

James Keenan

From: Kathryn Claxton <ClaxtonK@clayclerk.com>
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To: James Keenan
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EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

DIVISION F MODIFIED PRETRIAL PROCEDURES

Ladies and Gentlemen: over the course of several years of conducting trials in family law matters, it is consistently apparent to the Court that there are several primary trends in trial practice that need to be addressed. Many cases are coming to pretrial and trial when it is clear to the Court parties are not prepared for trial and, correspondingly, substantive settlement discussions either have not taken place or are being advanced after the parties have expended time and expense preparing for trial. Moreover, and to put it candidly, our pretrial orders are routinely not followed or simply ignored. Failure to follow the trial orders seems to go hand-in-hand with an inability to handle documents at trial.

Accordingly, our division has made some important changes to our pretrial process and pretrial order. Trials dates will continue to be set directly with the Court's judicial assistant, consistent with the current practice. However, beginning with trials set in June 2025, there will now be a pre-trial status conference set approximately 60 days prior to the trial week, which will be in addition to the pre-trial conference to which you are accustomed. Pre-trial status conferences will be set for 30 minute blocks and may be attended by zoom or in person. Here is what the Order Setting Case for Trial will provide regarding the status conference:

STATUS CONFERENCE: Status Conference will be held by Zoom or in person on _____. You will come prepared to discuss the issues in the case to be tried, the status of discovery, including mandatory disclosure, financial disclosure and other discovery matters, identity and nature of outstanding motions, status of evaluations or reports (social investigations, guardian ad litem reports, mental health reports, substance abuse reports), and any special circumstances. **UNLESS OTHERWISE AGREED BY THE COURT, MOTIONS WILL NOT BE HEARD AT THE STATUS CONFERENCE. HOWEVER, PARTIES MUST BE PREPARED TO IDENTIFY FOR THE COURT THE GENERAL SUBSTANCE OF, AND RELIEF SOUGHT IN, ANY OUTSTANDING MOTIONS.**

The primary purposes of these status conferences will be for the Court to assist with trial preparation, and to ensure compliance with the Pretrial Order. At the status conference, in addition to other matters, the Court will discuss with the parties the status of document production and exhibit lists. Be prepared. By the time you get to the pretrial conference, you must be ready to proceed with trial in accordance with the pretrial order.

The Pretrial Order and process after the Status Conference will have some substantial changes. The Pretrial Conferences will be scheduled approximately 20 days prior to the trial week. Attendance in Court for all counsel and pro se parties is mandatory. Represented parties are welcome to attend, as always. Court reporters will not be provided by the Court but may be engaged by a party. Exceptions to personal attendance will be rare, and will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

All pretrial meetings will take place at least **7 days** prior to the pretrial conference. These meetings must take place **IN PERSON OR BY ZOOM (or other video-conferencing)**, to be initiated by petitioner's counsel or respondent's counsel if petitioner is pro se. All documents that either party may wish to introduce at trial must

be physically brought to the pretrial meeting (or made available at the meeting electronically if the parties agree). Three days prior to the pretrial conference, the Pretrial Stipulation must be **FILED**. The parties must also bring to the pretrial conference the list of documents and items that may be introduced at trial, which lists will be utilized for the pretrial stipulation. Items not identified on the lists and brought to the pretrial meeting (THIS INCLUDES VIDEOS, PHOTOGRAPHS, SOCIAL MEDIA REPRODUCTIONS, ETC.) are very likely not to be admitted at trial. **AT THE PRETRIAL CONFERENCE, THE PARTIES WILL CERTIFY TO THE COURT THAT THEY HAVE COMPLIED WITH THE PRETRIAL ORDER.**

If you have any questions about these procedures or orders, you may email Ms. Claxton.