



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Fourth Circuit Court Practitioners and Litigants

**FROM:** Judge Stephanie J. Williams and Fourth Circuit Court Staff

**DATE:** September 10, 2024

**RE:** Fourth Circuit Court Updates for Week of September 9, 2024

We had an exciting week last week in the Fourth Circuit Court finalizing team roles and responsibilities and discussing our vision for the operations of the court going forward. Thank you all for your continued support and well wishes during this transition period. Please see below some announcements and updates from the Court.

### **FOURTH CIRCUIT COURT STAFF**

Some of you may be aware that after 20+ years of service to the Fourth Circuit Court, Mrs. Brenda Womack retired last month. She is looking forward to more time with her family and enjoying the fruits of labor after a longstanding career in the legal profession. While we miss Mrs. Womack, we are grateful for her service and excited to see her take time for herself and her family.

We are happy to announce that all other current staff of Fourth Circuit Court have agreed to continue their service to you and our Court. For reference, they are as follows:

***Special Master Dana Ballinger*** presides over the weekly order of protection cases for Third and Fourth Circuit Courts.

***Mr. James Fields*** serves as a Court Officer for all order of protection dockets and other dockets of Third and Fourth Circuit Court as needed.

***Ms. Ronnell Griffin*** is the Judicial Administrative Clerk and oversees the day-to-day operations and dockets of the Court.

***Mr. Jonathan Gross*** serves as a Court Officer for all order of protection dockets and other dockets of Third and Fourth Circuit Court as needed.

***Mr. David Martin*** serves both as a court officer and judicial assistant for the Fourth Circuit Court.

*Special Master Kristen Menke* conducts judicial settlement conferences, provides case management for all domestic cases, including termination and adoption cases, presides over the child support docket and order of protection docket as needed.

*Mr. Dakota Vermillion* serves as the Student Law Clerk and assists with research and writing as well as courtroom and office support.

## **WE ARE HIRING!**

We are seeking to fill the positions of Staff Attorney and Court Improvement and Communications Coordinator. The job announcements with descriptions and application information may be found at: <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/nashville> beginning Wednesday, September 11, 2024. Please feel free to share with anyone you think may be interested.

## **NEW CHAMBER RULES**

We are currently finalizing our new Chamber Rules and hope to have them posted in the next couple of weeks. In the interim, outlined below are some rules that are effective immediately:

### **Communications with the Court**

When communicating with the Court regarding a substantive or fact specific matter of a case, we ask that you email your correspondence to the appropriate staff person and copy opposing counsel (*or opposing party if Pro Se*) when communicating with the court.

### **No Appearances are Required for Irreconcilable Divorce Hearings**

Appearances may be waived for final hearings in Irreconcilable Divorce cases. It is important to note these cases must still be set for a final hearing on a date certain. We will review the file and if everything is in order and an *Affidavit to Waive Appearance at Final Irreconcilable Differences Hearing* is on file, the court will enter the Final Decree on the date of the final hearing. If there is an issue with a case, the attorney or litigant (if a litigant is acting pro se) will be notified in advance of the hearing date.

There is a form *Affidavit to Waive Appearance at Final Irreconcilable Differences Hearing* on the Circuit Court Clerk's website. This must be completed by the party receiving the divorce. We also have an *Order to Set an Irreconcilable Differences Divorce with an Appearance Waiver* on the clerk's website. It is not mandatory you use this form to set your divorce case; however, it is provided for your convenience.

### **Adoption Dockets**

We will now hear uncontested and default adoptions on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday at 9:00 a.m. of each month. Further, to the extent possible, final hearings on terminations, adoptions and juvenile appeals will be heard on Mondays each week.

### **Motion Appearances via Zoom**

We will continue with our weekly staggered motion dockets. The staggered motion docket is posted by 12:00 noon on the Tuesday before the motion docket on the Circuit Court Clerk's website.

Zoom appearance will be allowed for default motions and cases set on the 9:00 a.m. docket. The motions heard by Zoom are only motions that do not require party or witness testimony and take less than 5 minutes. If a motion is scheduled to be heard on the Zoom docket and you expect to have party or witness testimony and/or the motion will exceed 5 minutes, please notify the court so we may place the case on the 10:00am docket.

Please note appearing by Zoom is only an option. You are still able to appear in person. We just ask that you be on Zoom or in the courtroom at the time your case is called. Further, details on how to participate via Zoom, including the Zoom link will be posted on the Circuit Court Clerk's website.

### **Motions that Extend Beyond 30 Minutes**

If it is expected that a hearing on a motion may exceed 30 minutes, please specify the same in the motion, along with the anticipated amount of time it will take to conduct the hearing.

### **Ex Parte Restraining Order Requests**

Petitions for Ex Parte Restraining Orders must be filed in the Circuit Court Clerk's office, with a copy emailed to: [ronnellgriffin@jnsnashville.gov](mailto:ronnellgriffin@jnsnashville.gov) by 2:30 p.m. to ensure same day review and processing. This is because the filing reaches chambers after it is processed by the Clerk's office, and we have no control over the time frame for that. We can only enter an order and process the same AFTER the filing has been processed in the Clerk's office and sent to chambers.

### **Automatic Recusals for Judge Williams**

As it relates to any Judicial Settlement Conferences Judge Williams conducted in her role as Special Master, any cases Judge Williams served as the mediator, or any cases Judge Williams previously represented a litigant, a recusal is mandatory pursuant to the Code of Judicial Conduct. If you have an active case that requires Judge Williams to recuse for one of the reasons set forth above, please email information regarding the same to: [ronnellgriffin@jnsnashville.gov](mailto:ronnellgriffin@jnsnashville.gov) as soon as possible, so we can timely enter a recusal order to expedite reassignment of the case to another court.

Should you have any questions with anything contained in this memorandum or any matters of the court, please feel free to contact us at: 615-862-5910 and stay tuned for more updates!

Have a great week!

Judge Williams and the Fourth Circuit Court Staff