner does not need to provide its name, current address or date of birth.

B. FAMILY COURT CASE ASSIGNMENT

1. Family Court shall be divided into five separate regions:
 - a. The Central Courthouse, Judicial Divisions FA, FC, and DV-TD;
 - b. The South County Courthouse, Judicial Divisions FX, FY, and FZ;
 - c. The North County Courthouse, Judicial Divisions FH, FJ, and FI;
 - d. The West County Courthouse, Judicial Division FW, and
 - e. The Criminal Justice Complex, Judicial Division CHJD.
2. Regional Case Assignment – Family Matters. In all cases except delinquency, dependency, mental health, probate, guardianship, risk protection orders, Department of Revenue (“DOR”), and private adoptions, the Clerk is hereby responsible for determining regional case assignment as follows:
 - a. If the Petitioner’s residential address is in Palm Beach County, the case shall be assigned to a region based on the Petitioner’s residential zip code as set forth in section C.
 - b. If the Petitioner lives outside of Palm Beach County and the case is properly filed in Palm Beach County, the Clerk shall assign the case as follows:

- i. If the Respondent's residential address is in Palm Beach County, the case shall be assigned based on the Respondent's residential zip code as set forth in section C.
 - ii. If the Respondent's address is not known immediately, then the case shall be temporarily assigned to Central Courthouse, and then re-assigned based on the Respondent's residential address when received.
 - iii. Should the Respondent not live in Palm Beach County, but the Petitioner lives in either Broward or Miami-Dade County, then the case shall be assigned to the South County Courthouse.
 - iv. Should the Respondent not live in Palm Beach County, but the Petitioner lives in either Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River or Okeechobee County, then the case shall be assigned to the North County courthouse.
 - v. Should the Respondent not live in Palm Beach County and the Petitioner does not live in Broward, Miami-Dade, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River, or Okeechobee County, then the case shall be assigned to the Central Courthouse.
 - c. Under no circumstances will cases be assigned by the address of the attorney.
 - d. Cases, including cases that are reopened for enforcement and/or modification, will remain in the same division they were originally filed in, regardless if the parties move their residence.
3. Divisional Case Assignment – Family Matters. The Clerk shall randomly assign family law cases properly filed in a region among the family law divisions sitting in that region.
4. Case Assignment – Other UFC Matters.
 - a. Assignments of delinquency and dependency matters are set forth in Administrative Order 5.102.
 - b. Assignments of probate, guardianship and incapacity cases are set forth in Administrative Order 6.101.
 - c. Assignments of mental health cases (excluding risk protection orders and incapacity cases heard by a Judge) are set forth in Administrative Order 6.107.
 - d. Assignments and procedures related to risk protection orders are set forth in Administrative Order 6.312.
5. Assignment of TPR Petitions without Dependency. When there is no pending dependency case, the Clerk shall randomly assign a Termination of Parental Rights action filed by an individual pursuant to Florida Statute Chapter 39 to the Juvenile Division.

6. Assignment of Juvenile Marchman Act Petitions. The Clerk shall assign juvenile Marchman Act petitions to a juvenile judge when there is an open dependency and/or delinquency case. The Clerk is directed to forward the initial assessment petition to the appropriate magistrate per A.O. 6.107 for hearing. After the initial determination is made, the magistrate and juvenile judge will confer and determine whether the magistrate or juvenile judge should hear the services petition. The assigned juvenile judge will sign the orders for both assessment and services hearings. For Statistical Reporting System (SRS)/Uniform Case Reporting System (UCR) purposes, the juvenile Marchman Act case will remain designated as a “MH” case type.
7. Assignment of Violence Injunctions. Subject to the related case provisions set forth in paragraph 9, below, the Clerk shall assign
 - a. All Petitions for Repeat Violence Injunctions, Dating Violence Injunctions, Sexual Violence Injunctions, and Stalking Violence Injunctions filed in the Main Branch to Division DV-TD.
 - b. All Petitions for Repeat Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Injunctions filed in South Branch to Division D.
 - c. All Petitions for Stalking Violence Injunctions filed in the North Branch to Division “FS”.
 - d. All other UFC petitions for injunctions, including petitions for domestic violence injunctions, shall be assigned to the applicable family law judge.
8. Reassignment Due to Recusal/Disqualification. In the event a case must be transferred because of judicial disqualification or recusal, the Clerk shall, by random selection, reassign the case to another division within the same region, excluding West Branch division.
9. Effect of Related Cases. The Clerk will be responsible for initially identifying related open or closed cases upon filing of a new case over which UFC has jurisdiction or the reopening of a UFC case on a petition for modification. Upon initial identification, the Clerk shall enter the related cases into the related case field in the Clerk’s case management system (Showcase) in the newly filed case and any open case or reopened petition for modification. Any subsequently filed petition and/or motion shall then be assigned in the following manner:
 - a. Except for cases falling under paragraph 7(a), above, when two or more domestic relations cases exist, the newly filed case shall be assigned to the same division as the previous case, if active within four years of the newly filed petition. If existing cases are in different divisions, the newly filed case shall be assigned to the division with the most recent case. The Court may transfer other cases to the same division if deemed appropriate.
 - b. For cases falling under paragraph 7(a), above, the Clerk shall assign the petition as a related case in accordance with this section only if the parties to both related cases have a minor child in common.

