



State of South Carolina  
The Family Court of the Seventh Judicial Circuit

M. Todd Thigpen  
Judge

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**TO:** All Family Court Practitioners  
In the Seventh Judicial Circuit

**FROM:** Usha J. Bridges and  
M. Todd Thigpen

**DATE:** August 6, 2020

**RE:** *Family Court Operations*

First of all, we would like to thank all of the attorneys who have worked diligently over the past several months to assist us in moving as many cases as possible during this difficult time. As you all know, the COVID-19 pandemic is new to all of us, and we are continuing to adjust Family Court operations to accommodate everyone in compliance with the current safety guidelines. Therefore, because we will have visiting judges for the remainder of the year and because there will be many weeks when one of us or both of us will be traveling, we hope the following guidelines will assist everyone in scheduling as many cases as possible:

1. **Motions for Temporary Relief** – Because we both remember what it was like to practice law, we understand that litigants expect to hear their attorneys argue their cases. As such, we have offered attorneys the option of having their Motion hearings heard via packet only, Webex, or live. Unfortunately, if everyone requests a live hearing, the number of Motions that can be heard will be limited due to the fact that we are required to stagger live hearings to limit the number of people in the courthouse at the same time. Therefore, we would encourage all of you to consider requesting a Webex hearing or packet only hearing in appropriate cases.
  - A. **Temporary Hearing Packets** – Effective Monday, August 10, 2020, your temporary hearing packet for a packet only hearing, Webex hearing, or live hearing **must** be filed in the office of the Clerk of Court at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the hearing so that it can be quarantined and delivered to the presiding judge at the appropriate time. To avoid ex parte communication, you **must** serve opposing counsel and/or self-represented litigants with your temporary hearing packet before it is filed in the Clerk of Court's Office. In addition, packets should **not** be delivered directly to a judge's office without his or her prior permission.

- B. **Packet Only Motion Hearings** – If you request a packet only hearing, it will be set for a date and time certain on the docket to give the presiding judge time to review the packets and schedule a conference call or Webex meeting to issue his or her ruling, as he or she deems appropriate. The presiding judge shall have the discretion to schedule a Webex hearing or live hearing if he or she believes a hearing is necessary after reviewing the packets.
- C. **Webex Motion Hearings** – Please note, it is the attorney’s responsibility to email the presiding judge’s administrative assistant (AA) one list of all of the Webex participants’ email addresses. For resident judges, the list should be emailed to the AA at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the hearing. For visiting judges, you should contact the judge’s AA the week before your hearing to determine when that judge requires the participants’ email addresses. Failure to email the appropriate AA all of the participants’ email addresses may result in your hearing being continued.
- D. **Live Motion Hearings** – As you all know, only parties, attorneys, and essential witnesses are allowed to attend live hearings at this time. For most Motion hearings, you will not have any essential witnesses. Therefore, please advise your clients that their family members, friends, and others will not be allowed to enter the courtroom. In addition, to limit the number of people in the courthouse at the same time, we would respectfully ask all of you to notify your clients that third parties should not enter the courthouse. Of course, if the presiding judge determines that a person is an essential witness, the judge will have the discretion to allow that person to be present for the hearing.
- E. **Changes to the Type of Motion Hearing Requested** – If you request a live or Webex hearing and then decide to change it to a packet hearing, please email Melissa Triplett, Kimberly McCraw, Leslie Fulmer for Spartanburg County and Kadena Cobb and Kiera Gist in Cherokee County to ensure that the presiding judge is aware of the change.
2. **Final Consent Orders** – As most of you know, we have been able to process Final Consent Orders fairly quickly over the past few months because our friend, The Honorable Phillip K. Sinclair, graciously agreed to review the majority of those Orders. Unfortunately, now that Judge Sinclair is retired and we are traveling, you may notice some delay in the processing of Final Consent Orders. Although we intend to reserve some time on each judge’s docket throughout the week to allow all judges to review Final Consent Orders, scheduled hearings will take priority over reviewing Consent Orders. Therefore, we would respectfully ask all of you to be patient as we try to find time to process Final Consent Orders.

**PACKETS FOR MOTION HEARINGS AND FINAL CONSENT ORDERS SHOULD NOT BE ADDRESSED TO A CERTAIN JUDGE, UNLESS A HEARING IS SCHEDULED ON HIS OR HER DOCKET. IN ADDITION, PACKETS FOR SPARTANBURG COUNTY**

**SHOULD BE SENT TO THE SPARTANBURG COUNTY CLERK OF COURT AND PACKETS FOR CHEROKEE COUNTY SHOULD BE SENT TO THE CHEROKEE COUNTY CLERK OF COURT. FINALLY, UNLESS YOU ARE INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE BY THE PRESIDING JUDGE, PACKETS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED BY EMAIL.**

If any of you have any questions, concerns, or suggestion about the above guidelines, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are always open to listening to the Bar and adjusting these guidelines as necessary.

As always, we thank you all for your assistance and hope things are well with all of you.

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