- c. Civil domestic violence cases with a pending criminal domestic violence case shall be assigned to division DVTD. If a juvenile or domestic relations case also is pending with the case(s) in division DVTD, the DVTD judge shall refer all matters related to the minor child(ren) to the juvenile or family judge. The juvenile or family judge shall be noticed by the case manager who identified the related case to ensure there are no conflicting orders.

10. Department of Revenue Case Assignment. DOR cases, including related cases, shall be assigned to a division at either the Central Courthouse or, if the Petitioner’s address lies within the West County region, to the West County Courthouse. When DOR is no longer involved in the case, then the case may be re-assigned in accordance with the procedure described herein upon order of the Court. All DOR cases shall be set for hearing in the designated branches, according to their divisional assignments. If there are two or more related DOR cases in different divisions, the DOR Magistrates shall confer and determine the best method of handling these cases.

C. FAMILY COURT REGIONS

- 1. The following regions will be used to assign UFC cases in accordance with paragraphs B.1, B.2, and B.3 above.
- 2. SOUTH COUNTY COURTHOUSE: The residential zip codes designating the South County service area are as follows:

33424	33449
33425	33463
33426	33467
33427	33472
33428	33473
33429	33474
33431	33481
33432	33482
33433	33483
33434	33484
33435	33486
33436	33487
33437	33488
33444	33496
33445	33497
33446	33498
33447	33499
33448	

- 3. NORTH COUNTY COURTHOUSE: The residential zip codes designating the North County service area are as follows:

33403	33418
33404	33419
33407	33420
33408	33458
33409	33468
33410	33469
33411	33470
33412	33477
33414	33478
33417	

4. WEST COUNTY COURTHOUSE: The residential zip codes designating the West County service area are as follows:

33430	33476
33438	33491
33440	33493
33459	

5. CENTRAL (MAIN) COURTHOUSE: The residential zip codes designating the Central Service area are as follows:

33401	33454
33402	33460
33405	33461
33406	33462
33413	33464
33415	33465
33416	33466
33421	33480
33422	
33423	

D. UNIFIED FAMILY COURT ELEMENTS:

1. The Unified Family Court Bench: Judges assigned to UFC shall have received training or have extensive experience in family, juvenile, and county criminal court.
2. General Magistrates: General Magistrates shall be utilized to supplement the work of judges within Unified Family Court when a presiding judge determines that a referral of a case is appropriate, consistent with Administrative Order 5.104.
3. Case Management: UFC Case managers and case managers assigned pursuant to A.O. 6.312 will serve to coordinate related cases and assist litigants, case parties and the judiciary with various court processes and to monitor movement of cases through the judicial process.

4. Alternative Dispute Resolution: UFC shall maximize use of alternative dispute resolution of family matters and issues as authorized by sections 44.102 and 39.4075, Florida Statutes; Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure 12.740 and 12.741; and Florida Juvenile Rule of Procedure 8.290.
5. Technology: The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit shall use available technology to access information essential to case management and coordination, to print forms and notices, to generate statistical reports to provide public and inter-agency access to records.
6. Domestic Violence: The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit shall work to ensure that cases involving domestic/repeat/dating/sexual violence/cyber stalking or stalking are identified and managed in a manner that is organized, timely and sensitive to the special dynamics involved in these cases.

E. UNIFIED FAMILY COURT RELATED CASE SCREENING, IDENTIFICATION, AND COORDINATION

1. If there appears to be a related UFC case that has not been identified by the Clerk, the attorney or litigant may file a Notice with the Clerk requesting a review of the cases by providing the related cases as identified by Case Number and an explanation of why the cases are related. UFC case managers shall review the filings along with the Notice of Related Case form and notify each of the judges involved in the case.
2. Upon in-depth screening, UFC Case Managers will coordinate and link any other open or closed related cases. Once related cases are identified, case managers will notify each of the judges involved in the cases.
3. When a juvenile, mental health, or guardianship case is pending along with a domestic relations case, the case manager who identified the related case shall prepare a UFC Identification Form and submit it to the appropriate judges.
4. Once notified of related cases, the judges will confer to determine whether assignment of both cases to one judge will serve in the best interest of the family or whether another method of coordination should be utilized. The case manager will draft an Order Transferring Unified Family Court Case if directed by the judge.
5. Upon Order of the Court or notification from court staff, the Clerk shall enter related case information into the case management system for all related cases identified.
6. Pursuant to Family Law Rule of Procedure 12.006, the Clerk is directed to docket copies of orders transferring related cases, Final Judgments and any order related to a change in the custody of minor child(ren) in each related case involving the same parties, in which the judge/court staff has listed all relevant case numbers in the Order or Final Judgment.

F. CONTINUING EVALUATION

1. UFC procedures shall be evaluated routinely by the Chief Judge or his/her designee to determine their effectiveness in implementing the Circuit's goal of addressing family law matters in a comprehensive, coordinated manner.

2. The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit's FLAG (Family Law Advisory Group) and the involved stakeholders shall continue to provide input regarding the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit's UFC.

DONE and SIGNED in Chambers at West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, this 3rd day of May, 2024.



Glenn Kelley, Chief Judge

*Supersedes admin order 5.101-6/2022